

**OMAN AND UAE REVIEW
BILATERAL RELATIONS**

Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion held on Wednesday a meeting with several ministers in the UAE. **>A2**



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2022 EDITION

Sayyid Theyazin to open Muscat International Book Fair

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the opening of the 26th edition of Muscat International Book Fair, which will run from 24 February to 5 March at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

After a one-year break (in 2021) due to COVID-19 pandemic, the extravaganza will boast a strong comeback and host an elite selec-



tion of literati, media personnel, publishers and exhibitors. This was stated by Dr. Abdullah Nasser Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair, during a press conference held at the Information Ministry on Wednesday.

The minister said that the Governorate of South A'Sharqiyah will be the Guest of Honour this year. It will showcase a wide range of pro-

grammes and cultural activities carrying the insignia of its heritage and cultural legacy throughout the days of the book fair.

The decision to hold the book fair this year was the outcome of extensive study bearing in mind all concerns and interests. Strict precautionary measures were devised by a specialised technical and health team to ensure the safety of all visitors of the book fair, Dr. Abdullah explained. **>A4**

OMAN

Bat Archaeological site

1 Archaeological excavations at the archaeological site of Bat in the Governorate of A'Dhahirah have resulted in discoveries. **>A3**

WORLD

Biden's warning to Russia

2 US is ready for decisive response to Russian attack on Kiev, says Joe Biden. **>A6**

MARKET

ahlibank profit up 15%

3 ahlibank has reported overall growth in its key financial indicators for year ending December 31, 2021. **>B1**

OMAN HAS PASSED ITS PEAK OF OMICRON VARIANT SURGE

Up to 99 per cent of infections in the country are due to the Omicron variant

Times News Service

MUSCAT: COVID-19 infection rates in Oman are on the decline, which means the country has passed its infection peak, a doctor in the country has said.

Dr Zaid Al Khattab Al Hinai, who is an assistant professor at the College of Medicine at Sultan

Qaboos University (SQU), and an infectious diseases consultant at SQU Hospital, said the gradual decline in infections is expected to continue over the coming weeks.

Speaking to *Times of Oman*, he said, "If the current trend continues, we should see infection rates reach relatively low levels around four to six weeks from now, hopefully before the month of Ramadan. However, infections may also rise if social distancing measures are aborted suddenly, which has been observed in several countries."

Al Hinai agreed with the steps being taken by the Supreme Committee when it came to the gradual easing of restrictions needed to stop the spread of COVID-19, as opposed to completely doing away with a



Dr Zaid Al Khattab Al Hinai

number of measures at once.

Although infections during Oman's Omicron surge have peaked, people are reminded that they still need to follow basic precautionary measures such as

wearing masks, washing hands, sterilising surfaces, using sanitisers, keeping windows open where possible to increase ventilation, avoiding contact with people who have the disease, etc.

"If you feel that you have symptoms, such as sore throat, congested nose, cough, fever or body aches, self-isolate and consult a doctor immediately," he explained.

"Also, please get vaccinated as soon as you are able. This includes taking the booster dose as well. If you need to take a flu shot, do that as well."

"Usually, we see a decline in the number of daily deaths from a disease about two to four weeks after there has been a drop in daily infection numbers," added Al Hinai. **>A4**



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Asr.....	3:42pm
Maghrib.....	6:08pm
Isha.....	7:19pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....	5:22am

ENHANCING COOPERATION

Oman-UAE review bilateral ties



DUBAI: Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion held on Wednesday a meeting with several ministers in the UAE, in-

cluding Dr. Thani Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of Foreign Trade, Dr. Ahmed Balhoul Al Falasi, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and SMEs and Abdullah Touq

Al Marri, Minister of Economy. The meeting reviewed means of enhancing cooperation in trade, industry and investment between the two countries. — **ONA**

INDOOR FARMING

Pact inked to fund vertical farming of leafy greens

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) on Wednesday signed an agreement to fund the project of implementing an indoor vertical farming project to produce leafy greens.

The agreement was signed within the framework of the ministry's in bolstering the food security system in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al Bakri, the Ministry's Undersecretary for Agriculture and Sheikh Khalid Mohammed Al Fannah Al Arami, OMIFCO's Director of Sustainability and Institutional Communication.

The project includes the use of Plant Factory technology, which



is a closed agricultural system in which light, temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide concentrations necessary for plant growth are artificially controlled. The plants are grown vertically instead of horizontally as in traditional greenhouses; this method increases crop production.

This system will allow farms in having a stable production of greens, particularly leafy greens, all year round.

Moreover, the system will create investment opportunities for job seekers. It will also reduce water consumption by 40-60% compared to regular systems. — **ONA**

OMAN'S CENTRAL PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES

WHO designates CPHL as collaborating centre

MUSCAT: The World Health Organization (WHO) has named the Sultanate of Oman's Central Public Health Laboratories (CPHL) a 'WHO Collaborating Centre' in the field of communicable diseases and emerging infectious diseases.

An announcement was made to this effect on Wednesday in the presence of Dr Ahmed Mohammed Al Saeedi, Minister of Health, officials of the ministry and representatives of the WHO.

The Omani centre is considered the first of its kind in the Middle East and its designation

to this position by the WHO adds to the repertory of Omani accomplishments in the health field.

A global role

Dr. Ameena Khalfan Al Jardani, Director of the Central Public Health Laboratories Department, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) and Oman TV that the designation of the Omani centre will serve the Middle East region and that it will have a global role as it operates alongside other internationally approved collaborating centres.

