

Largest-ever UFI Global Congress from November 17

The 2022 edition of the UFI Global Congress will take place in Muscat on November 14-17, with the keynote by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy (pictured), two-time Academy Award-winning filmmaker, and director of the critically acclaimed Marvel Studio's series Ms Marvel. "We couldn't be more proud to bring the industry to Oman for this year's event. The Middle East, and Oman specifically, has shown significant investment and commitment to developing a world-class business-events ecosystem," said UFI CEO, Kai Hattendorf. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN SAILING FESTIVAL 2022 LAUNCHED



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WORK ON KHASAB ZIPLINE PROJECT IN FULL SWING



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GAZA'S FIRST MARINE FISH FARM HELPS MAKE UP FOR DWINDLING CATCH



CAIRO

OMAN, EGYPT ENJOY SPECIAL MEDIA TIES

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, affirmed that the cooperation and contact between the journalists in the Sultanate of Oman and their counterparts in Egypt is crucial for reflecting the developments in both countries and fostering the joint visions that aim at enhancing the message of construction and spreading awareness undertaken by the media. At a forum held in Cairo, the minister stressed that the bilateral relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt in the media field is special. **P2**

WASHINGTON

NASA SCRAPS TUESDAY MOON LAUNCH

Nasa has called off the scheduled Tuesday launch of its historic unscrewed mission to the Moon due to a tropical storm that is forecast to strengthen as it approaches Florida. "Nasa is forgoing a launch opportunity... and preparing for rollback (from the launchpad), while continuing to watch the weather forecast associated with Tropical Storm Ian," it said on Saturday. After technical problems derailed two launch attempts several weeks ago, a new liftoff of the Artemis 1 mission was scheduled for Tuesday. **P5**

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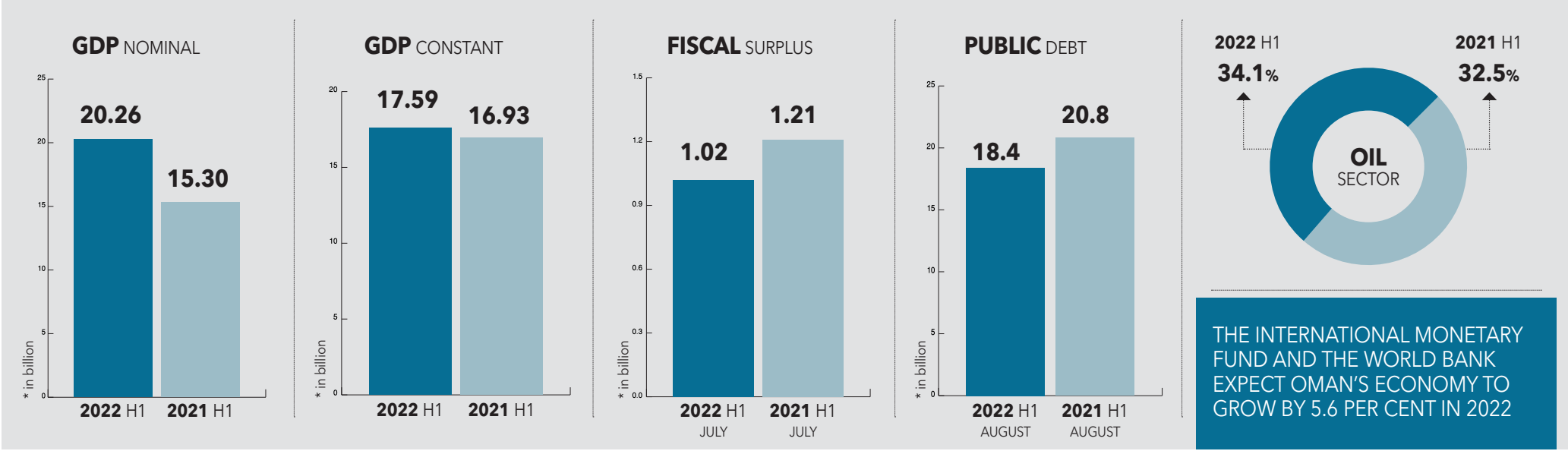


RUSSIA REPLACES TOP GENERAL **P6**



PREPARING FOR THE NEXT GLOBAL CATASTROPHE **P9**

MTFP helps post better growth, pare debt



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, SEPT 24

The medium-term fiscal plan (MTFP) and other economic measures helped Oman to improve its public finance, bring down public debt and bag international credit ratings. In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of

Economy, said the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) during the first half of 2022 grew 32.4 per cent at current market prices to reach about RO 20.26 billion compared to RO 15.30 billion during the first half of 2021. At constant prices, GDP grew by 3.9 per cent during H1 2022 to reach about RO 17.59 billion compared to RO 16.93 billion during H1 2021. The MTFP included

diversifying sources of national income, improving the business environment, stimulating domestic and foreign investment, enhancing the returns from government investments, strengthening tax administration and collection efficiency and rationalising government expenditure and spending. The MTFP helped to address three main challenges to Oman's economy during the 10th Five-

Year Plan; high fiscal deficit, high ratio of public debt to GDP and decline in credit ratings. Public revenues rose by 53.5 per cent at RO 8 billion in July 2022 and the state posted a fiscal surplus of RO 1.02 billion in July 2022 compared to a deficit of RO 1.21 billion in July 2021. The total public debt fell to RO 18.4 billion in August compared to RO 20.8 billion in the same period last year, a decrease of RO

2.4 billion or 11.5 per cent. Major international rating institutions like Fitch, Standard & Poor's have raised credit ratings for the Sultanate of Oman due to the rise in oil prices and in addition to the implementation of measures and initiatives to control financial performance, reduce public debt risks accompanied by balanced government policies. **SEE ALSO P2 & 13**

Tillon and Lienshoeft IRONMAN winners

SALALAH: Over 700 athletes took part in the IRONMAN 70.3 SALALAH triathlon in the scenic backdrop of Hawana Salalah. Etienne Tillon and Lea Lienshoeft emerged as winners of the endurance race. Triathletes raced against the clock on a route consisting of a 1.2 mile (1.9 km) swim, followed by a 56 mile (90 km) bike ride, and a final 13.1 mile (21.1 km) run – for a combined total distance of over 70.3 miles (just over 113 kilometres). IRONMAN 70.3 SALALAH was held in association with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism



and the Dhofar Municipality, and hosted by Hawana Salalah – the world-class luxury tourism destination in Salalah, in southern Oman. Governor of Dhofar His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said congratulated the main category winners and gave away prizes. In the men's category, Etienne Tillon (France) took first place in the main event. Mohammed Isa (Bahrain) took second place, and David Hynes (Britain) took third place. In the women's category, Lea Lienshoeft (Germany) took first place, followed by Daisy Baker (Britain)

in second, and Melissa Abbey (Zambia) in third place. Mohamed Obaidani, CEO, Triathlon Middle East LLC, said, "IRONMAN 70.3 SALALAH has been a truly exceptional event. I thank all parties involved in making this a highly successful and memorable event, which was a world-class sporting event for the Sultanate of Oman. Congratulations to all athletes who took part. "The CEO also announced that registration is now open for the IRONMAN 70.3 MUSCAT event taking place in the nation's capital in February 2023."

Oman reaffirms support to Palestine

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman reaffirmed the centrality of the Palestinian cause. This came during the Sultanate of Oman's participation at a ministerial meeting that brought together foreign ministers of the GCC countries, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Jordan and the United States of America. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly. Addressing the meeting, Dr Mohammad bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations and head of its delegation to the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly, said that the establishment of a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East region requires setting up a Palestinian state on its entire territories occupied since 1967. He reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman's support to the two-state solution. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US supports the two-state solution and will continue its efforts with the parties concerned in order to reach this objective and to achieve peace in the Middle East region. **— ONA**

Stargazers gear up, Jupiter comes close to Earth tomorrow

WASHINGTON: Stargazers will get a celestial treat on Monday, when Jupiter, the biggest planet in the solar system, will make its closest approach to Earth in 59 years. According to Nasa, "opposition" happens when an astronomical object, in this case, Jupiter, rises in the East as the Sun sets on the west, placing the planet and the Sun on opposite sides of the Earth. With Jupiter, this opposition happens once every 13 months, when the planet will appear larger

and brighter than any other time of the year. But the phenomenon on September 26 is a bit rarer. At the time, Jupiter will be approximately 590 million kilometres away from the Earth, which last happened in 1963. At its farthest, Jupiter is over 965 million kilometres away from Earth. "With good binoculars, the banding (at least the central band) and three or four of the Galilean satellites (moons) should be visible. "It's important to remember that Galileo observed



these moons with 17th-century optics. One of the key needs will be a stable mount for whatever system you use," said Adam Kobelski, a research astrophysicist at Nasa's Marshall Space Flight Center, in a press statement. To see the massive planet's Great Red Spot and bands in more detail, Kobelski recommends a large telescope; around 4-inch or larger, with filters in the green to blue range to enhance the visibility of these features. **— Agencies**



Oman and Egypt have special ties in media field

CAIRO: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, affirmed that the cooperation and contact between the journalists in the Sultanate of Oman and their counterparts in Egypt is crucial for reflecting the developments in both countries and fostering the joint visions that aim at enhancing the message of construction and spreading awareness undertaken by the media.

At a forum held on Saturday in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, and attended by senior writers, literati, intellectuals and editors of Egyptian publications, the minister of information stressed that the bilateral relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt in the media field is special, old and renewed day in day out.

The minister added that Egypt has had a significant role through various stages of development of the Omani media and many Egyptian writers are still contributing insightful articles in



various domains of knowledge.

Right now, our goal is elevating this relationship to a higher level and creating communication among the new generations of journalists particularly upon

taking into account the new developments in the media field in terms of the introduction of new technologies and modern means of communications which necessitates the creation new forms

of joint media, the minister said.

Oman strongly made its presence felt in the Egyptian media. This is something that we view with deep attention and we are striving to develop.

The Omani media follows the developments currently underway in Egypt i.e the comprehensive development process prudently and insightfully led by Abdel Fattah el Sisi, President of the

Arab Republic of Egypt. In addition, the Omani people are following the developments in the fields of media, economy, thought and culture taking place in Egypt, the minister said.

The Omani minister of information noted that the Omani and the Egyptian media share a responsible and disciplined media message that is undertaken by journalists in both countries. It's a lofty message that further fosters an already strong rapprochement between the Omani and the Egyptian peoples.

The Egyptian journalists expressed their utmost happiness over their meeting with Oman's minister of information, stressing that such a meeting would strengthen the role of the media in fostering the relationship between the two peoples as well as spreading culture, thought and enhancing exchange of expertise between the media houses in both countries. — ONA

■ ALTERNATE CONTRACTORS FOR ROADS



The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has decided to terminate a contract for the implementation of the second part of phase 2 of Al Sharqiyah Expressway project. The MoTCIT explained that the decision was taken on account of the contractor's failure to achieve the required progress in accordance with the terms of the contract, adding that the remaining work will shortly be assigned to a new contractor. The MoTCIT also announced the termination of a contract for the implantation of the first part of the Adam-Haima-Thamrait dual carriageway due to the contractor's failure to achieve the required progress in accordance with the contract, adding that the aforementioned project will soon be assigned to a new contractor.

Oman's inflation rate at acceptable levels due to strong fundamentals

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The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman remained at acceptable limits of about 3.1 per cent during the period January-August, which is much lower than the rate recorded by some economies, including advanced economies, the Ministry of Economy (MoE) revealed on Saturday.

According to Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary for Economy, "The inflation rate has been maintained at reasonable levels due to the strong fundamentals of our economic policy as it enabled Oman to tackle the supply chain crisis related to foodstuffs."

Some of the measures taken by the government include having a ceiling on monthly fuel prices.

The five-year development plan seeks to maintain the average inflation rate of 2.8 per cent throughout its year.

As per the statistics, the inflation rate witnessed a remarkable



decline to 2.4 per cent in August 2022 compared to 4.4 per cent in January 2022 even though global interruptions in supply chains due to the pandemic and international crisis drove inflation to unprecedented levels in many economies of the world.

In April 2022, the global inflation rate at 7.8 per cent was the highest since the 2008 financial crisis and it rose to 6.9 per cent in advanced economies, the highest level since 1983.

The International Monetary

Fund had predicted that inflation in 2022 to be 9.4 per cent in emerging and developing economies, the highest level since 1995.

However, according to analysts, GCC countries experienced rising consumer prices to a lesser degree because governments give top priority to restricting the prices of essential commodities. "The government of the Sultanate of Oman encouraged direct supply of food items during the crisis, which helped to maintain the inflation rate at acceptable levels."

Speaking to the Observer, several consumers said the prices of vegetables and fruits have gone up, but not doubled like in many other countries.

According to the data by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages went up by 4.9 per cent in August, transport by 3.1 per cent and restaurants and hotels by 2.1 per cent and fruits by 7.5 per cent, and other foodstuff by 1.9 per cent.

Largest-ever UFI Global Congress from November 17

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The 2022 edition of the UFI Global Congress will take place in Muscat on November 14-17, with the keynote by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy (pictured), two-time Academy Award-winning film-maker, and director of the critically acclaimed Marvel Studio's series Ms Marvel.

"We couldn't be more proud to bring the industry to Oman for this year's event. The Middle East, and Oman specifically, has shown significant investment and commitment to developing a world-class business-events ecosystem," said UFI CEO, Kai Hattendorf.

Hosted by Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat, this year's Congress is the first UFI Global Congress in ten

years to take place in the Middle East.

Offering unique content and keynote speakers from inside and outside the sector, the congress will look at the future of the industry. Alongside networking opportunities, attendees will have the chance to exchange lessons learnt, and gain new insights and ideas.

"Join us in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman this November for the UFI Global Congress, the "must attend" event for exhibition industry professionals," UFI said in its Twitter account.

Exclusive to UFI members and hundreds of industry leaders from around the world are expected to attend, the Muscat edition is tracking to be among the largest ever gathering of leaders of the exhibition and business events industry.



"Team Oman is embracing our sector as a driver of economic growth. We are excited to be working with the host team to put on this truly unique event, and our promising early-registration numbers show that industry professionals are also eager to meet again face-to-face, and to see what Oman has to offer," Hattendorf added.

As the sector continues its speedy recovery from the impact of the global pandemic, leaders from the regional and international exhibition sector will gather in Muscat.

"This year, more than ever, the UFI Global Congress will offer a safe and memorable experience. UFI's 89th Global Congress in Muscat is the opportunity to reconnect with exhibition industry peers and shape the future of our industry. We're looking

forward to welcoming industry professionals from all over the world, in person," says Monica Lee-Müller, UFI President, was quoted by Exhibition Showcase, Media Platform For Exhibitions.

According to eventindustrynews.com, Obaid Chinoy's keynote will begin the Congress with an audio-visual journey about uncovering the unseen, and the entire programme will be expertly guided by former broadcast journalist Eithne Treanor.

In addition, the programme will cover topics such as the state of the economy, global risks and opportunities, and trends in the industry. It will also dive into transformational topics, like the industry's sustainability agenda and talent narrative, as well as data and insights for creating serendipity.



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■ SIGN LANGUAGE DAY



The Sultanate of Oman alongside other countries marked the International Day of Sign Languages, which is celebrated on September 23 each year. The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed September 23 as the International Day of Sign Languages to increase awareness of the importance of sign language in the full realisation of the human rights of people who are deaf. – ONA

Winners of competitions feted

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEPT 24

The Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah feted winners of various competitions, which were held in Nizwa recently.

The prizes were given away by Saif bin Mubarak al Julandani, Director General of the Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The competitions aim to stimulate enthusiasm and improve efficiency.

The ceremony began with a speech by Khalifa bin Hadram

al Amiri. He said: “This year’s competition aims to foster quality of education in schools. The various departments of the educational directorate competed with creativity and desire for excellence. It was also an opportunity to showcase the talent of our students in drawing, innovation and creativity.”

The ceremony also included a video on the quality department in Al Dakhiliyah. The Educational Activities Department got first place in the competitions, while the Budgeting Department

came second. The Technical Supervision Department got third place. The early education and school administration supervision departments came fourth.

Among students, Joud bint Said bin Saif al Hanaiyah from Wadi Al Ala School won first place in drawing. Saif bin Ahmed bin Saif al Amri from Labid bin Rabea School won first place in innovation. In the essay competition, Mohammed bin Said bin Abdullah al Mahrouqi from Osama bin Zaid School got first place.

Challenges facing private schools discussed

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEPT 24

The General Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate hosted principals of private schools in Nizwa on Saturday.

The meeting was attended by Amal bint Khalifa al Shukriyah, Director of the Private Schools Department, and several educational supervisors for private schools.

The meeting aimed to provide the participants with an opportunity to learn about the new organisational structure of the Private Schools Department and its services to ensure the quality of education. The meeting discussed difficulties facing private schools. Al Shukriyah thanked private school principals for their efforts to advance education. She talked about the role of private schools in the governorate and stressed the need for excellence in academic achievement. She explained the importance of activating the correspondence



system and continuous communication between schools and the department.

Al Shukriyah provided instructions on the appointment system, licensing procedures and means of transportation. She also suggested that schools could face difficulties in some administrative and educational aspects while communicating with parents.

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Khayari, Assistant Director of the Private Schools Department, stressed the need to adhere to the rules and regulations. He also urged the attendees to attend training workshops and

implement safety procedures to ensure students’ safety in school campus and transport.

Ruqayah bint Suleiman al Harassiyah, an IT specialist, presented a working paper on introducing the correspondence system and students’ registration in the educational portal.

Ahmed bin Hamad bin Salim Ambusaidi, Coordination and Follow-up Supervisor, presented a working paper on creating a licence.

Yahya al Sarhani, Studies, and Follow-up Specialist presented a second working paper in which he talked about licenses and changing the name of a private school.

Badr bin Hilal bin Malik al Abri, a senior supervision specialist in the Private Schools Department, presented a working paper that talked about appointments.

The meeting concluded with the presentation by Sumayah al Hammamiyah, Kindergarten supervisor, who discussed the guidance bulletin for the early education stage.

■ OMAN VISION 2040 PANEL DISCUSSES MUSANDAM PLANS



MUSCAT: The committee tasked with following up and supporting the execution of Oman Vision 2040’s projects in the Governorate of Musandam today held a meeting during which it discussed progress plans for completing strategic projects. The meeting, chaired by Musandam Governor Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidi, reviewed development projects in different sectors in the governorate, including housing, transport, commerce, industry, tourism promotion, logistics and municipality. Ali bin Ahmed al Ma’ashani, Director-General of Housing and Urban Planning in Musandam Governorate, said that the meeting reviewed earlier accomplishments and touched on various developmental aspects. – ONA

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading partner in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank SAOC seeks tenders from companies specialized in creating Learning Management system (LMS), according to the following

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
22/22	Creating Learning Management System	150 RO Non-Refundable	06/10/2022	27/10/2022

- Interested companies may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Human Resources Department- Talent Management section) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion on any working day (Sunday to Thursday) between 8:30 AM and 2 PM on payment of non-refundable tender fee.
- The Tender with tender bond (1% of tender amount offered) enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed as Learning Management System tender, and should be submitted to the Human Resources Department at Third Floor by 2:00 PM on or before 27/10/2022.

Bank Name: Oman Development Bank
Bank Account: 000-10121129300-45
Bank Name: Bank Muscat
Corporate Branch
Swift Code: BMUSOMRXXXX

Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee’s decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24726905 Email: a.zadjali@odb.om www.odb.om

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUCTION



Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) hereby announces auction as mentioned in the following table:

Auction No.	Material for Sale	Last Date of Buying	Preview Date	Last date of Submission
03/2022	Selling of Electrical Scrap Materials at Rural Areas Electricity Company (TANWEER) Power Stations in Wilayat Al Duqm - Al-Wusta Governorate	5/10/2022	To Be Determined	16/10/2022

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Interested and Specialized Companies in scrap activities and have official registration with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain the auction documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment of RO. 100/- (Rial Omani One Hundred Only) for each set of documents. The fees of the auction shall be deposit on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824.
- Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman of Minor Tender Committee, Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C), marked with the auction number and subject. Other marks or reference whatsoever should be printed on the envelope. The identity of the bidder should not be revealed and should be submitted before 1:00 P.M. on the assigned date for submission of the auction.
- The buyer must pay the complete amount of his offer within **Two Weeks** of such notification by deposit or certified cheque.
- The buyer must transfer all the material and clean the location within **One Month** from the date of client notification for taking the materials. If the buyer does not transfer the materials purchased within the specified period, the same will be confiscated by the company. Such confiscated materials will be released to the buyer upon payment of demurrage charges to be calculated by the Seller.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company has the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.
- Preview of the material to be determined later during the formal working hours.

For more information please call: 80077787



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رؤية عمان 2040





IF BREAST CANCER IS DETECTED IN THE
FINAL STAGE, ITS TREATMENT COSTS
AROUND RO 180,000 TO RO 200,000.
IF DETECTED EARLY, THE COST WOULD
BE AROUND RO 8,000



LAKSHMI
KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

Cancer treatment is free for the citizens in the Sultanate of Oman even though the cost of providing cancer care is estimated at RO 15 million for all types of cancer.

Keeping in mind the high cost of treatment and saving patients from enormous suffering, early detection is highly recommended. Furthermore, regular health examination not only saves lives, but also reduces the psychological burden the family and relatives of the patients undergo.

“We are putting pressure on the GDP and the economy. We should do more to find out about cancer and measures for prevention, but that would require workforce and finance,” said Dr Wahid al Kharousi, Chairman of Oman Cancer Association.

If breast cancer is detected in the final stage, its treatment costs around RO 180,000 to RO 200,000. If detected early, the cost would be around RO 8,000.

“The medication is expensive. We do not calculate the cost of the doctors, nurses, services, and management of clinics and hospitals,” pointed out Dr Wahid.

Point to be noted that not just women are vulnerable to breast cancer. There are many cases in which men got breast cancer. The male ratio, however, is less.

Dr Raji Narayankutty, a member of the Oman Cancer Association Board, said, “When a male is diagnosed with breast cancer, it is important for all the women in the family to be screened, especially nieces.”

In October this year, volunteers and members of the OCA will be in major malls during the weekends and other malls during the weekdays to raise awareness about breast cancer.

They will hold talk sessions with people living with cancer and their families to let them feel free to talk and raise awareness.

Participants can register for the Annual Walkathon to be held on November 1 at Qurum Natural Park.

“At Qurum City Centre we have taken a special area for the whole month. Here one can learn about the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. We will also have space where doctors can perform a free examination of breast cancer and teach self-examination for women below 40 years of age as more and more breast cancer cases have been detected in young girls as young as 16 to 18 years,” noted Dr Wahid.

The Walkathon will be held from 4 to 6 pm, and the symbolic walk will be less than 2 km. According to Dr Wahid, the idea of the Walkathon is to tell cancer patients that they are not alone.

“There will be an area for kids and a food court at the Qurum Natural Park. There is a need to create cancer awareness among growing children in a society where people still do not want to utter the word cancer.

We are looking at ways to make girls in secondary school aware of breast cancer because cases are found amongst women below 40 years of age and even school-going children.

Awareness and teaching them self breast examination monthly is the only way to tackle it.”

There is good news, and that is people are coming with early diagnosis.

“Our awareness programme in 22 years has managed to show that the results are tangible and the results are excellent. About 22 years ago, the third and fourth stages of breast cancer cases were as high as 85 per cent. Now it is only 30 per cent. Two decades ago, first-grade breast cancer cases were only 8 to 10 per cent. Now it is over 70 per cent.

This is why we brought the theme ‘Towards Life’, because when one has an early diagnosis, one can have life,” said Dr Wahid.

GIFT OF
EARLY
DIAGNOSIS



Sudan's leader says date for elections not fixed



NEW YORK: The head of Sudan's ruling council General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said late on Thursday that no fixed date had been set for elections, but the military would not wait forever. Burhan, who derailed a political transition 11 months ago by dissolving a civilian-led government, had previously indicated that elections would be held in 2023.

The takeover he led halted a power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians, triggering mass street protests and a stand-off between the military and pro-democracy parties. After the deadlock deepened, Burhan said in July the army would step aside from political talks.

"We are waiting, we do not want to insert ourselves in this political process," Burhan said in an interview on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, when asked about a date for elections. "Of course we will not wait endlessly," he added. — Reuters



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Jeddah. — Reuters

Scholz holds talks with Saudi crown prince

BERLIN: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Saturday on the first stop of his first official visit to the Gulf.

Scholz shared a firm handshake with the leader of the Gulf state as they met in the port city of Jeddah. A meeting with US President Joe Biden in Jeddah as well as a trip to the European Union in July, during which he met French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris, have initiated a normalisation of his relations with Western leaders.

Scholz's visit has been seen by observers to be part of this process.

Scholz is also set to travel to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, where the World Cup will be held later this year.

Government sources said that while Scholz tour of the Arabian Peninsula will be mainly about discussing ways out of Germany's energy crisis, he will also address security issues.

It remained unclear whether agreements on the import of gas or, in the longer term, hydrogen from the region to Germany will be reached during the visit.

Scholz's government has not

Saudi Arabia to send its first female astronaut to space

CAIRO: Saudi Arabia said on Thursday it would send its first female astronaut into space next year as part of an ambitious programme. The Saudi Space Commission on Thursday launched an astronaut programme designed to groom Saudis to go on long- and short-term spaceflights, the monarchy's state news agency SPA reported. The first flight scheduled for 2023 will carry two Saudi astronauts including a woman, the agency added without giving further details. "This will mark an important historic event by sending the first Saudi woman to space," the SPA said. — dpa

approved any arms exports to Saudi Arabia since it came to power in December, according to information provided by the Economy Ministry.

On Sunday, the second day of his trip to the region, Scholz visits Qatar, with whom Berlin has been trying to secure a gas deal.

Qatar will host football's World Cup starting in November. — dpa

Iran lead negotiator to meet UN nuclear watchdog chief

TEHRAN: The head of Iran's atomic energy agency said on Saturday he will meet next week with the chief of the UN's nuclear watchdog, as attempts to revive the country's nuclear deal stall.

"I will go to Austria to take part in the annual general conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, where I will meet with Director-General Rafael Grossi," Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Mohammad Eslami told state television.

The Vienna-based IAEA's annual conference takes place this year from September 26-30.

The UN watchdog said early this month it was "not in a position to provide assurance that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful".

It has been pressing for answers on the presence of nuclear material at three undeclared sites and the issue led to a resolution that criticised Iran being passed at a June meeting of the IAEA's board of governors.

The three sites represent a key sticking point in negotiations to restore a tattered 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

Those negotiations began in Vienna in April 2021 but have repeatedly stalled.

The US walked out of the original deal under then president Donald Trump in 2018 and re-imposed biting sanctions, provoking Tehran into incrementally stepping back from its nuclear commitments.

Iran has repeatedly said it wants the IAEA to drop its interest



Mohammad Eslami, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has re-iterated his country's long held insistence that it is not seeking a nuclear weapon

in the three sites — a position that the nuclear watchdog says lacks credibility.

"I hope that my talks will put an end... to the false accusations about certain (nuclear) sites stemming from political pressure and psychological operations exerted against Iran," Eslami added.

In a speech at the UN General Assembly on Wednesday, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi reiterated his country's long held insistence that it is not seeking a nuclear weapon.

Earlier last week, Iran said it saw no point in saving a 2015 nuclear pact without guarantees the United States would not again withdraw and international inspectors close investigations of Tehran's atomic programme, Iran's president said on Thursday.

Signaling failure of attempts at the United Nations General Assembly to overcome an impasse, President Ebrahim Raisi had said: "What is the use of having a revived deal without assuring guarantees that the US will not violate again?"

After a meeting with Raisi on Tuesday in New York, French President Emmanuel Macron said that "the ball on reaching a nuclear deal with Iran is now in Tehran's camp". But Raisi, in a televised news conference, blamed the accord's European parties and the United States for failure to revive it. — AFP/Reuters

89 dead in Lebanon migrant shipwreck off Syria's coast

DAMASCUS: Eighty-nine bodies have been recovered since a boat carrying migrants from Lebanon sank off Syria's coast, Syrian state media said on Saturday, as the Lebanese army said it arrested a suspected smuggler behind one of the deadliest recent shipwrecks in the eastern Mediterranean.

Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), called it a "heart-wrenching tragedy".

At least 14 people rescued were recovering in hospitals in Syria while six others were discharged, as search efforts continued, with several people still missing since the boat sank on Thursday.

"There are 89 victims, while 14 people are receiving treatment at Al Basel Hospital, two of whom are in intensive care," Syria's official news agency SANA reported, quoting Iskandar Ammar, a hospital official.

Lebanon's army said it arrested a Lebanese man who "admitted to organising the recent smuggling operation from Lebanon to Italy by sea".

Lebanon, a country which hosts more than a million



Mother of Mustafa Misto, a Lebanese man who, with his wife and three young children, was on the migrant boat which sank off the Syrian coast after sailing from Lebanon, walks by the help of men in the northern city of Tripoli. — Reuters

refugees from Syria's civil war, has since 2019 been mired in a financial crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the worst in modern times.

It has become a launchpad for illegal migration, with its own citizens joining Syrian and Palestinian refugees clamouring to leave.

As many as 150 people were on board the small boat that sank off the Syrian port of Tartus, some 50 kilometres north of

Tripoli in Lebanon, from where the migrants set sail.

Those on board were mostly Lebanese and Syrians and Palestinians, and included both children and the elderly, the UN said.

Families in Lebanon were to hold a second day of funerals on Saturday after they were handed bodies of relatives on Friday night through the Arida border crossing with Syria.

Since 2020, Lebanon has seen

a spike in the number of migrants using its shores to attempt the perilous crossing in jam-packed boats to reach Europe.

The UN children's agency, Unicef, said they had initial reports that 10 children were "among those who lost their lives" in the latest disaster.

"Years of political instability and economic crisis in Lebanon have pushed many children and families into poverty, affecting their health, welfare and education," Unicef added.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said: "No one gets on these death boats lightly."

"People are taking this perilous decisions, risking their lives in search of dignity."

Lazzarini said more must be done "to offer a better future and address a sense of hopelessness in Lebanon and across the region, including among Palestine refugees".

Antonio Vitorino, head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said: "People looking for safety should not be compelled to take such perilous and often deadly migration journeys." — AFP



هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (the Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred by Article (109) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree (No. 78/2004) (the Sector Law), proposes to modify the Licences granted to all Licensees under the Sector Law (Licensees) by amending the current Condition or adding the new Licence condition related to the Regulatory Compliance, to be as follows:

"The Licensee shall, insofar as they are applicable to it, comply with all regulations, conditions, instructions, directives, and all other Regulatory changes and developments that may be issued by the Authority from time to time, including in relation to applicable tariffs and charges."