Dr. Ameena pointed out that

Oman's WHO collaborating centre will tackle emerging epidemics and serve as a training hub in building capacities.

The medical laboratories constitute basic pillars of healthcare, epidemiological investigation and disease monitoring.

The centre for the management of new and reemerging diseases in the Sultanate of Oman will provide an opportunity for exchanging expertise. It will enable countries in the region and the world to tap Oman's experience in the field of public health labs and other regulatory matters. — **ONA**

AGAINST COVID-19

Mobile medical service organised

MUSCAT: The Directorate General of Health Services for Muscat Governorate, affiliated to the Ministry of Health organised a mobile medical service (bus service) campaign for vaccination against COVID-19 at the public yard of Hay Al Wazarat (Ministries' District) in Al Khuwair.

This was as a part of the efforts of the directorate for curbing the spread of COVID-19 virus. The campaign aimed to intensify the doses of the vaccine for citizens and residents.

Dr. Manal bint Said Al Dhanki, Consultant of Family Medicine and Chairperson of the Informa-

tion Committee at the directorate said that the campaign kicked off, last Sunday, in the Wilayat of Seeb.

The campaign was aimed to increase the number of citizens and residents vaccinated with the first and second dose and the third booster dose. — **ONA**



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HERITAGE

Archaeological discoveries at Bat site reveal aspects of life in Umm an-Nar period



IBRI: Archaeological excavations carried out by a joint team from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and archaeological researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and New York University in Abu Dhabi, resulted in discoveries at the archaeological site of Bat in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah. These discoveries include houses along a slope overlooking a Wadi. The other archaeological site is located southeast of the archaeological site of Bat around an area where rainwater has accumulated since a very long time. These houses seem similar at first glance, but in reality they are completely different because they are located in radically different ecological zones. Ancient stoves, ovens, and burnt seeds were also found within the excavated settlements. The researchers believe that these finds contain valuable data that can help understand how people lived during the Umm an-Nar period, and how they were able to thrive at the Bat site for nearly 1,000 years. The archaeological site of Bat, Al Khatm and Al Ain is located in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah in the Wilayat of Ibri. It represents an outstanding model for the settlements of the third millennium BC as they include the largest gathering of archaeological towers and tombs from this era. For its exceptional importance, the site was included on the World Heritage List in 1988. -ONA



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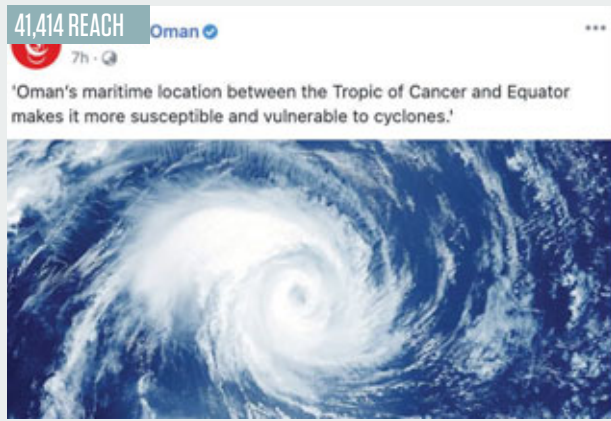

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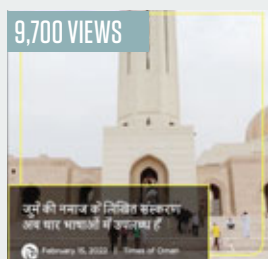
'Oman's maritime location between the Tropic of Cancer and Equator makes it more susceptible and vulnerable to cyclones.'



Story on Oman being vulnerable to cyclones

A story on Oman being vulnerable to cyclones reached 41,414 people and had 5,484 engagements on Facebook.

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Maghrib Minute video news wrap

The Maghrib Minute video news wrap had 9,700 views and reached 42,900 people on Facebook.

📺 MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM



Video on Tour of Oman

A video on Tour of Oman had 455 views and 43 likes on Instagram.

BOOK FAIR

<FROM A1 Covid measures to be followed



The minister said that the guests this year will include an elite selection of literati, media personnel and the Chairman of Arab Publishers' Association.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Said Sultan Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, gave an overview of activities to be held as part of Muscat International Book Fair.

As many as 114 cultural activities, among them 29 unique to the South A'Sharqiyah Governorate, will be staged, but children's activities will be limited to 85 in line with COVID-19 precautionary measures, added Sayyid Said.

On his turn, Ahmed Saud Al Rawahi, Director of Muscat International Book Fair, said that 570 publishers from 27 countries will exhibit their publications directly at the book fair, while 145 will participate through agents,

taking the total to 715 publishers and 361,230 titles.

Al Rawahi explained that lounge will comprise the Guest of Honour wing, open halls named after Arab and Omani celebrities and wings dedicated to official departments, leading initiatives, sponsors and radio channels.

He pointed out that a special team will be tasked with following up the implementation of precautionary measures.

It will ensure that no gatherings take place in the corridors or in the wings of the book fair or activities halls.

The authorities concerned will coordinate with the Ministry of Education to arrange school visits to the venue, said Al Rawahi, adding that logistic incentives will be extended to tour operators and firms engaged in transporting individuals to and from the book fair. -ONA

Now, drones to deliver parcels in Muscat

The project was inaugurated by UVL Robotics in cooperation with some local e-commerce companies and courier service providers

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Drones will deliver parcels in Muscat, the government said on Wednesday.