These Proposed Modifications are required for enhance the authority's ability to raise the efficiency of performance in the Sector, and to achieve the economic benefits in line with Oman 2040 vision.

Any person who has an objection to the proposed modification shall submit the details of its objection on the address below within 28 days. Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered.

Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights
Block No 9993 | Building No. 95 | First Floor
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair
P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
email: enquiries@apsr.om
Tel: +968 24609700, Fax: +968 24609701



Denys and Sasha cheer passing vehicles from their mimicked checkpoint at the curve of a road in Chuhiiv, Kharkiv region. – AFP

Russia replaces top general, pursues breakaway Ukraine polls

KYIV: Moscow replaced its top logistics general on Saturday after a series of setbacks as Kremlin-held regions of eastern and southern Ukraine voted for a second day on becoming part of Russia.

The changing of the guard comes amid a major mobilisation drive by Russia after the Ukraine invasion revealed widespread logistical difficulties, with Kyiv now taking back more and more territory.

Russia’s invasion and recent gains by the Ukrainian army in a lightening counter-offensive have laid bare important logistical flaws with some analysts seeing logistics as the weak link in Moscow’s army.

“Russia’s referenda are a sham — a false pretext to try to annex parts of Ukraine by force in flagrant violation of international law,” Biden said. “We will work with our allies and partners to impose additional swift and severe economic costs on Russia.”

It even prompted a reaction from Beijing, Moscow’s closest ally since the war began in February.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi — in comments made to his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba at the UN General Assembly Friday — said the “sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected”.

Ukrainian forces said they were clawing back territory from

Moscow-backed separatists in the very lands Russia wants to assimilate.

Voting is being held in Russian-controlled areas of Donetsk and Lugansk in the east, and Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in the south.

Authorities there are going door-to-door for four days to collect votes. Polling stations then open on Tuesday for residents to cast ballots on the final day.

It was also possible to vote at the building in Moscow that represents the Donetsk breakaway region.

Leonid, a 59-year-old military official, said he was “feeling happy”.

“Ultimately, things are moving towards the restoration of the Soviet Union. The referendum is one step towards this.”

The vote was announced earlier this week after a Ukrainian counteroffensive seized most of the northeastern Kharkiv region — bringing hundreds of settlements back under Kyiv’s control after months of Russian occupation.

The four regions’ integration into Russia would represent a major escalation of the conflict as Moscow would consider any military move there as an attack on its own territory. The referendums are reminiscent of the one held after Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimea in 2014. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday denounced the polls. — AFP

Nasa scraps Tuesday Moon launch due to storm

WASHINGTON: Nasa has called off the scheduled Tuesday launch of its historic unscrewed mission to the Moon due to a tropical storm that is forecast to strengthen as it approaches Florida.

“Nasa is forgoing a launch opportunity... and preparing for rollback (from the launchpad), while continuing to watch the weather forecast associated with Tropical Storm Ian,” it said on Saturday.

After technical problems derailed two launch attempts several weeks ago, a new liftoff of the Artemis 1 mission was scheduled for Tuesday and was threatened by a storm gathering in the Caribbean.

The storm, which has not yet been assigned a name, is currently located south of the Dominican Republic.

But it is expected to grow into a hurricane in the coming days and could move north to Florida, home to the Kennedy Space Center, from which the rocket is set to launch.

Earlier reports said: “Our plan A is to stay to course and to get the launch off on September 27,” Mike Bolger, Nasa’s exploration ground systems manager, told reporters on Friday. “But we realised we also need to be really paying attention and thinking about a plan B.”

That would entail wheeling the giant Space Launch System rocket back to the Vehicle Assembly Building, known as VAB.

“If we were to go down to Plan B we need a couple days to pivot from our current tanking test or launch configuration to execute rollback and get back into the protection of the VAB,” Bolger said, adding that a decision should be made by early afternoon on Saturday.

On the launch pad the orange and white SLS rocket can withstand wind gusts of up to 137 kilometres per hour. But if it has to be sheltered, the current launch window, which runs until October 4, will be missed.

The next launch window will run from October 17 to 31, with one possibility of take-off per day, except from October 24-26 and 28. — AFP



Storm Fiona hammers Canada’s east coast

HALIFAX: Powerful storm Fiona slammed into eastern Canada on Saturday with hurricane-force winds, blowing over trees and powerlines and leaving hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses without electricity.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said the centre of the storm, downgraded to Post-Tropical Cyclone Fiona, was now in the Gulf of St Lawrence after racing through Nova Scotia. Reports of downed trees and power lines were widespread in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

“She was a wild ride last night, sounded like the whole roof was going to blow off,” said Gary

Experts predicted high winds, storm surges and heavy rainfall from Fiona while some 79 per cent of customers were without power in Nova Scotia

Hatcher, a retiree who lives in Sydney, Nova Scotia, near where the storm made landfall. A maple tree was toppled in his back yard but did no damage to his house.

Fiona, which nearly a week ago battered Puerto Rico and



A project manager for general contractor G&R Kelly, places sandbags around the doors of the Nova Scotia Power building before the arrival of Hurricane Fiona in Halifax, Nova Scotia. – Reuters

other parts of the Caribbean, made landfall between Canso and Guysborough, Nova Scotia, where the Canadian Hurricane Centre said it recorded what may have been the lowest barometric pressure of any storm to hit land in the country’s history.

“We were up all night,” said Dave DeBlois of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, who said there was no major damage to his home. “Was a bit scary at times,” he said. “You could feel the house sway.”

Some 79 per cent of customers, or 414,000, were without power in Nova Scotia, and 95 per cent, or 82,000, had lost power on Prince Edward Island, utility companies

said. The region was also experiencing spotty mobile phone service. Police across the region reported multiple road closures.

The storm weakened somewhat as it travelled north. As of 8 am, it was over the Gulf of St Lawrence about 340 km northeast of Halifax, carrying maximum winds of 85 miles per hour and barreling north at around 23 mph, the NHC said.

Experts predicted high winds, storm surges and heavy rainfall from Fiona. The storm was forecast to gradually weaken but was expected to maintain hurricane-force winds until Saturday afternoon, the NHC said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LUANDA

Thousands protest Angola’s disputed vote result

Angolan opposition supporters took to the streets to protest the return to power of the long ruling MPLA party in divisive elections last month. The demonstrations were called by UNITA — the largest opposition party and a former rebel movement which fought a 27-year civil war against the MPLA government that ended in 2002. The opposition National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), whose popularity has been growing in recent years



rejected the results of the August 24 vote.

It challenged the outcome in court, but the country’s top court dismissed the petition. — AFP

COLOMBO

Lanka disperses student rally after protest ban

Sri Lankan police dispersed hundreds of demonstrators on Saturday, a day after severely curtailing protest rights in response to months of unrest sparked by the island nation’s sharp economic downturn. President Ranil Wickremesinghe has taken a tough line against activists who forced his predecessor to flee the country and resign in July at the peak of the country’s crisis.

Officers in anti-riot gear blocked the student march hours



after the government declared the city centre a “high security zone”, outlawing protests in the vicinity. Police fired tear gas and water cannon to clear out the demonstrators. — AFP

TOKYO

Typhoon lashes central Japan, killing 2

A typhoon lashed central Japan with torrential rain and fierce winds, killing two and leaving tens of thousands of households without power, the Kyodo news agency reported. Shizuoka city, southwest of the capital, Tokyo, was hit especially hard, seeing a record 417 mm of precipitation since the rain started on Thursday, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said. Winds at the centre of Typhoon Talas were blowing at about 65 kmph, with peak gusts of about 90 kmph, it said.



A man in his 40s was killed in a landslide and a 29-year-old man was found dead after his car plunged into a reservoir, Kyodo reported. — Reuters

Italy votes on Sunday. Here’s what you need to know

JASON HOROWITZ, GAIA PIANIGIANI
AND ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

Italians vote on Sunday for the first time in almost five years in national elections that will usher in a new, and polls predict, right-wing government that will face economic challenges, a deepening energy crisis, and questions about Italy’s hard line against Russia and its full-throated support for the European Union.

The elections come after the national unity government of Prime Minister Mario Draghi, a darling of the European establishment who is widely credited with increasing Italy’s credibility and influence, collapsed amid a revolt in his coalition.

The elections had been scheduled for February, but the premature collapse raised familiar questions about Italy’s stability and the popularity of the country’s far-right opposition, which had grown outside the unity government, and rekindled doubts about Italy’s commitment to the European Union.

International markets, wary of the country’s enormous debt, are already jittery. And Italy’s support for sending arms to Ukraine, which has been influential within Europe, has emerged as a campaign issue, raising the prospect of a possible change of course that could alter the balance of power in Europe.

Despite the broad popularity of Draghi, a Eurocentric moderate, it is the populist-infused right, with a recent history of belligerence toward Europe, that has had a clear edge in the polls.

Most popular of all has been the hard-right Brothers of Italy party, led by Giorgia Meloni, whose support skyrocketed as it was the only major party to remain in the opposition. If she does as well as expected, she is poised to be Italy’s first female prime minister.

Meloni is aligned with the anti-immigrant and hard-right League party, led by Matteo Salvini, and Forza Italia, the centre-right party founded and still led by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Italy’s election law favours parties that run in a coalition, and so the coalition on the right has an advantage over the fragmented left.

The largest party on the left, the Democratic Party, is polling around 22 per cent. But Meloni’s support has polled around 25 per cent, and the right is expected to gain many more seats in Parliament, the basis upon which the government is composed.

The once anti-establishment 5-Star Movement cratered from its strong showing in 2018, when it had more than 30 per cent of the vote. But after participating in three different governments spanning the political spectrum, it has lost its identity. Now headed by former prime minister Giuseppe Conte, it has opted to run alone. In recent weeks, its poll numbers have climbed, thanks to support in the south, which is rewarding the party for passing, and now



A supporter of Giorgia Meloni and the hard-right Brothers of Italy party carries the flag of Italy as he leaves a campaign rally in Caligari.

defending, a broad unemployment benefit.

A centrist party called Azione, led by a former minister, Carlo Calenda, and backed by another former prime minister, Matteo Renzi, would claim a moral victory even if it only hit 6 per cent or 7 per cent.

What are the issues?

While Meloni’s post-fascist roots have attracted attention and prompted worries outside Italy, few voters in Italy seem to care. The issues of the day are energy prices, inflation, the cost of living, and Italy’s policy towards Russia and Ukraine.

On the last issue, the conservative coalition is split. Meloni, in part to reassure an international audience that she is a credible and acceptable option, has been a consistent and outspoken supporter of Ukraine throughout the war. Even though she has been in the opposition, where she criticised coronavirus vaccine mandates, she has emerged as a key ally of Draghi on the question of arming Ukraine.

The conservative coalition has proposed cutting taxes on essential goods and energy, offering energy vouchers to workers, and renegotiating Italy’s EU recovery funds to adjust for higher prices. It is also seeking to reinvest in nuclear energy, which Italy has not produced since the 1990s and banned in a 2011 referendum.

Its leaders have proposed a deep flat tax and the elimination of unemployment benefits popular in the south — known here as the “citizens’ income.” The benefit, pushed

through with much fanfare by the 5-Star Movement in its first government, acts as a subsidy to the lowest-income earners.

To drum up electoral support, hard-right parties have also tried to make illegal migration an issue, even though numbers are far below earlier years.

The right also wants to change the constitution so that the president can be elected directly by voters — and not by Parliament, as is now the case.

The centre-left Democratic Party has argued to continue the hard line against Russia and has emphasised energy policies that focus on renewable sources, cutting costs for low and medium-income families, and installing regasification plants to increase natural gas supplies as Italy faces shortages from Russia. The party has advocated easing the path to citizenship for children of immigrants born in Italy, and wants to increase penalties for discrimination against LGBTQ people. It also proposes introducing a minimum wage, cutting income taxes to raise net salaries, and paying teachers and healthcare workers better wages.

The 5-Star Movement is, like Salvini, dubious of a hard line against Russia and against the shipment of Italian weapons to help Ukraine. The 5-Star Movement is proposing an energy recovery fund to tackle the price surge and investments in renewable energy. It is also calling for a ban on new drilling for fossil fuels.

The Jetsons, now 60 years old, is iconic. That’s a problem



STEPHEN J. DOWNS

On the evening of Sunday, September 23, 1962, millions of American families finished their dinners, turned on their televisions and were introduced to The Jetsons, a cartoon sitcom produced by the legendary team of Hanna-Barbera.

Set in 2062, The Jetsons captured the technological optimism of the time and projected it into a space-age, gadget-fueled vision of the future, inviting its viewers to imagine the dazzling possibilities that the current wave of technological achievement could one day realise. (Jetsons aficionados believe George Jetson was born on July 31, 2022, though it’s not clear that’s canon.)

In the end, The Jetsons was a rather tame, pedestrian sitcom about a family that reinforced traditional gender and family roles, knew little of the social issues of the time (it was, for example, unbearably white), and effectively glorified the consumerist, suburban lifestyle.

But as a template for a technology-driven American future, it was no less than iconic. It was also prophetic.

The Jetsons debuted five years after the Soviets had launched Sputnik, four years after the opening of the first commercial nuclear power plant in the US, and 16 months after president John F. Kennedy set a goal of putting a man on the moon by the decade’s end.

Fifteen years earlier, scientists at AT&T’s Bell Labs invented the transistor, and soon after, miniature (by contemporary standards) transistor radios were found in many households.

That same year, the Levitt brothers broke ground on their first Levittown suburb in Nassau County, New York.

The team at Hanna-Barbera extrapolated from all of these trends and created a slick (albeit goofy at times) rendering of a future world. The world of The Jetsons seemingly occupied a middle layer between the Earth and outer space, with buildings and developments either high up on stilts or floating in air.

The architecture and interior design could be described as cartoon-Saarianen, inspired by the swooping curves of the architect’s designs for the terminals at Dulles and JFK airports and his fabled tulip tables and chairs.

Technophilic names — from the family dog, Astro, to Cosmic Cola and Molecular Motors — were omnipresent. Even the teenage heartthrob was named “Jet.”

(“Lectronimo,” the nuclear-powered robotic dog, was a bit of a head scratcher, though.) In this respect, the series was a full-throated embrace of the technologies upon which the new world would be built.

There is an optimism at the heart of The Jetsons. The nuclear fission borne from the Manhattan Project contained an astonishing power that ended the war with Japan and had since been transformed into a seemingly magical source of everyday fuel for the growing economy and new household capabilities.

Rockets had blasted Alan Shepard, followed by Gus Grissom, John Glenn, and Scott Carpenter, into space. Televisions were starting to broadcast in colour.

And Moore’s law, which held that the density of integrated circuits would double every two years, was beginning to manifest (even if it had yet to be articulated by Gordon Moore).



The world of The Jetsons seemingly occupied a middle layer between the Earth and outer space, with buildings and developments either high up on stilts or floating in air

That idea — that technology would get smaller, faster, cheaper, and more powerful year after year — along with the breakthroughs in space technology and nuclear and atomic science, led to a techno-optimism that was part of the zeitgeist of the early 1960s.

It also followed two decades of rapidly rising home ownership and steady rises in the adoption of household appliances, like refrigerators, air conditioners, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners — and of course personal automobiles.

Science was cool, technology was blossoming, and more and more Americans were dreaming of owning their own homes, replete with the latest gadgets.

The Jetsons took that dream and supercharged it, riding the wave of optimism to depict a future where technology catered to our every need, at the touch of a button or at the command of our voice. It was a fantastical vision that deeply appealed to our needs and desires for comfort and convenience.

Life on The Jetsons was anything but hard. Jetsons World was also clean, even antiseptic. In hindsight it’s easier to see what’s missing (besides people of colour). Nature, for example, was not entirely absent, but it only makes a few cameos (some occasional greenery popping up on a floating office complex; a “park” where Elroy, the young boy in the family, plays with Astro, appears in one episode).

It’s as if, in a future where technology reigns, we don’t need it anymore.

Food (it’s not clear where it comes from) is at best efficient and seemingly never enjoyed. (Of course, Judy, the teenage daughter, is on a diet.)

The Internet is not your doctor



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

A colleague was telling me about his son who found it difficult to relax during job interviews. He would feel very anxious and start sweating and stuttering and his heart beat goes up.

Despite scoring good marks in his exams his body lets him down during the interview. “He searched the symptoms and found out that it is called social anxiety, he then searched anxiety and found most symptoms apply to him, now he is very anxious about his anxiety. He kept reading and reading and self diagnosing.”

The behaviour described above is not uncommon and I met patients who would google their symptoms and the treatments before coming to my clinic.

While it is good to be

knowledgeable about mental health and other health conditions in general it is important to remember that Internet websites are not meant to give you a diagnosis.

That exactly is the job of a real doctor, one who studied medicine at an accredited university and has enough skills and knowledge to understand what mental illness is and how to make a diagnosis.

I can see the temptation to search the Internet instead of booking an appointment with a psychiatrist who may ask you personal questions or you may have unnecessary fear of the assessment session.

These fears may stem from the media or the experiences of other people around you. You may fear being judged or called “crazy” by

ONE HAS TO BE VERY SELECTIVE OF THE SOURCES OF THE INFORMATION HE GETS ESPECIALLY WHEN DEALING WITH HEALTH RELATED ISSUES. PLEASE DON'T DIAGNOSE YOURSELF, LEAVE THAT TO THE DOCTORS

other people if you are found to be seeing a psychiatrist.

While googling one’s symptoms is not limited to mental health issues in my opinion. It has worse impact, possibly due to the special nature of mental health problems and the fact that people who experience them may be more suggestible and prone to take advice from non-

professionals.

I remember a young patient who was suffering from anorexia nervosa, a psychiatric problem where a person “usually a young girl” refuses to eat for fear of gaining weight and becoming fat even when she is clearly underweight and in some cases undernourished.

The patient uses extreme forms of starving and excessive exercising to lose weight. Some use pills to make them urinate more.

This particular patient was finally stable after months of therapy, she joined a Facebook group for girls with anorexia, the group members started bullying her and calling her a “traitor” because she was gaining some weight.

They even taught her new

tricks to lose weight and “cheat the doctors.” Sadly her condition deteriorated and she lost all the progress she made simply because of the bad influence of that Facebook group.

The Internet is full of information but not all of it is true or genuine. We all remember during Covid how fake news became common and conspiracy theory believers were spreading lies about the origins of the virus and the safety of the vaccines and how many people died because of this fake news.

Therefore, one has to be very selective of the sources of the information he gets especially when dealing with health related issues. Please don't diagnose yourself, leave that to the doctors.

Indigenous activists raise climate awareness on sidelines of UNGA

ANA FERNÁNDEZ

Uyukar Domingo Peas, an Ecuadorian Indigenous activist, says if there are still “reservoirs of natural resources” in the world, it is “because we have protected them for thousands of years.”

Peas has been fighting against the destruction of forests for three decades and regrets that states and companies continue to destroy the Amazon despite the urgency of the climate crisis.

“The Amazon must remain intact for the youth and the rest of humanity,” the 58-year-old from the Achuar nation said, lamenting that governments and corporations have not sought the ancestral knowledge of Indigenous peoples to save the planet.

Peas was speaking at Environment Week, a series of independent events involving Indigenous peoples from around the world that is being held in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

An estimated 80 per cent of the world’s tropical forests — about 800 million hectares — are in Indigenous territories, according to organisations that defend them.

Many Indigenous people blame capitalism for the destruction of their forests.

“We want companies and banks to stop investing for money and invest for the common good” because “climate change harms every human being,” he said.

He is calling for funds to implement the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Initiative, which aims to protect 35 million hectares in the Amazon rainforest of Peru and Ecuador, and is home to 30 Indigenous communities with around 600,000 people.

He hopes that the nine countries that share the Amazon — often referred to as the lungs of the planet, spread over nearly 300 million hectares with three million inhabitants from more than 500 peoples — will also join this initiative.

Peas advocates for a new “bioeconomy,” with new sources of energy, tourism programmes and other initiatives to ensure that Indigenous youth do not migrate away from their homelands.

Compared to the large sums needed for the oil and mining projects that pollute their lands and rivers, Peas’ initiative requires just \$19 million over 10 years.

“Mother Earth does not expect us to save her, she expects us to respect her,” said Nemonte Nenquimo, the Ecuadorian chief of the Waorani nation.

The Covid pandemic and “the collective hysteria of oil-dependent countries” following the conflict in Ukraine have dealt a severe blow to the Indigenous climate struggle, said Levi Sucre, of the Bribri community, an Indigenous people living between Costa Rica and Panama.

With priorities set on economic recovery, Indigenous rights “have regressed alarmingly in the last two, three years,” he said. — AFP

War, inflation and squandered credibility



Paul Krugman

The writer is an opinion columnist and writes about macroeconomics

What does Jerome Powell, chair of the Federal Reserve, understand that Vladimir Putin doesn’t?

OK, I know that may sound like a trick question, or a desperate effort to offer a counterintuitive take on recent events. We may say that the Fed has gone to war against inflation, but that’s just a metaphor. Russia’s war on Ukraine, unfortunately, is all too real, leading to tens of thousands of deaths among both soldiers and civilians.

Yet the Fed and the Putin regime have this in common: Both took major policy actions this week. The Fed raised interest rates in an attempt to curb inflation. Putin announced a partial mobilisation in an attempt to rescue his failed invasion.

Both actions will inflict pain.

One important difference, however — aside from the fact that Powell is not, as far as I know, a war criminal — is that the Fed is acting to maintain its credibility, while Putin seems determined to squander whatever credibility he might still have.

About the Fed: I’m worried about the effects of rate hikes. There is a serious risk that the Fed’s actions will push America and the world into a gratuitously severe recession, especially because it isn’t just the Fed — central banks are raising rates around the world, and there could all too easily be a sort of destructive synergy from this worldwide monetary tightening.

Yet if I were in Powell’s shoes, I would probably have done the same thing.

Notice that I said “preserve.”

The Fed — like yours truly — failed to predict the 2021-22 inflation surge. But neither financial markets nor the public lost faith that inflation would, in fact, come down in the fairly near future.

That’s an important asset. Subdued inflation expectations are the best reason to believe that the Fed can engineer a relatively soft landing — an economic slowdown for sure, maybe a recession, but not the kind of sustained era of extremely high unemployment that it took to end the inflation of the 1970s.

And the Fed is acting to preserve this asset, trying to bring current inflation down soon enough that the public retains its faith in low future inflation. I don’t like it. I’ll be calling for a monetary pivot as soon as we have clear evidence that inflation is,

in fact, coming down. But the Powell Fed is, I’m afraid, right to believe that retaining credibility is important.

Putin obviously doesn’t have similar concerns.

His Wednesday speech was full of apocalyptic rhetoric, portraying Russia as a nation under attack by the whole West. But he didn’t announce the kind of full-scale mobilisation that rhetoric would seem to imply. Instead, he announced a series of half-measures

PUTIN’S ATTEMPTED ECONOMIC BULLYING, LIKE HIS PARTIAL MOBILISATION, PROBABLY WON’T CHANGE THE COURSE OF THE WAR

that defence experts doubt will do much to change Russia’s downward military trajectory. I have no reason to question their judgment.

What struck me, however, was that the new policies amount, in effect, to a betrayal of Russians who believed Putin’s past promises. Notably, contract soldiers — people who volunteered to serve for a limited time — have suddenly found themselves stuck in service for the indefinite future. This may shore up Russian numbers for the next few months; but who, in the future, will be foolish enough to volunteer for Putin’s army?

Putin’s clumsy efforts at economic warfare are, in a way, creating similar credibility issues. Russia has largely cut off the flow of natural gas to Europe, hoping to bully Western democracies into stopping their military and economic aid to Ukraine. He is succeeding in creating a lot of economic pain; energy prices have soared, and a nasty European recession seems highly likely.

Yet the West isn’t going to abandon Ukraine, especially given Ukrainian success on the battlefield. So Putin’s attempted economic bullying, like his partial mobilisation, probably won’t change the course of the war. What it’s doing, instead, is showing how dangerous it is to do business with an erratic, authoritarian regime. This means that even if and when the Ukraine war ends, Russia’s trade relations won’t return to normal: As long as Putin or someone like him remains in power, Europe will never again allow itself to become so reliant on Russian energy.

In short, Putin is engaged in what we might call a bonfire of the credibilities — his desperate short-run efforts to rescue his war of aggression are undermining Russia’s future, by making it clear that he can’t be trusted. Looking forward, Russian citizens won’t volunteer to serve in the military, lest they end up trapped in a kill zone; European companies won’t sign contracts with Russian suppliers, lest they find their businesses stranded by economic blackmail.

— New York Times



A rescuer works at a site of a residential building damaged by a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia. — Reuters

Holding out for a hero



Ray Petersen
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In 1984, Jim Steinman and Dean Pitchford collaborated with the husky-voiced Welsh, yes that's right, she's Welsh, starlet Bonnie Tyler, to produce the almost anthemic, "I'm Holding Out for a Hero," which featured on the global pop charts, peaking at Number One on 'Billboard.' Most of the world is holding out for one now!

"Where have all the good men gone..." it begins, and it's a question we find ourselves asking of nobody, maybe over coffee, or a juice, a lemonade, but outside of our families and friends we find few to aspire to, don't we? From a global perspective, and I don't need to mention names... we see those who are physically unfit to rule... too old... too slow... simply incapable of maintaining coherent thought and discussion, let alone lead their nations!

"He's gotta be up for the fight." Hmmm, let's not hide behind gender either. I'm happy for women to have greater ascendancy among leadership and management, but they must stand up even taller. We have women who display empathy, compassion, and concern, but do they grasp or are they making the most of the wonderful opportunities they must, to be real heroes, or heroines? Are they being all they can be? I see Baida and Noor al Zadjali of Meezah Consultants re-shaping traditional ideas in Oman, and that must be a good thing, right?

The music continues... "and where are all the Gods?" Well, they, irrespective of your faith, are still there, but are you reaching out, are you listening, and are you being what they want you to be? Again, we could, and should, question whether the moral and ethical needs of our current world order are being met by those in positions to make a difference? The Sultanate of Oman's adherence to its culture and traditions are heartening reminders of how one reed may be broken easily, but many... not so.

THE SELF-SERVING PARANOIA, HATRED, AND ANTAGONISM WITH WHICH INSECURE INDIVIDUALS COMPEL NATIONS TOWARDS WAR AND CONFLICT, UPON THE FLIMSIEST OF PRETEXTS, ARE HORRIFIC REFLECTIONS OF THE BARBARITY OF CENTURIES PAST

"Where's the streetwise Hercules to fight the rising odds, Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?" And there lies one of our greatest fears today. We have nobody capable of asking difficult questions and demanding genuine answers. The self-serving paranoia, hatred, and antagonism with which insecure individuals compel nations towards war and conflict, upon the flimsiest of pretexts, are horrific reflections of the barbarity of centuries past. Have we learned so little across time?

"I need a hero!" We all need a hero, or heroes. We do need someone to "be strong, be fast, be larger than life." Oh goodness, do we need someone good or what? Just someone who will demand honest answers. However, all we get is the arrogance of evasion, the smug indulgence of silence, and the temerity of obscurity, rarely coming out to 'face the music.' The CEO of BP, owner of 1,218 petrol stations across the UK, has a company fuel card, so is totally insulated from petrol price rises. The Chairman of EDF Energy (UK) has their utilities, their gas and electricity, paid as part of their employment package. How aware do you think they are?

In a world where... incredibly and regrettably, train drivers are paid more than nurses and teachers, we do need heroes. It is also a world where, incredibly, corporate energy giants announce indecent profits at the same time as they, with the connivance of politicians, apply multiple tariff increases. It is a world where we are being 'driven,' towards electric vehicles without genuine consideration of the environmental impact of lithium mining in Chile and China having a horrendous environmental impact upon those countries, and therefore the planet. But maybe, out of sight...

Oman is an oasis of calm and tranquility in a world that is becoming a maelstrom of intrigue, of faithless existence, of conceit, arrogance, and pride that all come before a fall. Don't be dissuaded from your objectives of a society in which health and education are the primary concerns. Your doctors, your nurses, your police, your teachers, should be your heroes, because every day, they are "up for the fight!" They are real heroes!



JUST MISSED

An Aeropostale Boeing 737 overran the runway during its landing phase at night at Montpellier airport in France on Saturday. The airport of Montpellier has been closed for an indefinite period of time after a cargo plane went off the runway during the night while landing without causing any injuries. – AFP

Preparing for the next global catastrophe



José Manuel Barroso

The writer is former president of the European Commission (2004-14) and prime minister of Portugal (2002-04), is Chair of the Gavi Board

After two and a half years of lockdowns, quarantines, and mask mandates, billions of people around the world have returned to their normal lives. But in many ways, this newfound sense of post-pandemic normalcy is misleading. Beating Covid-19 will not mark the end of our current age of global instability, but rather the end of the beginning.

Of course, it is important to remember that the battle against Covid-19 is still far from over. More people have been infected in 2022 than in the previous two years combined, and while vaccines have brought down death rates, more than a million people worldwide have died this year after contracting the virus. And as governments begin to roll out updated booster shots, the world must brace itself for a major fall surge and the possible emergence of dangerous new variants.

But even if Covid-19 were to disappear soon, our goal must not be to return to the status quo ante. In the pre-pandemic world, governments and communities were woefully ill-prepared – not just for a deadly pathogen, but also for an explosive confluence of political and economic crises. If we continue to view the end of this pandemic as our only goal, the new normal will be just as fragile as the old one.

Global leaders should recognise that, far from being an outlier, the pandemic might be a harbinger. Even as Covid-19 continues to spread, the likelihood of another pandemic increases by 2 per cent each year. Moreover, the threat of new pandemics is just one of several looming catastrophes – including climate change, war, and food insecurity – that conspire to make social and economic stability a thing of the past. Simply put, the world is not prepared.

In any kind of crisis, the top priority should be to protect those who are most at risk. But as Covid-19 and climate change have demonstrated, the most vulnerable among us are often the first to be affected. And if adequate protection mechanisms are not introduced before a crisis strikes, the world's poorest countries will most likely be the last to receive help.

The pandemic is a case in point. Instead of crafting an equitable global response in advance, leaders had to scramble to ensure that lower-income countries could get access to vaccines. Despite immense challenges, the Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access facility (COVAX) has been remarkably successful. So far, COVAX has delivered more than 1.75 billion vaccine doses to 146 countries. Of these, 1.5 billion went to 92 low-income countries. By January 2022, COVAX helped lower-income countries to achieve an average

vaccination rate of 20 per cent, enough to protect the most at-risk groups.