A project to enable delivery of parcels in Muscat by drones was launched by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in cooperation with the Governorate of Muscat.

The service will enable daily delivery of postal packages, including goods or food items by drones. The project was inaugurated by UVL Robotics in cooperation with some local e-commerce companies and courier service providers.

The first phase of the project will make the deliveries to the residents of Muscat Bay residential complex, Qantab and the tourist areas. In the subsequent phases, the project will be extended to other areas in Muscat, including Yeti, Yenkit, Khairan and As'sifah.

During the trial phase, some local e-commerce and parcel delivery companies will be enlisted for the service.

The service is part of the efforts being made by the Governorate of Muscat to enable the residents of Wilayat of Muscat and the villages in its neighborhood to get the deliveries in real quick time, otherwise hampered or made difficult due to some geographical challenges which often delay or result in higher costs. Besides, the project aims to localise modern delivery technology and enrich the logistics sector and supply chains.

The drones would be electric-powered which can travel at an altitude of 25 kms with a load capacity of 5 kilograms. The box would have an electronic display for payment and the parcels can be



Musa bin Karim Al Balushi, Regional Director of UVL Robotics, said: "The experiments come as a preparatory stage to provide the service in an integrated manner in cooperation with several local companies that provide e-commerce services and delivery of orders and also come within the efforts made by the Governorate of Muscat in serving citizens and residents of remote areas, and their earnest desire to take advantage of modern technologies and harness them to serve the population wherever they are in the governorate.

The Governorate of Muscat appreciates the role played by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to localise modern technology and facilitate licences from government institutions. This, he said, would have a positive impact on the way services are provided and enable institutions working in the field to contribute to the improvement of services and innovation of best practices and technical solutions.

detached by the receivers through an interactive code.

His Excellency Mohammed bin Sulaiman Al Kindi, Deputy Governor of Muscat, said: "The launch of the delivery service via drones comes in the background of the efforts aimed at developing services provided to citizens in the governorate in general, and enabling the people in the targeted neighborhoods in particular, to benefit from the services which modern technologies provide...this service through the company (UVL Robotics) would will facilitate the arrival of parcels to residents easily and conveniently and shorten the time of parcel delivery."

His Excellency said: "The service of delivering parcels via vehicles is currently (running) in the villages of the Governorate of Muscat, which are far from the service centers and suffer from high cost and long(er) time of delivery."

His Excellency stressed that

the governorate will provide the facilities required for the delivery service, in cooperation with the government institutions.

On his part, His Excellency Dr. Ali Al Shethani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said: "The launch by the company (UVL Robotics) to deliver parcels, goods, merchandise and supplies needed by the residents of the Wilayat of Muscat is a qualitative development that contributes to enhancing the use of modern technology in remote places and benefiting them with the services available in the city center of Muscat."

He added that this service is an adjunct of the Sultanate's directions to benefit from the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and enhance the digital economy, and that its launch coincides with the announcement of Muscat as the Arab Digital Capital for the year 2022."

COVID-19

<FROM A1 Reduced severity of disease

"This is because in the case of people who have severe infection from the virus, their infections may flare up about a week after contracting the virus. In such cases, treatment, if successful, could take weeks."

Adding further optimism, Al Hinaï said that the immunity people have gained from vaccination, as well as recovery from previous infections, has significantly reduced the severity of the disease. While most deaths in prior waves were directly linked to complications from the virus, an increasing percentage of deaths in the Omicron wave are due to other causes.

For example, in Denmark, it is estimated that about half of



the deaths are due to COVID-19, while for the other half, the virus was detected but death might have been due to other causes.

"The infections we have seen over the past few weeks – and at present – are largely due to the Omicron variant: if we assume that 100 patients have COVID, 99

percent of them will be infected with that variant," he said. "It has also been previously confirmed by the Ministry of Health that 99 percent of people infected with COVID have contracted the Omicron variant."

He added: "The Omicron variant has completely dominated Covid-19 cases in this wave. In other words, other variants have largely subsided, and the Omicron variant accounts for essentially all Covid-19 at the present time."

Oman recorded 1,430 fresh infections from COVID-19 on Wednesday, February 16, 2022. Although 2,114 people did recover from the disease, five people died from COVID-19.

Oman attends dates council meet in Al Ahsa

AL AHSA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and water Resources took part in the founding meeting of the International Dates Council, being held in the Governorate of Al Ahsa in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The meeting announced the establishment of the International Dates Council with its headquarters in the KSA, as well as electing KSA a head of the council and the Sultanate of Oman as a representative of the executive body of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and Yemen. - ONA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

National Obstetric Ultrasonography training course begins

MUSCAT: The Third National Obstetric Ultrasonography Training course has commenced.

The course is organised by the Women & Child Health Department of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) in cooperation with the Royal Hospital, as well as the International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (ISUOG).

Nearly 26 female-doctors working in the obstetrics and gynaecology clinics from Oman's various governorates participate in the training course.

The training programme includes three phases that covers spectrum of theoretical lectures

in the field along with hands-on training.

Dr. Jamila Al Abri, Director of Woman and Child Health described at the inauguration of the course the importance of conducting obstetric ultrasound by a trained doctor in improving the health of mothers and their children.

Dr. Al Abri also reviewed the efforts made by the Ministry of Health in this field since the launch of the Maternal and Child Care Programme in 1987, including the provision of ultrasound devices in primary health care institutions, and adopting training programmes in cooperation with

international associations.

The opening also provided an overview of the training program and presented the requirements of completing the training.

Skills covered during this week will include the determination of the fetuses' number and age, monitoring foetal growth, detection of ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage and fetal abnormalities.

The first phase of the training is conducted this week and to be followed by the second and third phases after six months and five months respectively. Each phase will address a variety of topics in the field of obstetric ultrasound.

- ONA





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FIRST COLUMN OF GRADUATES

Royal Army of Oman celebrates passing out of new batch of recruits

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) celebrated at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Training Regiment on Wednesday the passing out of a new batch of recruits. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj.Gen Khalifa Ali Al Siabi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of Maj.Gen Mattar Salim Al Balushi, Commander of RAO.

The ceremony began by performing the military salute to the chief guest who inspected the first column of the graduates. Then, the graduates paraded in a slow march accompanied with the RAO Musical Band. Then, the chief guest handed over appreciation awards to top graduates.

At the end of the ceremony, the graduates took the oath of loyalty and proclaimed thrice Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

The ceremony was attended by a number of senior officers at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), as well as RAO officers and parents of the recruits. — **ONA**



INTEGRATED LOGISTICS SERVICES

Asyad Shipping, Japanese shipping giant sign pact

MUSCAT: Asyad Shipping, a part of Asyad Group, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Japanese shipping giant, Suzue Corporation to open up new prospects for collaboration and unlock mutual business opportunities.

Through this pact, the companies aim to pool their capabilities and potentials, and expand their global logistics networks to start new projects that promote the trade and logistics sectors in both Oman and Japan.

To this end, Asyad Group seeks to maintain an active exchange of information, technologies, and know-how with the Japanese provider of integrated logistics services, Suzue Corporation that offers a wide range of shipping and transport services in East and Southeast Asia and plans to establish a joint venture with Asyad Shipping in the future in Oman.

Asyad Group looks to harness this MoU to serve its mutual interests with Suzue, expand its network of shipping partners and collaborators, and add to its offering new support logistics solutions in East and Southeast Asia. The MoU is a clear expression of Suzue's intent to cooperate with Asyad Shipping for Oman to become its logistics gateway to the European and African markets.

These efforts translate into Asyad Group's vision of cementing Oman's position as a global logistics hub standing at the nexus of key shipping routes considered to be the transit gateway to East Africa, Middle East, Arabian Gulf and India.



Asyad Shipping has dramatically evolved over the years from initially focusing on transporting domestic oil and gas products to entering the shipping of commodities and general cargo market. Today, Asyad Shipping's fleet of more than 60 ships has grown to include very large crude carriers (VLCCs), very large ore carriers (VLOCs) of all sizes, chemical and petrochemical tankers, bulk carriers, multipurpose vessels, and container ships and LNG ships. — **ONA**

BILATERAL TIES

Oman, Saudi Arabia ink food security pact

AL AHSA: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of food and water security.

The signing of the MoU came on the sidelines of the International Council for Dates, held in Al Ahssa, the KSA.

The MoU was signed by Dr. Saud Hamoud Al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Eng. Abdul Rahman Abdul Mohsen Al Fadhli, Saudi Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture.

— **ONA**

EMBASSY OF INDIA MUSCAT

VACANCY FOR THE POST OF CLERK

Applications are invited for the post of Clerk in the Embassy of India, Muscat. The pay scale of Clerk is 335-10-485-15-635-19-825 with starting salary of OMR 335.000 per month. The candidate should be graduate from a reputed institution and should be proficient in reading, writing and speaking English. Working knowledge of Arabic language is mandatory (reading, writing and speaking). The candidate must also be conversant with computers and social media platforms.

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AL KAMIL POWER COMPANY SAOG

Invitation to an Annual General Meeting and an Extraordinary General Meeting of Al Kamil Power Company SAOG

The Board of Directors (Board) of the Al Kamil Power Company SAOG (Company) is pleased to invite the shareholders of the Company to an Annual General Meeting (AGM) and an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) commencing from 3 PM on Tuesday, 8 March 2022 to be held at the Head Office of Dentons & Co. Oman Branch located at Salam Square – South, 3rd Floor Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat and through the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and in the event that quorum for holding the AGM and/or EGM was not achieved, the second AGM and/or EGM, shall be held commencing at 3 PM on Thursday, 10 March 2021 at the same venue and electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda item:

First: the Agenda of the AGM

- To consider and approve report of the Board of Directors on the business of the Company and its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Company's report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report on the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the Board's Appraisal Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 as per Annexure 1.
- To approve the sitting fees for meetings of the Board, Audit Committees and Nomination and Remuneration Committee, for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 as per Annexure 2.
- To ratify the additional fees of RO 5,000 paid to external auditors for audit of financial statements for the period ended 30 September 2021.
- To notify the AGM of the donations made for corporate social responsibility activities for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 as per Annexure 3.

Second: the Agenda of the EGM

- To consider and approve the liquidation and dissolution of the Company, appointment of the liquidator and determining his fees in accordance with the key terms set out in Annexure 4.
- To authorise the Executive Management of the Company to undertake all things that may be required or are necessary to implement the decision undertaken in relation to item 1 of this agenda.

As per the regulations of the convening of the general meetings through electronic platforms, issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to attract your kind attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons have the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general meeting and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that this natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than three (3) days and until the end of the voting process on day of the general meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the general meeting.

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US is ready to ‘respond decisively’ to Russian attack on Ukraine: Biden

President Biden acknowledged reports on Tuesday that Russia has ordered the partial withdrawal of its troops near Ukraine’s borders



tinctly possible.”