But the next time we face a global crisis, we must act faster and more decisively. Crucially, any potential protection mechanism must be fully funded, or at least have pre-approved contingent funding in place, so that lower-income countries have access to lifesaving countermeasures immediately. But

GLOBAL LEADERS SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT, FAR FROM BEING AN OUTLIER, THE PANDEMIC MIGHT BE A HARBINGER. EVEN AS COVID-19 CONTINUES TO SPREAD, THE LIKELIHOOD OF ANOTHER PANDEMIC INCREASES BY 2 PER CENT EACH YEAR. MOREOVER, THE THREAT OF NEW PANDEMICS IS JUST ONE OF SEVERAL LOOMING CATASTROPHES – INCLUDING CLIMATE CHANGE, WAR, AND FOOD INSECURITY – THAT CONSPIRE TO MAKE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY A THING OF THE PAST. SIMPLY PUT, THE WORLD IS NOT PREPARED.

developing an adequate global response also requires a change in mindset. Even now, as G20 leaders map out how to prepare for future pandemics, there are no detailed proposals that address how the world's poorest economies will obtain vaccines.

Fortunately, COVAX itself provides a useful model for how to design future protection mechanisms. By treating the protection of the world's most vulnerable as its primary objective, COVAX has

helped ensure that 63 per cent of older people and 75 per cent of healthcare workers in lower-income countries are fully vaccinated. Although the rollout could have been faster, the fact that 76 per cent of the doses delivered to low-income countries have come through COVAX shows that hundreds of millions would have suffered without it.

But if COVAX had been created and fully funded before the pandemic, its impact could have been even greater. COVAX worked because it was built on global health networks that were already in place and had the resources, expertise, and infrastructure to mount a rapid global effort. But that effort stretched these agencies to the limit. If these organisations had built-in surge capacity and contingency funding, the response could have been faster and more efficient.

The willingness to take risks is critical. With COVAX, officials secured billions of vaccine doses without knowing if those vaccines would work or how many doses would be needed. But the economic, social, and political repercussions of allowing millions of people to get sick or be displaced would have been far more costly.

Even though the COVAX model is not a one-size-fits-all solution for future calamities, it does offer useful lessons that could apply to crises beyond public health. For example, private-sector actors, led by Stripe, Alphabet, Shopify, Meta, and McKinsey, are exploring a Climate Advance Market Commitment that would promote and invest in climate solutions, based on COVAX's innovative financing mechanism.

Whatever policies we put in place to prepare for future global crises, we must do so quickly. Whether we like it or not, the next disaster is only a matter of time. Preparing for it must be our new normal.

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An electronic sign displays flight schedules at Hong Kong International Airport on Friday. Hong Kong announced it will end mandatory hotel quarantine, scrapping some of the world's toughest travel restrictions that have battered the economy and kept the finance hub internationally isolated. – AFP

sport

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OMAN SAILING FESTIVAL 2022 LAUNCHED

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has announced the launch of the Oman Sailing Festival 2022, a nationwide initiative to introduce communities across the country to the sport. The Oman Sailing Festival will offer free Try Sailing, Para Sailing, Windsurfing and Kite Surfing sessions under the supervision of Oman Sail's coaches, along with SME engagement and beach clean-up events to help conserve the local environment and keep the seas clear of litter and other items damaging to marine life.

The Oman Sailing Festival will begin on October 4-9 in Suhar, and then visit Musannah from October 11-14, Sur Al Hadeed in Seeb from October 19-22, Duqm from November 1-6 and Salalah from November 6-12. The Oman Sailing Festival will then continue in Musannah from November 23-26, Sur from November 27 to December 4, Al Mouj Muscat from December 7-11, and concluding in Musandam from December 17-25, 2022.

Three high profile sailing competitions will also be staged during the festival, focusing the attentions of the sailing community firmly on Oman.

The first event of the season will be the Arab Sailing Championships at the Barceló Mussanah Resort from October 11-15, 2022. Fifty sailors from 14 countries across the region will compete in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, RS:X and iQFOiL windsurfing and RS Venture para sailing. Sailors will be visiting from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the UAE for the first Arab Sailing Championships since 2019.

The Barceló Mussanah Resort will also host the RS Venture Connect World Championships, the first exclusively Para Sailing championship to be staged in Oman. Taking place from Sunday November 20 until Sunday November 27, 36 teams from 15 nations, including members of Oman Sail's SailFree team, will



Dr. Khamis Al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO



compete in the RS Venture boat, designed specifically for people with disabilities.

The final event will see a return to Omani waters for the RC44 Cup. Oman Sail hosted the inaugural round of the RC44 Cup in 2013.

Nine teams from across Europe are currently in a close-fought battle for supremacy at the top of the leaderboard and the winner will be crowned at the Al Mouj Marina after five days of intense racing from December 7-11, 2022.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "This is an exciting time for sport in Oman and we are very proud to take a leading role in sharing the excitement of sailing, windsurfing and kite sailing with the community. We look forward to showcasing the potential of sailing to capture the imagination of people across Oman and reaching the next generation of sailors. The events will attract a diverse demographic to our nation, which benefits the national economy, and offers a glimpse at the highest level of the sport which can inspire the local population to pursue a new activity, train and, ultimately, represent the Sultanate of Oman."

Dr Al Jabri added, "It is always a great honour for Oman Sail to be chosen as hosts for international sailing events and be able to lend our experience to other organisers as we work together to continue building Oman's excellent reputation in the global sporting community."

Each event will incorporate the need to maintain the natural environment and promoting sustainability. Oman Sail will host beach clean-up events and provide recycling facilities on site to reduce the human impact and raise awareness of the need to preserve Oman's natural resources.

The sailing festival is supported by OQ, the National Mineral Water Company (Tanuf), Barceló Mussanah Resort, while RC44 is supported by Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier lifestyle destination, as host venues.



Van Vleuten defies pain 'hell' to win world road race title

WOLLONGONG: Gutsy Dutchwoman Annemiek Van Vleuten rode through the pain of a fractured elbow to win a pulsating world cycling road race on Saturday after launching a breathtaking late solo attack.

The 39-year-old Tour de France champion held off a challenge by Belgium's Lotte Kopecky by one second after a gruelling 164.3 kilometre (102 mile) slog in the rain around Wollongong, south of Sydney.

Italy's Silvia Persico took the bronze.

"I think this was the best victory of my whole career with the week I have been through. Miracles can happen," said Van Vleuten, who fractured her elbow in the mixed relay on Wednesday after crashing heavily.

Medics only gave her the green light to challenge for the rainbow jersey on Friday evening.

"It was hell today," she added of the pain. "My legs were exploding on the climbs."

The win capped an incredible



Belgian Lotte Kopecky (L) and Dutch Annemiek Van Vleuten (R) cross the finish line of the elite women road race at the UCI Road World Championships Cycling 2022, in Wollongong. – AFP

season for the Movistar rider, who won the Tour de France, Giro and Vuelta to sweep the women's major tours in 2022, as well as the Liege-Bastogne-Liege to cement her status as an all-time great.

Van Vleuten was pessimistic before the race about being able to attack on the short, sharp climbs because her injury made it too painful to get out of the saddle.

She stayed in touch during a series of breakaways in the final city circuit lap that split the peloton and left her three-time champion team-mate Marianne Vos adrift on the last climb, before soaring away in the final kilometre to add to her 2019 title.

"I was working for Marianne and I suddenly found myself in the (leading) group," said Van



Dutch Annemiek Van Vleuten celebrates after winning the elite women road race at the UCI Road World Championships Cycling 2022, in Wollongong. – AFP

Vleuten, who is set to retire at the end of next season.

"Then I felt that she wasn't coming back, so I knew that I couldn't sprint with my elbow, and I was waiting for the moment to attack from behind.

"That was the only chance that I had and I was waiting, and waiting until they came with a sprint over the top of me, but

they didn't catch me." Seventy-eight of the 130 riders finished, with the Dutch team weakened by Demi Vollering withdrawing after getting Covid.

REELED IN

The pack headed south from the start at Helensburgh, hugging the Pacific coast, towards the heart of the championships in Wollongong,

before a steep climb up Mount Keira and then six circuits of the city.

In sunshine and showers, France's Gladys Verhulst powered 1mins 20sec clear of the peloton as they approached Mount Keira. But the gap narrowed on the fast and wet descent, and they were bunched again with 118 kilometres to go.

Belgium's Julie Van de Velde, Britain's Elynor Backstedt and Swede Caroline Andersson then attacked to form an elite group with a 90-second gap.

The peloton thinned as fatigue set in, with Italy's defending champion Elisa Balsamo left behind with 26 kilometres left.

A series of attacks in the final lap saw a group of five pull clear before they were hauled in by a chasing group, including Van Vleuten, who timed her final attack to perfection.

The first-ever women's under-23 title was also decided as part of the elite race, with New Zealand's Niamh Fisher-Black taking the honours. — AFP

■ GOODBYE TO GOSWAMI



India seals a famous win and ensures a clean sweep to gift the perfect farewell gift for Jhulan Goswami at the 3rd Royal London ODI. India won by 16 runs; 3-0. The last time Indian women won an ODI series in England was way back in 1999 when Goswami hadn't made her international debut. – AFP



Argentina's Lionel Messi (L) kicks the ball during the international friendly match between Honduras and Argentina at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. – AFP

Messi powers Argentina past Honduras in Miami

MIAMI: Lionel Messi scored twice and Argentina dominated Honduras 3-0 on Friday in Miami as the World Cup-bound team continues to fine-tune its game ahead of the upcoming international tournament in Qatar.

Messi was at the centre of the action from the opening whistle, lobbing a pass to the charging Papu Gomez who found Lautaro Martinez for an early 1-0 lead.

The 35-year-old Messi was on the receiving end of a hard foul in the 39th minute when Deybi Flores of Honduras slammed into him, sending him face down onto the turf and drawing a yellow card.

Messi's team-mates immediately got in the faces of the Honduras players and the teams exchanged words but stopped short of trading blows. The Argentina captain remained in the game.

Near the end of the half Marcelo Santos fouled

Argentina's Giovanni Lo Celso and Messi coolly slotted home the penalty for a 2-0 advantage.

Argentina kept its foot on the gas in the second half, extending their unbeaten streak to 34 matches. Enzo Fernandez stole the ball in the 69th minute and it fell perfectly to Messi, who chipped it over the goalkeeper's head to the delight of the partisan crowd at Hard Rock Stadium.

Determined to continue putting on a show for his fans, Messi tried a difficult leaping shot in the waning minutes of the match but it missed the target. The crowd roared in approval nonetheless.

Next up for Argentina is another friendly, this time against Jamaica on Tuesday in New Jersey.

Two-time World Cup champions Argentina are among the favourites to win it all in Qatar and play their first group stage match against Saudi Arabia on November 22. — Reuters

Mighty Geelong rout Swans in AFL Grand Final

MELBOURNE: The Geelong Cats stormed to their 10th Australian Football League (AFL) title on Saturday with an 81-point demolition of a shell-shocked Sydney Swans in the season-ending Grand Final.

After charging to a 43-point lead before half-time, the Cats closed out the 20.13 (133) - 8.4 (52) win in front of a heaving crowd of 100,024 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to hoist their first premiership cup since 2011.

"They're hard to win and every side says it, but I think we deserved one," said emotional Geelong captain Joel Selwood, who won his fourth AFL championship after Grand Final triumphs in 2007, 2009 and 2011.

"This has been building for five or six years."

The showpiece match of Australian Rules football returned to the MCG for the first time since Covid-19 - but the sell-out crowd at the sport's spiritual home were denied anything like a contest.

The oldest and meanest team in the AFL, Geelong booted seven of the first eight goals in a ferocious start, dismantling a Swans midfield that appeared paralysed by stage fright.

The Cats then shut down the match with six unanswered goals in the third quarter to trigger early celebrations in their sleepy home base an hour out of Melbourne.

"This is the pinnacle," said Geelong's veteran utility Patrick Dangerfield. "Worth the wait and better than I could have ever imagined, it's bloody special. We just played such a complete game."



The Cats' 16th win in succession capped one of their most dominant seasons, while erasing the heartbreak of their Grand Final thrashing by Richmond two years ago in Brisbane.

Geelong winger Isaac Smith kicked three goals and won the Norm Smith medal as the Grand Final's best player, but plenty of

his team-mates had claims to the prize.

The Cats' small forward Tyson Stengle top-scored with four goals, while power forward Tom Hawkins booted three, igniting his team with the first two of the game as he outpointed the Swans' big man Tom Hickey twice in ruck duels. More had been expected

of the Swans, who came into the match on a nine-game winning streak. But they head home sore and sorry after humiliation on the game's biggest stage.

"We'll be back hungrier and better for it next year," said Swans co-captain Dane Rampe. "To our red-and-white supporters, sorry, we failed you today. — Reuters

OMAN EDGE IRAQ TO BOOK JORDAN FINAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Oman will face hosts Jordan in the final of the Jordan International friendly tournament after both teams secured crucial triumphs over Iraq and Syria respectively at the King Abdullah II stadium in the Amman city on Friday.

The Red Warriors managed to register a positive start in the friendly tourney as they defeated Iraq 4-3 on penalties after the regulation time ended in a 1-1 draw. In the later match at the same venue, Jordan blanked Syria 2-0.

The final match of the international tournament between Oman and Jordan is scheduled to take place on Monday at 10 pm (Oman time) while Iraq will take on Syria in the third and fourth play-off on the same day at 7 pm (Oman time).

Earlier, in the Oman-Iraq match, the first half ended in a goalless draw after scoring attempts from both sides. Oman's forward Mohsin al Ghassani left the match before the end of the first half after suffering an injury and he was replaced by Essam al Subhi. The following half of the match began intensely with both teams fighting for scoring.

As the game headed towards end and prior fixture's end by 10 minutes, Oman's Omar al Malki took the lead for his team after a perfect header in the 82nd minute. Three minutes later, Iraq's Ayman Hussain equalised as he received a long ball and converted it to a goal by a strong header.

Oman's youngster goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini was the star in the penalty shoot-out as he saved three shots of the opponents. Salah al Yahyaie and Omar al Malki missed from the Oman side. Issam al Subhi, Motaz Saleh, Mohammed al Mosalami and Jameel al Yahmadi converted the penalties successfully.

The Jordan friendly event acts as crucial preparation for Red Warriors as they are gearing up for Arabian Gulf Cup, 2023 West Asian Championships and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. Oman football's delegation arrived in Amman city on Sunday and reported to the training sessions.



Oman women snatch seven medals in Jordan tent pegging

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Oman women's tent pegging team won four gold, silver and bronze medals on the first and second days of the International Women's Tent Pegging Championship (Grand Prize), hosted by Jordan, from September 21 to 25, in Petra.

The championship features the participation of 28 contestants from 14 countries, Oman, Jordan, Sudan, Russia, Belarus, Britain, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Norway, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Oman team includes Ghanima bint Abdullah al Shukaili, Turkiah bint Mahmoud al Balushi and Amal bint Abdullah al Maskari. Other members are Mohammed bin Salem al Maliki as the team manager, Hilal bin Hassan al Balushi as team coach and Khamis bin Khadabkhsh al Balushi as an official for the mission.

The first day witnessed the opening ceremony of the tournament, and the competition started of the first round of the tournament of singles of

spears, doubles of spears, where Oman national team managed to achieve the bronze medal at the team level with a total of 24 points, while South Africa won the gold medal at the team level with a total of 33 points and Sudan won the silver medal with a total of 31.5 points.

The competitions of the second day, the second round of the tournament, were through single sword, double sword, where the chances of Oman team were great by obtaining three medals, which is the gold medal at the team level with a total of 24 points, while India occupied the runners-up and Pakistan came third. Also, Oman team's contestant Ghanima bint Abdullah al Shukaili won the silver medal at the individual level, and the contestant Turkiah bint Mahmoud al Balushi won the bronze medal also at the individual.

The third day, the third and final round and the conclusion of the tournament will be on Sunday through the competitions of sharing and wedge with a spear for the individual, and lemon and wedge with the sword for the individual.



50 HORSES QUALIFY FOR 40 KM ENDURANCE RACE IN BARKA



50 horses out of 54 horses qualified for the endurance race at the start of the equestrian season 2022-2023, through the qualifying race for endurance, organised by the Oman Equestrian Federation for a distance of 40 km, at Al Mahamed Endurance Village in Barka. The race included only one stage for a distance of 40 km, the maximum heart rate was 56 beats per minute, the minimum speed was 42 km/h and the top speed was 16 kmph with the age of horses being 5 years and above.

70 PLAYERS IN JUNIOR TENNIS LEAGUE FOR FIRST TIME



The Junior Tennis League was launched for the first time by the Oman Tennis Association through the opening of the tennis season 2022-2023, for the age groups 8, 10, 12, 14 and 18 years of different nationalities residing in Oman, with participation of 70 men and women, which will continue until September 29 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The league aims to discover more talent in tennis and classify the participating players according to the results and points earned by each player to represent the Oman national team.

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Jump Start



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MAISARAH

Economic policies deliver impressive 32.4% growth in nominal GDP in H1

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said the Omani economy has witnessed remarkable growth as exemplified by the performance of the state's public finances and improvement in the credit ratings issued by international ratings agencies.

Additionally, the main economic indicators, whether at the level of performance of economic activities or with regard to consumer prices, and labour market conditions and employment, attest to the general improvement in the country's economic performance.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the official said that Oman's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) during the first half of 2022 grew 32.4 per cent at current market prices to reach about RO 20.26 billion, compared to RO 15.30 billion during the first half of 2021. At constant prices, GDP grew by 3.9 per cent during H1 2022 to reach about RO 17.59 billion, compared to RO 16.93 billion during H1 2021.

The added value of hydrocarbon activities grew by 9.2 per cent, constituting 34.1 per cent of GDP in H1 2022, compared to 32.5 per cent during the same period in 2021. Non-oil activities improved by 2.1 per cent during the first half of 2022.

Al Maawali listed several factors that helped improve these indices, notably the strong rise in crude oil prices in global markets, and most importantly, the effectiveness and efficiency of the financial and economic policies taken by the Sultanate of Oman to aid the economic recovery efforts



This growth stems from the economic policies approved by the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), specifying the priority of economic diversification and financial sustainability, including creating a stimulating work environment that increases the income of the economic diversification sectors and shifts from labour-intensive investments to investments based on qualified human capital and technology instead of reviewing the policy of incentives, support and financing and linking them to the targeted sectors in the economic diversification.

from the pandemic.

These efforts were aimed at accelerating the achievement of the goals and programmes of the 10th five-year development plan (2021-2025), he stated.

Among the most important sectors that recorded remarkable growth were "transport and storage" and "accommodation and food services activities", which amounted to 29.4 per cent

and 29.2 per cent, respectively.

Mining activity and manufacturing activity grew by 15.4 per cent and 11.5 per cent, respectively.

This primarily translates into the economic stimulus policies that were pursued during the past two years in the wake of the pandemic and the sectors' need for stimulus packages and initiatives through which they can return

to their natural growth path and contribute to the recovery of the national economy as a whole.

This growth, he said, stems from the economic policies approved by the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), specifying the priority of economic diversification and financial sustainability, including creating a stimulating work environment that increases the income of the economic diversification sectors and shifts from labour-intensive investments to investments based on qualified human capital and technology instead of reviewing the policy of incentives, support and financing and linking them to the targeted sectors in the economic diversification, expressing his belief that the fruits

of these policies have begun to reflect positively on the nature of the performance indicators of the Omani economy.

Al Maawali said that current efforts are focused on maintaining inflation within tolerable limits to ensure no adverse impact on the living conditions of individuals.

"We are all aware that the world is going through this year, in particular, with unprecedented increases in the level of global prices, driven by the instability of supply of various goods and services, especially basic food and agricultural commodities, in addition to the imbalances in global supply chains, the increase in import and services costs, and the increase in Russian costs."

TURN TO P15

Oman-Saudi
bilateral trade
soars to
RO 1.249 bn
in H1 2022



JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia more than doubled to exceed RO 1.249 billion during the first half of 2022, compared to RO 595 million in H1 of 2021, entailing an increase of 210%. Saudi Arabia's exports into Oman were valued at RO 831 million while Oman's exports to Saudi Arabia were valued at RO 418 million as of end of June 2022.

The top Saudi export commodity comprised metals, totalling RO 538 million in value. On the other hand, Oman exported RO 139 million worth of metals to Saudi Arabia during the H1 2022, according to data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Earlier this month, Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said during the 4th Oman-Saudi Business Council meet in Riyadh, that as of end May 2022, the trade exchange between the two countries already reached RO 1.009 billion in value.

The volume of Saudi investments registered in Oman amounted to RO 1.477 billion. Citing indicators, Al Saleh noted that a "continued rising curve" was being witnessed in the trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In 2021, Saudi Arabia was the fourth biggest trading partner of Oman, next to China, UAE and India, with RO 1.3 billion in merchandise trade. More investments and cooperation between the two countries are seen in the fields of energy and mining, food security, technology, logistics, industries and construction and services.

Work on Khasab zipline project in full swing

HAMMAM AL BADI
KHASAB, SEPT 24

Work is under way on the zipline project at Khasab in Musandam Governorate, with its launch expected later this year. The project is one of the most significant adventure-related activities in the governorate.

One of the biggest of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, the zipline starts at a height of 220 metres atop Jabal Fitt in Musandam and spans a total distance of 1,800 metres. When operational, it will enable adventure-minded tourists to experience the beauty of Musandam's rugged terrain and



surrounding countryside.

Work on the project started in

March with contractors ensuring that all components are built

and installed in accordance with international safety standards and procedures, including an advanced braking system, helmets to protect riders, safety harnesses and jackets.

Additionally, an access road is also being constructed to the summit of Jabal Fitt to enable tourists to access the launch site. Work on the roughly 1,500-metre road began in August last year.

The zipline is a key part of the Adventure Centre project, work on which began earlier this year in Musandam Governorate. It is expected to revitalise the tourism economy of the governorate, making it a vibrant area of tourism

development.

Besides attracting large tourist groups and adventure lovers, the zipline project is also expected to spur investment in leisure, recreational and other economic activities in the area.

This is in line with the government's overall goal of positioning Khasab and the wider governorate as a hub for tourism.

The project is being implemented by Omran Group — the executive arm of the Sultanate of Oman for tourism development — with the support of Musandam Governor's Office and Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

Muscat Airport lounge ranked among the best

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Oman Air figures among the top airlines for the First Class and Business Class services, while Muscat International Airport's Primeclass won second place among the best Best Independent Airport Lounges.

Oman Air is the 37th best airline in the world, up from the 42nd position in 2021, while the First Class product (16th rank) and Business Class (17th) figure in the top 20 list. The airline has been ranked among the Middle East operators.

Qatar Airways has been voted the World's Best Airline for a record seventh time at the 2022 World Airline Awards, winning the prestigious Airline of the Year 2022 title. After two years of virtual award ceremonies, the 2022 World Airline Awards event returned to



normal procedures, with airlines from around the world attending the 2022 awards ceremony, held today at the historic Langham Hotel in London, United Kingdom.

Widely regarded as 'the Oscars of the aviation industry, the World Airline Awards began in 1999, and

remain totally independent and impartial with all of the customer survey costs and awards event paid by the organisers, Skytrax.

Singapore Airlines takes the second position in the world, with Emirates third, ANA All Nippon Airways fourth, and Qantas

Airways in the fifth position, out of more than 350 airlines included in the survey results.

Edward Plaisted of Skytrax said: "To receive the 2022 World's Best Airline award is a great recognition of Qatar Airways' high standards, and recognises the hard work and

OMAN AIR IS THE 37TH BEST AIRLINE IN THE WORLD, UP FROM THE 42ND POSITION IN 2021, WHILE THE FIRST CLASS PRODUCT (16TH RANK) AND BUSINESS CLASS (17TH) FIGURE IN THE TOP 20 LIST.

dedication from every member of the airline's staff to satisfy customers.

Qatar Airways was the largest airline to have flown consistently throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, with their network never falling below 30 destinations, and that determination has clearly been well recognised by customers with this award as Airline of the Year 2022.

For Qatar Airways to achieve this top accolade for the seventh time is both a unique and remarkable achievement, and we

congratulate them for this success."

Big winners at the awards included Qatar Airways who scooped nine award wins, with Singapore Airlines also receiving nine awards.

Delta Air Lines was a success in North America, winning six awards. In Europe, Turkish Airlines was dominant, receiving four awards including the highly competitive Best Airline in Europe title.

India's Vistara was another key winner, receiving two awards, the Best Airline in India and Southern Asia and Best Airline Staff Service in India and Southern Asia.

Vinod Kannan, Chief Executive Officer of Vistara said "It is incredibly heartening for all of us at Vistara to win these awards, which reaffirms the steadfast trust our customers have in us and is a true testament to Vistara setting global benchmarks for excellence in operations and service delivery"

Profit with the dependable range of Toyota commercial vehicles

MUSCAT: Toyota is offering customers in Oman, an opportunity to take their business place with the dependable and capable commercial range of vehicles. The impressive models include the Land Cruiser pick-up, Hilux and the all-new Lite Ace.

The Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up's large wheels and stable footprint allow it to offer good control. Carrying forward the Land Cruiser's proven legacy, the Land Cruiser pick-up is built to taken-on any hurdle with ease. A heady blend of rugged functionality, dynamic handling and all-out reliability, the Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up is truly built to last.

The Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up is packed with many features that include an Advanced 7" Navigation System with DVD Player featuring AUX, USB and Bluetooth, Stylish Radiator Grille in addition to Daytime Running Lights (DRL) and side protection moulding with chrome inserts.

The Land Cruiser Pick-up is well-detailed and has Classy Silver Garnish on AC Vents, Keyless Entry System, Fog Lamps, Power Windows, Woodgrain Panelling, Wood Finish Steering Wheel, Chrome Outer Mirrors with Turn Signals, Front Bumper Guard and much more.

Land Cruiser Pick-up is a Part-time 4WD with easy switching between 4WD and 2WD mode – it is powered by a mighty 4.0L, V6, VVT-i Engine generating 228 HP. The Land Cruiser Pick-up offers reassuring levels of protection thanks to many Safety Features such as Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Active Traction Control (ATRC), Hill Assist Control (HAC), Brake Assist (BA), Electrical Winch, Rear Differential Lock, Driver + Front Passenger Airbags, Rear View Camera, etc.

The rugged Hilux is available with J-Deck. The noteworthy features include a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6-speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP. The Hilux is not only a tough vehicle but also an advanced pick-up with stylish cues hitherto found only



on SUVs. The front of the Hilux gives a sense that the vehicle is wider than it is. This is achieved by the horizontal Bars that make up the Grille and Sleek Headlamps that wrap around the front of the Fenders.

The Hilux sports a thick Front Bumper sculpted like an SUV, Front Fog lamps, Alloy Wheels, apart from Side Stripes that adorn the vehicle. The Toyota Hilux rises above expectations, to deliver some of the finest on-road and off-road experiences ever. The Hilux really is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends, thanks to added comforts and safety features. Indeed the Hilux models are stunning in design and features. Their performance & safety parameters are amongst the best and the strong frame and suspension impart toughness for any demanding task.

The new Toyota LITE ACE has been designed to maximise loading capacity in a compact, easy-to-manoeuvre vehicle, while providing a comfortable driver and passenger experience. Low steps just 425 mm in height enable smoother cabin entry, with a roomy foot area. Moreover, the placement of the gear shift lever next to the steering wheel also facilitates easy access to the front passenger seat.

The cockpit is designed to provide enhanced operability and visibility, creating greater convenience and peace of mind for the driver. With a low floor height of 620 mm and a spacious rear door entrance, the Toyota LITE ACE makes it easy to load

and unload cargo from the hold. The vehicle also features large, 815-mm sliding doors on both sides, enabling users to load and unload cargo even in tight spaces. With a maximum length of 2,075 mm and a height and width of 1,305 and 1,495 mm, respectively, the cargo hold is capable of carrying cardboard boxes, tall objects, furniture, and other large cargo.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the new Toyota LITE ACE comes with a 1.5-ltr four-cylinder engine that generates a maximum output of 96.5 hp and 134 nm of torque. It incorporates Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing-intelligent) technology, which continuously optimises intake and exhaust valve timing in response to driving conditions for exceptional performance.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

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Otaxi service launched in Duqm SEZ

MUSCAT: Otaxi, an investment of Oman Technology Fund (OTF), has announced that it will provide public transport service in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). The service will support the growth of the Zone's commercial development growth.

Eng Harith bin Khamis al Maqbali, CEO of Otaxi, stated, "The service has been launched in the SEZ while a taxi order platform has been installed at Duqm Airport as well. Visitors can use this affordable and fast service via the Otaxi mobile app too."

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, commended the Otaxi's cooperation to provide its services in the Zone, which in turn will provide greater convenience to arrivals, visitors and tourists at a time when the SEZ witnessing rapid economic investment.

Moreover, the service will also contribute to creating job opportunities for taxi owners in Duqm."



Otaxi started providing its services in 2018 to include many governorates and wilayats. It

stands as the first taxi service available through an electronic application in Oman.

IDdesign Oman celebrates 20th anniversary

MUSCAT: Acknowledged as a pioneer in innovative, high-concept design, IDdesign is pleased to announce that it is celebrating 20 years of its luxury furnishing journey in the Sultanate of Oman. This milestone has been marked with the launch of a new collection of luxury furniture and accessories designed for a glamorous and contemporary lifestyle.

The IDdesign universe is characterised by furniture and home accessories that have been handpicked and designed with the well-known Scandinavian sense of detail and quality in mind.

Shedding light on the brand's 20 year legacy of excellence, exceptional craftsmanship, and customer satisfaction, Marios Stylianides, General Manager, Oasis Lifestyle LLC stated: "Over the past two decades, IDdesign has established itself as a leading European furniture brand in the Sultanate of Oman, receiving exceptional love and warmth from our customers.

Our philosophy combines elegance with comfort and innovation, so each piece is created with the highest standards of quality and craftsmanship by European designers and artisans. The unique combination of materials used by us, and our high quality production standards transform furniture into enduring daily companions."

"The passion of our team and the loyalty of



our customer-base have been deciding factors of our growth and success; and for us continuing to drive IDdesign to the next level. Just like our new anniversary collection, we have introduced great designs over the years, some that are looking into the future, others that fit right into today's trends and finally some that simply last year after year. This mix has what has positioned us well in the industry here in Oman", he added.

IDdesign's stylish showrooms are located at the Markaz Al Bahja Mall (First Floor) in Muscat and on Al Tatawoor Street 244 (2100 Central Business District) in Salalah; both outlets are home to an extensive collection of contemporary furniture, accessories, lighting and art pieces.



How logistics represent the biggest challenge in e-commerce

STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

E-commerce logistics is the process of producing, labelling, warehousing, and ultimately shipping the product to a customer's door after it is purchased.

It is the seamless — and often automated — process that helps e-commerce companies deliver products to customers who bought online (and back to the company if returned). When it comes to logistics of shipping, improving the final-mile delivery process — that is, the step where a package is delivered to the customer's door — is the single most crucial precondition for customer loyalty with an e-commerce store.

Focusing on the logistics implications of e-commerce, rapid increases in the delivery speeds present huge challenges to organising online order fulfilment.