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Tuesday said that Washington is ready to respond decisively to the Russian attack on Ukraine.

“We are ready to respond decisively to the Russian attack on Ukraine which is still very much a possibility,” Biden said in remarks at the White House. President Biden acknowledged reports on Tuesday that Russia has ordered the partial withdrawal of its troops near Ukraine’s borders, but stressed that the US has “not yet verified” the Kremlin’s claims and that an invasion remains “distinctly possible.”

“We have not yet verified the Russian military units are returning to their home bases -- indeed, our analysts indicate that they remain very much in a threatening position, and the fact remains right now Russia has more than 150,000 troops circling Ukraine and Belarus, and along Ukraine’s border and invasion remains dis-

frontation with Russia though I have been clear if Russia targets Americans in Ukraine, we will respond forcefully,” the US President asserted.

In remarks televised nationally, Biden emphasized that the path to diplomacy and de-escalation remains open but said if Russia invades Ukraine in the coming days or weeks “it will be met with overwhelming international condemnation.”

“Accountability matters. If Russia does invade in the days and weeks ahead, the human cost for Ukraine will be immense. And the strategic cost for Russia will also be immense. If Russia attacks Ukraine, it will be met with overwhelming international condemnation. The world will not forget that Russia chose needless death and destruction,” the US President said in White House remarks.

Biden’s speech came hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow’s security concerns

should be addressed and taken seriously.

Biden told reporters if Russia invaded Ukraine there would be crippling sanctions that could impact the American economy, that could suffer from disruption to energy supply and price hikes in the likely event that sanctions were levied on Russia in response to any invasion of Ukraine.

“If Russia decides to invade that will also have consequences here at home, Biden said in remarks at the White House.

“The American people understand that defending democracy and liberty is never without cost.”

He said the US was prepared to respond to other attempts at inflicting pain on Americans, including in cyberspace.

“We are not seeking direct confrontation with Russia, though I have been clear that if Russia targets Americans in Ukraine, we will respond forcefully. If Russia attacks the United States or allies through asymmetric means, like disruptive cyberattacks against

our companies or critical infrastructure, we’re prepared to respond,” Biden said.

Amid the ongoing tensions that started in November at the Ukraine-Russia border, President Biden made it clear that the United States is not seeking to add to the volatility.

“Let me be equally clear about what we are not doing: The United States and NATO are not a threat to Russia,” said Biden, speaking from the White House.

“Ukraine is not threatening Russia. Neither the US nor NATO have missiles in Ukraine. We do not, do not have plans to put them there as well. We’re not targeting the people of Russia. We do not seek to destabilize Russia. To the citizens of Russia: you are not our enemy. I do not believe you want a bloody, destructive war against Ukraine,” he said. Noting that Russia and the United States teamed up in World War II -- which he called “a war of necessity” -- Biden drew a distinction between the current state of affairs.

“If Russia attacks Ukraine, it will be a war of choice, or a war without cause or reason. I say these things not to provoke, but to speak the truth, because the truth matters. Accountability matters,” Biden said.

“If Russia does invade in the days and weeks ahead, the human cost for Ukraine will be immense,” he added.

Diplomatic efforts continued Tuesday between US and Russia. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a call with Lavrov, according to a State Department. Biden spoke with French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday about the evolving crisis. **ANI**



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MEETING

Taliban delegation meets EU envoys

DOHA: Taliban delegation on Tuesday held talks with European Union’s representatives in Doha.

According to the statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Taliban delegates reassured the EU envoys that the new ruling government of Afghanistan is committed to upholding the legitimate rights of the society. “The participants shared their plans, recommendations, and information on the humanitarian and health situation, the educational process, and the needs of Afghanistan,” read MoFA statement.

“The EU representatives called the current educational process in Afghanistan and its progress promising, and reminded of allocation of \$11 million in this sector, saying that given the situation, we want to increase humanitarian, educational, and health assistance in Afghanistan,” added the statement.

The Taliban delegation called on the European Union to relaunch the suspended education process and to cooperate in the field of internet services for Afghan students to have access to online courses.

Responding to the EU representatives’ concerns, the Taliban



also reassured them that they were committed to the legitimate rights of the society, professional staff was being recruited, mistreatment of officials from previous administration was toxic propaganda, and that experiencing the conditions, Afghans living abroad are returning home where their skills are utilised for the development of the country.

Participants stressed the importance and continuation of such meetings.

A combination of a suspension of foreign aid, the freezing of Afghan government assets, and international sanctions on the Taliban have plunged the country, already suffering from high poverty levels, into a full-blown economic crisis. **ANI**

DRUG TRAFFICKING CHARGES

Police arrest Honduras former president wanted by the US

TEGUCIGALPA: Honduras’ former President Juan Orlando Hernandez was arrested by police on Tuesday after the United States sought his extradition on drug trafficking charges.

The former leader was led away by police from his residence in the capital city Tegucigalpa, with his wrists and ankles shackled.

Hernandez was seen wearing a bulletproof vest. A police helicopter also appeared to be escorting the caravan.

Police had surrounded Hernandez’s house soon after news broke about the US government seeking his extradition. Hernandez had been wanted for years by US prosecutors for his alleged ties to drug traffickers.

Hernandez’s arrest in the public eye represents a major fall from grace for a leader who was once a top US ally.

US asks Honduras to extradite Hernandez

Earlier in the day, the Honduran Foreign Ministry said the US Embassy had requested the arrest of a Honduran politician. The min-



istry added the request had been sent to the Honduran Supreme Court.