Many challenges associated with last-mile delivery are beyond a firm's control; and in recent years, the challenges and costs associated with last-mile delivery have only grown worse, as the alternatives for delivery have continued to increase for customers.

In addition, managing those expectations for faster delivery, volume, and sufficient inventory in times of spikes in demand could be a nightmare. During busy seasons, such as festivities or global promotions such as 11.11, shipping and logistics are the biggest challenges that e-commerce companies have to deal with.

To do logistics well, it is essential that you get external assistance for logistics in the areas of shipping, fulfilment, and logistics. More than half of retailers report that logistics for deliveries and fulfilment

presents a major challenge.

The rapid rise in e-commerce is starting to place a greater burden on third-party logistics (3PL) companies, which are struggling to meet challenging customer demands, rising costs, and increased competition.

According to a SOTI Inc. report, over 61 per cent of logistics companies agree that last-mile delivery is the most inefficient process across the entire supply chain. The report from SOTI found that almost half of the world's transport and logistics companies are using obsolete technologies to handle last-mile deliveries.

Data is key in order to predict the challenges ahead. Forecasts can be hugely influential on the running of retail businesses, and, focusing on the logistics side, how deliveries are made to customers.

Data driven forecasting could potentially overcome hurdles for both retailers and third-party logistics providers. But when data is scarce or inaccurate, troubles may arise, as last-mile delivery costs could become very expensive.

Last-mile logistics can account for 53 per cent of the overall transportation costs for products, but finding a logistics company that will maintain the ability to deliver large quantities of goods within short periods is essential, which allows for retention of customers.

Returns are costly for e-commerce players, because reverse logistics presents unique challenges. As part of their reverse logistics processes, companies must try to figure out what are the major reasons behind returns, and also which returns methods customers favour.

Integrating returns processes with the rest of logistics operations could be a good approach to mitigate over-consumption costs and better position products for resale.

One of the best ways to enhance logistics is by offering multiple shipping options. For instance offering priority tiers could help customers to better decide how fast they want to receive their products. As a result, companies could effectively sort deliveries according to their urgency. If the clients is not in a hurry, no need to rush the delivery.

Sultanate of Oman's first scrap tyre-based Waste-to-Energy plant nearing completion

CIRCULAR ECONOMY: Oman Cement set to commission a first-of-its-kind project that will use shredded tyres as an alternative fuel source for its cement manufacturing operations

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 24

Majority government-owned Oman Cement says it plans to commission, by the end of this year, a first-ever Waste-to-Energy (WTE) plant, utilising shredded scrap tyres, in a landmark effort to reduce its dependence on natural gas as its primary fuel source.

Company officials said during a recent investment forum hosted by Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) that construction work on the tyre-chips based plant is ongoing, with commissioning slated during the fourth quarter of this year.

The Waste-to-Energy plant is part of a fuel diversification strategy adopted by the publicly traded cement firm — which is 51 per cent owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — that envisions access to a mix of alternative, sustainable energy sources.

Two years ago, Oman



Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), which oversees the country's solid waste services sector, signed an agreement with Oman Cement to supply 30,000 tonnes of tyre-derived fuel (TDF) annually in the form of shredded tyres.

"The TDF samples were tested by Oman Cement to ensure compliance to emission standards and were granted operational permit from Environment Authority," be'ah affirmed in a recent report.

Separately, with low-carbon hydrogen expected to come into production in sizable quantities in the coming years as part of Oman's energy transition goals, Oman Cement is also studying options

to add this environment-friendly energy source to its energy mix. To this end, the company is working with the National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly) — a grouping of Omani and international energy companies and sector stakeholders — to progress this opportunity.

The use of tyre chips as a fuel source is another triumph for Oman's authorities in supporting the growth of a circular economy in the Sultanate of Oman. An estimated 45,000 tonnes of scrap tyres are generated every year in the Sultanate — a figure that is projected to rise in line with population growth and urbanisation.

End-of-life tyres (ELT), as they are also called, have been stockpiled at around nine landfills

around the country as recycling opportunities are explored by investors in coordination with be'ah. The distribution of the scrap tyres across multiple locations is designed to mitigate risks associated with accidental fires.

Waste tyres are widely used as a fuel resource in cement kilns in a number of countries around the world, either as the primary fuel or in combination with natural gas and coal. Once stripped of their metal reinforcements, such as wires, the waste tyres are then shredded into chips, known as 'Tyre Derived Fuel' (TDF). These chips are typically used in high heat operations, such as cement kilns, waste-to-energy schemes, and power plants.

Economic policies deliver impressive 32.4% growth

FROM PAGE 13

The biggest role in it is in addition to the rise in global energy prices. The increase in domestic demand for some goods and services as a result of the recovery of the movement of economic activity after the decline of the pandemic, also contributed to the rise in the general level of prices," he said.

In this regard, he pointed out that the inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman remained at acceptable limits, reaching about 3.1 per cent during the period (January-August) 2022, which is much lower than the rate reached by some global economies and even advanced economies.

"Moreover, the rate did not, in general, represent a large gap from the expectations drawn by the tenth five-year development plan in its financial framework to maintain the average inflation rate throughout the years of the plan within the range of 2.8 per

cent, especially since we have witnessed a continuous decline in monthly inflation rates since the beginning of 2022, as they declined from 4.4 per cent in January to about 2.4 per cent in August 2022, despite the prospects of uncertainty and economic turmoil that have swept the world in the past two years," he stated.

Commenting on the performance of public finances, the Under-Secretary said that Oman's financial situation witnessed a clear improvement during the January-July 2022 period, compared to the same period last year. This is attributable to the increase in public revenues by a significant rate of 53.5 per cent to reach about RO 8 billion by the end of July 2022 due to the rise in oil prices and the rise in public spending.

However, the rate of increase was less than the rise in public revenues, which amounted to 8.8 per cent to reach about RO 6.98 billion until the end of July 2022 as a result of continuing to

implement financial control measures, which led to an improvement in the performance of the general budget in addition to improving the management of the loan portfolio.

Domestic liquidity grew by 3.3 per cent and the increase in total deposits in the banking sector by 5.4 per cent at the end of June 2022, in addition to the improvement in the performance of the Muscat Stock Exchange, where the index climbed 15.6 per cent to reach 4,585 points at the end of August 2022, compared to 3,967 points at the end of August 2021, accompanied by an increase in trading volume by 21.4 per cent.

He added that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank expect the Omani economy to grow by 5.6 per cent in 2022 while the inflation rate will remain within acceptable limits within the range of 3 per cent despite the rise in global commodity prices, thanks to measures and initiatives taken by the government to mitigate inflationary pressures.

MSX30 index closed the week lower by 0.13%

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.13 per cent. The financial index was down by 0.42 per cent, the services index also ended the week down by 0.11 per cent. The industrial index closed down by 1.04 per cent. The MSX Shariah index went up by 0.61 per cent.

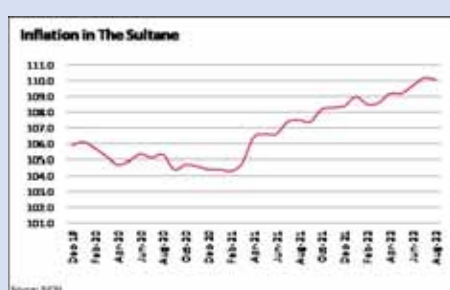
Oman Fisheries Company announced to its shareholders that it has signed a sales and marketing agreement with Al Wusta Fisheries Company in line with Oman Vision 2040 for the fisheries sector and with the aim of expanding exports of Omani fish products in the global market.

Saudi Fisheries Co also signed a non-

binding memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oman Fisheries to strengthen mutual cooperation through the production, marketing and sale of products from fisheries and aquaculture, according to a bourse filing.

Oman Qatar Insurance Company SAOG announced that it has received a written notice from Al Hosn Investment Co. SAOC containing information relating to an acquisition offer to acquire 11.5 per cent of the issued share capital in accordance with the takeover and acquisition regulation.

The inflation rate of the Consumers Price Index (CPI) in the Sultanate of



Oman stood at 2.4 per cent in August 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in August 2022 compared

to August 2021, such as education by 5.1 per cent, food and non-alcoholic beverages by 4.9 per cent, health by 3.5 per cent, transport by 3.1 per cent, restaurants and hotels by 2.1 per cent, miscellaneous goods and services by 1.5 per cent, recreation and culture by 1.4 per cent, furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 1.2 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.9 per cent and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 0.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, the prices of some main groups remained unchanged, such as tobacco and communications.

Prices also went up for oils and fats by 19.2 per cent, meats by 8.8 per cent, fruits by 7.5 per cent, non-alcoholic beverages by 4.4 per cent, bread and cereals by 4.1 per cent, milk, cheese and eggs by 3.2 per cent, sugar, jam, honey and sweets by 2.3 per cent, other foodstuff by 1.9 per cent and fish and seafood by 1.7 per cent. Prices declined for vegetables by 2.9 per cent.

The Central Bank of Oman started increasing the interest rate on repurchases of local banks by the same amount as the increase approved by the US Federal Reserve, which is 75 basis points; to 3.75 per cent. [Courtesy: U-Capital]

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- Should have worked with MOTC, Municipalities, Madayan and other related Govt. Bodies.
- Should be able to liaise with the Govt. Authorities.
- Should be willing to lead team of qualified engineers.
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- Should have 25 years of work experience.

2. PROJECT ENGINEER - 1 No.

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No farm land to plant on? Why not try hydroponics

By Mazoun al Ghailani

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The Agricultural Future Company

helps people to set up their own farms by providing the equipment needed that ease the hydroponics process.

The general concept of the firm is the agricultural development that facilitates the agricultural systems in the world and secures enough food for humanity. "Our company brand name is based on the general concept of agricultural future. We are an Omani company working to apply the latest agricultural systems in the world, and we bring them to our homeland to keep pace with the global movement in providing food security in the best modern and safe global methods," Hamza al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of Agricultural Future Company.

Hydroponics is an environment-

friendly technology that can be used to grow any type of plant using a scientifically balanced food system.

Cultivation technology without soil is not just an addition to normal soil cultivation but rather complements it. One hectare of hydroponics farms can produce between 200 to 300 tonnes of vegetables annually. That is five to ten times more than any crop grown in open fields. Globally, there is a limited number of crops grown using hydroponics such as tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, chilli peppers, bell peppers and strawberries. Ornamental flowers are among the most important commercial crops. But there are other emerging crops like herbs and pharmaceutical crops.

"We work on the latest technologies



and agricultural systems, including hydroponics or cultivation without soil, aquaponics and other products used in modern agriculture," Hamza explained.

He added, "In my opinion, the importance of smart agriculture lies in containing the modern technology techniques in agricultural methods, which could help save labour costs and reduce consumption of water and fertiliser. It also increases the production of the crops, and produces safe and

healthy crops for consumption."

Hydroponics limits the problems of drought as plants absorb what they need from the water and save what's left. Remarkably, germs growth is minimal in hydroponics and the problem on grass is also eliminated.

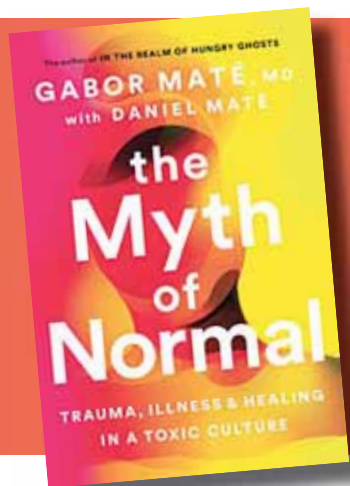


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The potential ways in which trauma and stress from modern-day living can affect our physical health.



TRAVEL TALES

French shepherdess Alisson Carrere-Sastre, 23-years-old, looks at her female dog Panny in the Soula Valley, in the French Pyrenees. The French shepherdess leads a flock of 700 sheep in the Pyrenees pastures from June to September. — AFP



MUSEUM TIME

A work titled "La bague aux chevaux" (The horses ring), displayed as part of the exhibition "Champollion, La Voie des Hieroglyphes" (Champollion, The way of the Hieroglyphs). On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the decipherment of hieroglyphs by Jean-Francois Champollion, and to celebrate its 10th anniversary, the museum Louvre-Lens is organising a major exhibition dedicated to one of the most fascinating symbols of Egyptian civilisation: the hieroglyphs. — AFP





Milan Fashion Week looks hopeful with diverse fashion offerings

CHINESE BUYERS are back and business is booming — Milan Fashion Week opened on Wednesday on an optimistic note, despite the shadows cast by the soaring cost of energy.

Almost 70 catwalk shows and 110 presentations are scheduled over the next six days, featuring the giants of Italian fashion, from Gucci to Prada, Versace, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana and Bottega Veneta.

The return of a mostly full live programme in February after two years of coronavirus was marred by Russia's war of Ukraine two days in.

But this season the international jet set are back in force, from 300 journalists to 450 buyers expected — including the first Chinese delegation since the pandemic closed borders across the globe. Fendi kicked off the week with a 90s-inspired collection shown off to a techno party beat, the models sporting shag hair-cuts with long fringes as they sashayed down the runway.

Low-rise cargo pants, embellished with straps and sometimes overskirts, featured alongside tank tops and vinyl wedges. A pastel palette was enhanced with enough absinthine green to get drunk on.

Among the key events of spring/summer 2023 are Moncler's 70th birthday celebrations and Ferragamo's catwalk show at the site of its future Milan hotel.

Meanwhile, a number of personnel changes are causing interest, with Marco de Vincenzo having taken over as new creative director at Etro, Filippo Grazioli at Missoni and Andrea Incontri at Benetton.

New faces Valentina Ilardi, Marco Rambaldi and Matty Bovan will also be closely watched as an indication of future trends.



pant inflation and an energy crisis linked to the Ukraine war.

The growth this year is partly explained by the increase in prices but stripping taking that into account, turnover still increased by more than 18 per cent, returning to levels seen before the 2008 financial crisis.

Exports increased significantly in the first five months of 2022, up 21.9 per cent for fashion, and 30.2 per cent in related sectors.

- Sanctions hit exports -

The US and South Korean markets had the strongest performance, while there were slowdowns in China and in Russia, where the luxury goods industry has been

hard hit by Western sanctions.

Exports to Russia fell 26 per cent in clothes fashion, 68 per cent for jewellery and 56 per cent for eye-wear.

"The energy crisis has a significant impact on fashion because the entire upstream supply chain is energy intensive," Capasa said.

"To manufacture fabric or a bag you need raw materials that consume a lot of energy."

The cost of energy previously made up about 10 per cent of the final product, he said: now it is at least 30 per cent.

"Prices cannot be adjusted indefinitely and that puts companies in the difficult position of asking if it is

TRAVEL TALES

Cheap mealboxes a taste of Hong Kong's economic woes



HONG KONGER Kitty Chan pivoted to takeout to help her restaurant survive the pandemic, but she has since opened a second shop as demand for cheap mealboxes surges in a city enduring economic woes.

Small shops selling inexpensive two-dish mealboxes have mushroomed across one of the world's least affordable cities, cropping up in working-class and white-collar areas alike as people tighten their belts.

"The Covid restrictions were a catalyst," she said at her restaurant in Kowloon, one of the world's most densely populated city districts, as a queue of hungry patrons snaked down the street.

"There are multiple factors in this city that make us many people's kitchen."

Hong Kong took an economic hit in 2019 when months of democracy protests kept visitors away and helped tip the city into a prolonged recession.