While the ministry did not name the politician in question, officials speaking on condition of anonymity told the media the request was for Hernandez.

Hernandez, who was once considered a top US ally in the region, ruled the country for eight years. Washington’s extradition request represents a major blow to the reputation and partnership the US once shared with Honduras.

Hernandez to face unspecified charges

Hernandez faces unspecified charges, though he has been implicated in a drug trafficking case in a US federal court and accused of corruption. He has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

The drug trafficking scandal badly hit the image of his government, with his party losing last year’s federal election. Leftist candidate Xiomara Castro replaced Hernandez as Honduras’ first female president last month. **AW**

COUNTRY WILL OPEN AGAIN

The Netherlands lifts most of COVID-19 measures as country returns to ‘normal’

THE HAGUE: Dutch Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport Ernst Kuipers on Tuesday announced a “return to normal” in the Netherlands by lifting most measures against the spread of COVID-19.

“The country will open again,” Kuipers told a press conference in the Hague. “The past two years have been all about protection against the virus and the accessibility of care. We are now in a different phase. Back to normal.” Earlier on Tuesday, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) announced that from February 7 to 13, the number of people in the Netherlands who tested positive for COVID-19 decreased by 22 per cent compared to the week before. A total of 482,695 positive tests were reported to the RIVM.

Meanwhile, a total of 1,149 new patients were hospitalised, compared to 1,393 the week before. Of these, 88 were admitted to ICU, compared to 122 in the previous week.



“A lot of people are infected, but we seem to have passed the peak,” Kuipers said. “Hospital occupancy is completely different compared to the past two years.”

The lifting of COVID-19 measures in the Netherlands will take place in three phases. The government’s advice not to receive more than four people at home, and to work from home where possible, will expire with immediate effect.

Next, from Friday, all locations in the country will once more be

able to open until 1 am.

Finally, from February 25, normal opening hours will apply again at every location, and nightclubs will be able to open as normal.

In addition, the requirement for a corona entry pass will be removed at places with a capacity of less than 500. The mandatory social distancing of 1.5 metres and the obligation to wear a face mask when moving around in restaurants and schools will also disappear. **ANI**



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Rank		G	S	B	T
1	Norway	13	7	8	28
2	Germany	10	6	4	20
3	USA	8	7	4	19
4	PR China	7	4	2	13
5	Austria	6	7	4	17
6	Netherlands	6	4	4	14
6	Sweden	6	4	4	14
8	Switzerland	5	0	5	10
9	RDC	4	8	12	24
10	France	4	7	2	13
11	Canada	3	4	11	18
12	Italy	2	7	6	15
13	Japan	2	5	7	14
14	Republic of Korea	2	4	1	7
15	Slovenia	2	3	2	7
16	Finland	1	2	3	6
17	Australia	1	2	1	4
18	New Zealand	1	1	0	2
19	Hungary	1	0	2	3
20	Czech Republic	1	0	1	2
21	Slovakia	1	0	0	1
22	Belarus	0	2	0	2
23	Spain	0	1	0	1
23	Ukraine	0	1	0	1
25	Belgium	0	0	1	1
25	Estonia	0	0	1	1
25	Latvia	0	0	1	1
25	Poland	0	0	1	1

timesofoman.com

FOOTBALL

Chinese veteran Qi wins gold in freeski men’s aerials

CHONGLI: Chinese free skier Qi Guangpu scored 129 points to grab the men's aerials gold in his fourth Olympic appearance at Beijing 2022 here on Wednesday.

It's the seventh gold for China in the ongoing Beijing Winter Olympics, a record so far in its Winter Games history. China's previous best was five golds at Vancouver 2010.

Qi's victory is also the third Olympic gold for the Chinese freeski aerials team in history. After Han Xiaopeng was crowned in the men's aerials at Turin 2006, China waited for 16 years to see its second aerials gold taken by Xu Mengtao, also 31, here on Monday night in the women's aerials.

In the breathtaking final on Wednesday night, the 31-year-old Qi, who had never earned a podium finish in his previous three Olympic appearances, jumped on the top through a brilliant trick of back double full-full-double full which boasts of a difficulty degree of 5.000, the highest in the world so far.

Oleksandr Abramenko of Ukraine won the silver on 116.50 while Llia Burov from the Rus-



sian Olympic Committee came third with 114.93.

Finishing seventh in both Vancouver 2010 and PyeongChang 2018 and fourth in Sochi 2014, Qi was seen as one of the favorites but had to face an extremely tight battle. In the two-jump Final 1, eight athletes from the 12 finalists threw the same trick of back-full-double-full-full with difficulty degree of 4.425, which has become a normal degree for the men's aerials elites. The scores of the top six athletes were between 126.24 and 122.13.

Only Oleksandr Okipniuk from Ukraine got 91.40, lower than 100 due to a bad landing. **Xinhua**

VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT HELD

The Philippine Women's Volleyball tournament named 'Phiom' was held on February 11, 2022. Barangay Wadi became the champion while Foxhard team came first and Muscat Blazer came second. Monica Seyer was adjudged the best setter while Shay Mapando was adjudged the best spiker.



T20 WORLD CUP

Eight teams to fight for two T20 World Cup spots in Muscat

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A, supported by Dream 11, begins at the Oman Academy grounds in Al Amerat on Friday.

A lot is at stake for the eight participating nations – Ireland, Nepal, UAE, Canada, Germany, Philippines, Bahrain, and hosts Oman – as they vie for the two spots available at the Qualifier A from 18 to 24 February.