More than 2.5 years of strict Covid controls have again pushed the Asian finance hub into negative growth.

long been a feature of the city, "the consumers' perception has changed and these mealboxes are no longer a symbol of relatively low income".

China and Hong Kong have largely escaped the runaway inflation seen across the globe.

But food in particular has become more expensive — Chan estimates her grocery purchases have risen about 20 per cent this year.

Mealbox restaurants are also popular with Hong Kongers who have refused to vaccinate themselves against Covid.

The city uses a QR code system that denies unvaccinated people access to most public premises.

Retiree Grace, who gave only her first name, described herself as "a denied person" because she had only gotten one vaccination shot.

"At first I thought why not give (mealboxes) a try since I had to have takeaway," the 68-year-old said. "But now I find it pretty attractive... it feels like having a buffet."

- TOURIST TRICKLE -

Hong Kong finance chief Paul Chan warned on Thursday there is a "very high chance" the city will end the year in a full-blown recession while the fiscal deficit is expected to balloon to HK\$100 billion (\$12.7 billion), twice initial estimates.

The mealbox boom "is similar to the emergence of dollar shops during the (2008) financial crisis," said Andy Kwan, director of the ACE Centre for Business and Economic Research think tank.

"People tend to spend less when the economy is not well and confidence is low," he said.

Chan's restaurants are selling 2,000 to 3,000 mealboxes per day at around HK\$48 (\$6).

Mealboxes go for anything from HK\$25 to HK\$80 depending on ingredients and shop locations, and many include a drink or soup.

A Facebook group for sharing tips on mealbox restaurants, started by social worker Andrew Wong, has grown to 87,000 members.

"When I opened the group at the end of 2021, we found 110 to 120 such restaurants, and so far in 2022, we have found 150 brand new spots," he said.

Another crowd-sourced map lists more than 440 two-dish restaurants across Hong Kong, up from around 330 in May.

Wong said the boom was fuelled by Covid restrictions and the drop in tourist numbers over the last three years.

Before the protests and pandemic, Hong Kong would see around 65 million tourists a year, with 78 per cent coming from the Chinese mainland.

That has slowed to a trickle, with the Chinese border effectively closed and international arrivals still facing mandatory hotel quarantine on arrival.

City leader John Lee has vowed to reopen the city and hinted at further Covid relaxations in the coming weeks.

But Hong Kong's international access remains far behind rivals such as Singapore, London and Tokyo.

"People are wondering if there is any policy to stabilise the economy and whether the government is enterprising enough to bring changes," think-tank director Kwan said.

"Meanwhile, people are cutting daily expenses so they can have more to spend if the worst happens". — AFP



- BUFFET IN A BOX -

To compete in what is now a crowded market, Chan tries to supply the kind of food you can get in a sit-down restaurant — mostly wok-fried Cantonese dishes such as black-pepper beef short ribs, steamed fish and razor clams.

Her strategy has attracted a mostly white-collar clientele.

"The two-dish mealbox is a very interesting entry point to observe our economy," said Fred Ku, an economist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Ku said that while the two-dish restaurant had



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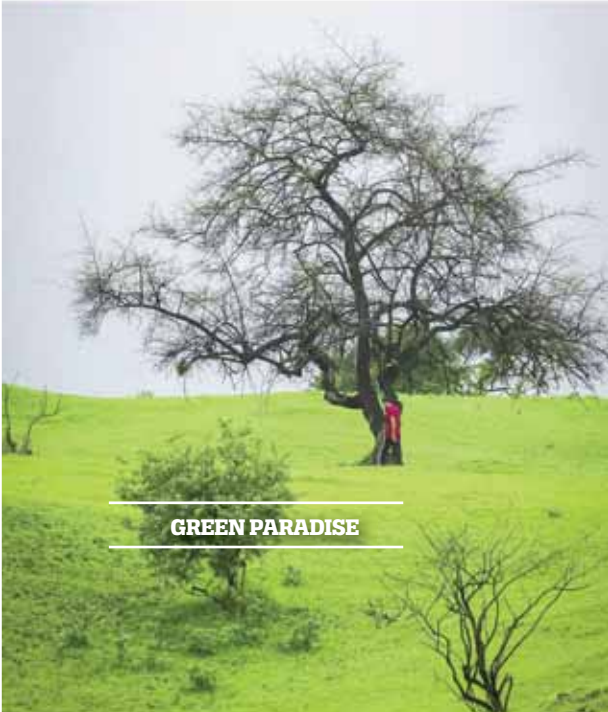


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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Neptune's delicate rings captured in new Webb image



THE JAMES WEBB Space Telescope has turned its gaze away from the deep universe towards our home Solar System, capturing an image of a luminous Neptune and its delicate, dusty rings in detail not seen in decades, Nasa said on Wednesday.

The last time astronomers had such a clear view of the farthest planet from the Sun was when Nasa's Voyager 2 became the first and only space probe to fly past the ice giant for just a few hours in 1989.

Now Webb's unprecedented infrared imaging capabilities has provided a new glimpse into Neptune's atmosphere, said Mark McCaughrean, a senior adviser for science and exploration at the European Space Agency.

The telescope "takes all that glare and back-ground away" so that "we can start to tease out the atmospheric composition" of the planet, McCaughrean, who has worked on the Webb project for more than 20 years, told AFP.

Neptune appears as deep blue in previous images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope due to methane in its atmosphere.

However the near-infrared wavelengths captured by Webb's primary imager NIRC2 shows the planet as a greyish white, with icy clouds streaking the surface.

"The rings are more reflective in the infrared," McCaughrean said, "so they're much easier to see".

The image also shows an "intriguing brightness" near the top of Neptune, Nasa said in a statement. Because the planet is tilted away from Earth and takes 164 years to orbit the Sun, astronomers have not yet had a good look at its north pole.

Webb also spotted seven of Neptune's 14 known moons.

STRANGE MOON

Looming over Neptune in a zoomed-out image is what appears to be a very bright spiky star, but is in fact Triton, Neptune's strange, huge moon haloed with Webb's famed diffraction spikes.

Triton, which is larger than dwarf planet Pluto, appears brighter than Neptune because it is covered in ice, which reflects light. Neptune meanwhile "absorbs most of the light falling on it", McCaughrean said.

Because Triton orbits the wrong way around Neptune, it is believed to have once been an object from the nearby Kuiper belt which was captured in the planet's orbit.

"So it's a pretty cool to go and have a look at," said McCaughrean.

As astronomers sweep the universe searching for other planets like our own, they have found that ice giants such as Neptune and Uranus are the most common in the Milky Way.

"By being able to look at these ones in great detail, we can key into our observations of other" ice giants," McCaughrean said.

Operational since July, Webb is the most powerful space telescope ever built, and has already unleashed a raft of unprecedented data. Scientists are hopeful it will herald a new era of discovery.

Research based on Webb's observations of both Neptune and Triton is expected in the next year.

"The kind of astronomy we're seeing now was unimaginable five years ago," McCaughrean said.

"Of course, we knew that it would do this, we built it to do this, it is exactly the machine we designed.

"But to suddenly start seeing things in these longer wavelengths, which were impossible before... it's just absolutely remarkable." — AFP

CHANGING WORLD

Collectors clamour for rare Queen Elizabeth coins and notes



THE DEATH OF Britain's Queen Elizabeth has collectors scrambling to secure rare coins and bills bearing her likeness, even as her portrait is set to remain in circulation for years to come on money throughout the Commonwealth.

Coin dealers say demand for rare-issue notes and coins — such as such as a pre-World War Two Canadian \$20 bill featuring Elizabeth as a child or Australia's Platinum Jubilee 50-cent coin — has surged since the queen died in Scotland on September 8. Queries have been coming in from both seasoned collectors and novices eager to commemorate the death of Britain's longest-reigning monarch, who appears on a record 33 currencies around the world, according to the Guinness Book of World Records.

"There's been an incredible upsurge in demand," said Peter Hutchison, heritage coin specialist at Hattons of London. Inbound queries surged 45-fold following the queen's death and have come in from as far as Australia, he said.

In highest demand are limited-issue collector items, like British Platinum Jubilee 50-pence coins struck in real platinum, the 2022 Her Majesty's Graces gold sovereigns, and sets issued in 1953 for Queen Elizabeth's coronation, along with curiosities like Canada's 1954 "Devil's Head" note series, where the queen's hair gives the illusion of a grinning devil. With seasoned numismatists eager to fill gaps in their collections, prices are already rising.

"I think we'll see them increase a considerable amount more now as more people enter the market and

try to chase them down," said Hutchison.

Jon White, owner of The Britannia Coin Company near Swindon, located about 80 miles west of London, said he has an overseas buyer willing to pay handsomely for a 2022 Maundy set, coins gifted by the monarch to elderly individuals for their community service.

"We are finding it increasingly difficult to source items our customers want," he said.

In Australia, coin expert Joel Kandiah posted a video on TikTok this week saying the value of the country's 2013 Purple Coronation \$2 coin had "shot up" to as high as A\$180 (\$120).

At Alliance Coin & Banknote in Almonte, Ontario, near Ottawa, owner Sean Isaacs is preparing for an auction this month featuring some "significant" royal-themed items, including the 1935 Canadian \$20 bill featuring then-Princess Elizabeth at the age of 8.

"It's one of the top 10 most desirable notes of the 20th century anyways, so I'll be interested to see if there's an above-and-beyond fervour around those notes," he said.

The bills that Isaacs plans to auction range in estimated value from C\$300 (\$226) to "a couple thousand" dollars each, based on condition. A rare French version of the note without faults could fetch C\$18,000 to C\$22,000, he said.

Advance activity is strong, with the auction night expected to be the best gauge of interest, he said. In a separate online auction, a 1935 \$20 bill featuring young Elizabeth was being bid at C\$2,100 with 10 days to go.

LONG WAIT

Looking ahead, Isaacs expects a rush of interest in

any commemorative coins issued to celebrate the queen's reign. He is also eager to see the first coins featuring Charles as king.

"That will be another momentous day in collecting," said Isaacs.

But it could be some time before coins and bills displaying King Charles find their way into people's pocketbooks, particularly outside Britain. The Commonwealth spans 56 countries.

Central banks in Canada, Australia and New Zealand have all said bills featuring Queen Elizabeth will remain in circulation for years to come. Canada's mint says it will continue to strike 2022-dated coins as needed to supply the market.

New Australian coins will eventually feature King Charles, though not anytime soon, according to the Royal Australian Mint. "Historically, coins bearing a new Sovereign's effigy were released approximately 12 months after coronation," it said. Indeed, Commonwealth countries looking to use King Charles' image on coins and notes will likely find themselves in a queue behind Britain.

The Royal Mint and Bank of England have not yet given any details, but experts anticipate that once the mourning period ends work will be under way on designs, including preparing and approving a portrait of King Charles. "My guess is this process will take a minimum of four months and possibly up to six," said Hutchison. "They will usually aim to have the new coinage and banknotes out before the coronation or in time for the coronation." No date has been set for King Charles' coronation. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

New 007 to 'serve King and country' as producers vow to keep Bond 'fresh'



THE NEXT JAMES Bond will serve King and country — but discussions with new 007 studio owner Amazon over the spy film franchise's future direction haven't really started, long-standing producer Barbara Broccoli said on Wednesday.

Broccoli and her half-brother Michael G Wilson sat down with AFP to speak about the future of the 25-movie franchise, moments after having their handprints immortalised in cement at Hollywood's famous TCL Chinese Theatre.

The last Bond outing, 2021's "No Time To Die," was the final installment to star Daniel Craig, and Amazon has since bought 007 studio MGM. This means speculation is rife about what changes could lie in store for the world's most famous fictional spy.

"We're just beginning our relationship with Amazon. We haven't really started to get involved in the next Bond film yet," said Broccoli.

As custodians of the franchise her father Albert "Cubby" Broccoli founded 60 years ago, "we're not always just going to rest on our laurels and keep to a formula," she added.

At the centre of the rumours and guesswork swirling around the next 007 outing is the matter of who will play the suave superspy with a licence to kill.

Craig was initially a controversial choice, particularly for his blond hair and rugged looks, but his five 007 films broke box office records, with 2012's "Skyfall" surpassing \$1 billion worldwide.

Fans have suggested the next Bond may be the first non-white actor in the role, while Broccoli has scotched claims that Bond in future could be female.

She told AFP that "there are certain formulaic things" that will always remain.

"The central character of James Bond is the most important element of these movies, and we believe he's incorruptible, he works for Queen and

now King and country," she said.

"He's not in it for his own personal gain. He's in it for trying to keep the world a safer place. So I think that is something we definitely wouldn't change."

'SURPRISED'

But Broccoli said their father "always tried to give us the confidence to take risks so that Bond can change over the years."

She added: "We like to change it up, and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't — but it keeps it fresh."

The Broccoli family's company Eon has immense creative control over the Bond film franchise, originally based on Ian Fleming's novels.

Barbara and her half-brother Michael have presided over the films since "GoldenEye," released in 1995, a year before the death of her father.

Under a complex deal, Eon split profits with historic studio MGM, which had the right to finance and distribute the 007 movies.

But the studio was bought by Amazon for \$8.5 billion under a deal closed in March, and it emerged weeks later that MGM's film leadership would be leaving.

In another sign of changing times, Amazon's Prime Video will release an eight-part Bond-themed reality-TV competition series called "007's Road to a Million."

Wilson told AFP it was important for Bond films to keep pace with the ever-changing challenges facing the world.

"What's the world going to worry about two or three years from now? How do we stay topical?" he said.

"But so far it's worked pretty well. You can't be afraid of change... you have to embrace it, and you can't do the same thing over and over again. You have to change it a bit.

"The audiences have a certain expectation. But they also want to be surprised. So that's all part of the effort." — AFP



Gaza's first marine fish farm helps make up for dwindling catch

A FISH FARM established in the Mediterranean Sea off Gaza last year has begun to produce sea bream for the local market as well as for export to the occupied West Bank, bringing a welcome boost to diets and much-needed cash to the economy.

The facility, established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in partnership with Italy some four nautical miles offshore, is one of a range of projects aimed at bolstering the local fishing industry and developing businesses in Gaza.

Fish exports have been hit recently by restrictions imposed by Israel in August, but these are expected to be eased.

Gaza's fishing boats have long operated under a tight blockade imposed by both Israel and Egypt, which has made it too expensive for many to operate and has reduced the size

of their catch, hindering economic development in the enclave, where just over half the population lives in poverty.

Abdel-Nasser Madhi, the head of the offshore fish farm project, said the new facilities help bring in vital funds for the fishing industry and create stronger export ties.

Madhi added he expected production of 60-80 tonnes of sea bream in the first year would be divided between the Gaza and West Bank markets. West Bank dealers were competing to buy the project's fish, he said.

The fishing industry has been hit by export bans imposed by Israel, which controls access for exports from Gaza to markets in the occupied West Bank, and which has fought repeated wars with Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers.

In August, when Israel bombed targets linked to the Islamic Jihad move-

ment in Gaza in a brief three-day campaign, exports were stopped for two weeks before being allowed to resume at just a fifth the normal level of 100 tonnes a month, an amount Palestinians said was insufficient.

The Israeli Agriculture Ministry said on Tuesday the reduced level was related to public health concerns following illegal fish smuggling from Gaza but that Israel had decided to set the quota at 40 tonnes.

Yasser Al-Haj, who owns a beachfront restaurant and onshore fish farms that produce up to 300 tonnes of sea bream per year, 80% of which is exported to the West Bank, said exports would resume on Wednesday.

"We suffered huge losses. We agreed to resume exports on a promise the Israelis would gradually increase the permitted quantity," he said. — Reuters