The Qualifier A is one of the two global qualifiers that is part of the final stages of qualification process of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia. A total of 20 matches will decide the two teams that will travel to Australia for the pinnacle event in the shortest format of the game later this year as an



intense and exciting battle of cricket awaits the fans across the world.

The eight-nation tournament features an experienced Ireland side, who are set to face a fight from an in-form UAE, hosts Oman, and Nepal as the quartet boast of experience at playing at the global stage. However, with teams like Canada, Germany, Bahrain, and the Philip-

pires eager to showcase their mettle, there is a good possibility of few surprises in the coming week.

If Test-playing nation Ireland, the only Full Member nation, in the fray, begins the tournament as a favourite, there is a lot of excitement in the camp of debutants – Germany and the Philippines, who start the tournament as minnows,



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DIRECTOR'S REPORT
For the year ended 31st December 2021



Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Qatar Insurance Company S.A.O.G. ("OQIC" the company), I am pleased to present the company's Annual Report for the Year ended 31st December 2021 including the Audited Financial Statements, Auditors Report, the Management discussion & Analysis Report and the Corporate Governance Report.
Business Environment
Oman budgeted deficit reached to RO 1.2 billion in 2021 and COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on individuals, society, business and the wider economy across the globe for more than two years now and Oman has also been affected severely. The pandemic had taken heavy toll on the lives of individuals and the economy as a whole.
However, the sultanate has adopted various fiscal measures over the past year to reduce the budgeted deficit by tightening spending and reducing government entities expenses. In addition, the government adopted some measures to support the economy during the pandemic, including interest-free emergency loans, tax and fee reductions and waivers, the flexibility to pay taxes in instalments and a Job Security Fund to support citizens who lost their jobs.
Introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) in April 2021 by the Tax Authority of Oman was a major change and impacted the country's economy as well as the insurance sector. OQIC took necessary measures in advance to comply with VAT requirements.
The stiff competition from industry peers is also having an impact on our topline growth, on the other hand, incurred losses due to Cyclone Shaheen and frequent heavy rainfall impacting the underwriting results. However, despite this we remained focused on protecting and growing our top and bottom line, enhancing underwriting results and customer centricity which enabled us to achieve a robust growth in bottom line in current Year.
Company Performance
Despite the challenges due to business environment and economic factors, the company managed to achieve a robust growth in Net Profit after tax of 48% to RO 3.14 million in 2021 vs RO 2.12 million in 2020. Net Underwriting Income has increased by 1% of RO 2.82 million in 2021 vs RO 2.78 million in 2020. This increase is contributed by increased reinsurers commission income and reduced claims incurred cost. We achieved strong Investment Income growth of 60% to RO 3.04 million in 2021 vs RO 1.91 million in 2020. This substantial increase is due to unrealised gain of RO 2.09 million in 2021 vs unrealised gain of RO 371K in 2020. Reinsurers Commission Income has also increased by 62% to RO 1.30 million in 2021 vs RO 809K in 2020. Major growth is contributed by Medical, Energy & Travel Business.
Shareholders Returns
Positive results achieved by the company have generated attractive returns for investors. The Market Capitalization has more than doubled and stood at RO 21.4 million as of 31st December 2021 as compared to RO 9.5 million in the previous Year. Basic Earnings per share (EPS) has increased by 48% and stood at 31 baiza per equity share for the Year ended 31st December 2021 as compared to 21 Baisa for the Year ended 31st December 2020. Net Asset Value (NAV) per share stands at 208 Baisa as on 31st December 2021 on 100 million equity shares. The company also delivered good return on equity of 15% in 2021 as compared to 12% in 2020.
Outlook
In light of the high oil prices and ongoing government initiatives to improve, diversify and restructure the Omani economy and strong roll-out of vaccinations, the economic outlook is expected to improve. Yet will remain challenging in the Year 2022 due to the tailing impact of pandemic and significant changes due to transformational decisions and new economic measures taken by government to cut spending and increase in inflation.
There may be further reduction in premium rates in corporate products too which will pose challenges for insurance industry. However, the company will remain focused on bottom line driven growth with prudent risk management and overall improvement in customer services.
Company will further increase its motor business by putting more focus on additional marketing and branding activities and focusing on digitalization of retail products and customer centricity which would enhance the volume growth and bottom line.
In Life and Medical Business, we see growth opportunities especially with the introduction of mandatory health insurance scheme (Dhamani) being mobilized in Oman. We will continue to develop this portfolio with right selection of profitable accounts.
Changing Regulatory Environment
IFRS 17 which is applicable from 1st January 2023, represent a complete overhaul of the accounting for insurance contracts, it will change the way insurance company maintain its records and increase the transparency of financial position and performance. The company made a clear project plan and started the preparation in advance for such changes.
Further progressive regulations on insurance industry are expected to be introduced by Capital Market Authority including regulation on Mandatory Health Insurance (Dhamani) and regulation on Risk based Solvency framework.
Corporate Social Responsibility
OQIC remains committed to touching human lives through its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. During the year, Sultanate of Oman witnessed devastating Cyclone Shaheen that made a landfall in Oman with fierce winds and heavy rains, flooding streets and prompting evacuations from coastal areas. Thousands of houses have been impacted and tens of lives have been lost.
In this devastating situation, OQIC committed and contributed RO 100K as a support to rebuild the impacted areas and compensate the unfortunate people. The initiative has been well received by the community and will be ratified at next Annual General Meeting dated 22nd March 2022.
Appreciation
On Behalf of the Board of Directors, I thank the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Capital Market Authority for their continued guidance and support. We also wish to record our gratitude to our clients for their valuable support, to our share-

Statement of Financial Position

	31 December 2021 RO	31 December 2020 RO
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	2,510,696	3,553,856
Bank deposits	15,686,535	17,039,900
Premiums and reinsurance balances receivable	7,034,258	5,637,192
Reinsurers' share of insurance contract liabilities	34,615,000	50,618,000
Other receivables and prepayments	356,710	449,436
Financial investments	15,063,228	12,751,282
Property and equipment	158,798	197,677
Right of use assets	83,028	182,484
Total assets	75,508,253	90,429,827
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	10,000,000	10,000,000
Legal reserve	1,521,020	1,207,123
Contingency reserve	5,498,753	5,145,436
Fair value reserve	(18,948)	(12,746)
Retained earnings	3,773,640	1,801,882
Total equity	20,774,465	18,141,695
Liabilities		
Liabilities arising from insurance contracts	41,635,000	58,419,000
Due to reinsurers	7,283,888	5,009,456
Other liabilities and accruals	5,814,900	8,859,676
Total liabilities	54,733,788	72,288,132
Total equity and liabilities	75,508,253	90,429,827
Net assets per share	0.208	0.181

Statement of Comprehensive Income

	2021 RO	2020 RO
INCOME		
Gross premiums written	31,394,078	31,281,072
Insurance premium revenue	31,394,078	31,281,072
Insurance premium ceded to reinsurers	(24,383,604)	(24,001,590)
Net insurance premium revenue	7,010,474	7,279,482
Movement in unexpired premium	(662,000)	13,787
Net premium earned	6,348,474	7,293,269
Claims paid	(17,919,683)	(10,797,349)
Reinsurers' share of claims	13,185,291	5,974,919
Net movement in outstanding claims	1,443,000	740,020
Net commission	(395,067)	(514,069)
Other insurance income	158,836	83,076
Net underwriting results	2,820,851	2,779,866
Investment income (net)	3,038,955	1,905,433
Total income	5,859,806	4,685,299
General and administration	(2,256,312)	(2,024,020)
Depreciation	(288,572)	(292,157)
Profit before taxation	3,314,922	2,369,122
Taxation	(175,950)	(248,708)
Profit for the year	3,138,972	2,120,414
Other comprehensive income / (expense)		
Items that will be classified to profit or loss		
Net change in fair value of investments	(6,202)	(21,180)
Total comprehensive income for the year	3,132,770	2,099,234
Earnings per share – Basic and diluted	0.031	0.021

holders for their strong confidence, to the Management and to the staff for their dedicated efforts.

We would like to extend our sincere best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, and we pledge our constant support and commitment for the economic development of the Sultanate for achieving the strategic directions and goals of Oman Vision 2040. We pray to the almighty Allah to protect his Majesty the Sultan and help Oman continue its progress and transformation under his wise leadership.

H. E. Khalaf Ahmed Al Mannai
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts are available with Muscat Stock Exchange. However, the same will be sent by mail to any share holder, who requests them to the above address, in either Arabic or English, as requested within 7 days of receipt of such request.

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MARKET

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MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 4,090.72 points, up by 0.21 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.64 per cent at 497.19 points. Muscat Desalination, up 9.91 per cent, was the top gainer while, Takaful Oman, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser.

ahlibank records net profit growth of 15%

ahlibank announced its financial results for the year ending December 31, 2021 wherein its total assets grew by 13.0 per cent, reaching OMR3.05 billion, compared to OMR2.70 billion in 2020

Times News Service

MUSCAT: ahlbank has reported overall growth in its key financial indicators for the year ending December 31, 2021 with net profit rising by 15 per cent. ahlbank announced its financial results for the year wherein its total assets grew by 13.0 per cent, reaching OMR3.05 billion, compared to OMR2.70 billion in 2020. Customer deposits went up by 13.3 per cent to reach OMR2.18 billion, compared to OMR 1.92 billion the previous year. Likewise, net loans, advances



Said Abdullah Al Hatmi, CEO, ahlbank

and financing grew by 8.3 per cent, reaching OMR 2.40 billion. Moreover, the bank's operating income increased by 15.2 per cent, reaching OMR 82.4 million in 2021 and the net profit for the period increased by 15 per cent, reaching OMR276 million. These achievements and continued growth showcase the bank's consistent rollout of innovative products, services and offerings that are oriented toward enhancing customer satisfaction. ahlbank's strategic roadmap encompasses a robust digital transformation strategy and an expansion plan that entails ramping up its on-ground pres-

ence and overall infrastructure. The bank is powered by its rich human capital with high qualifications and extensive experience in the sector. This has enabled it to further enhance its customer excellence and optimise emerging opportunities to increase its contribution in supporting the national economy's future progress. Said Abdullah Al Hatmi, CEO, ahlbank, remarks, "We have had commendable growth in 2021 despite economic challenges and an unpredicted change in the financial and banking landscape. This is the result of the introduction of various bespoke products and services for the conventional and Islamic banking segments apart from the enhancement and strengthening of our existing portfolio and the boosting of our operational processes, systems and digital infrastructure." "Our commitment to deliver efficient and professional customer service has earned us rightful recognition and commendation from the industry, which resulted in ahlbank receiving prestigious awards such as the 'Excellence in Private Banking' Award and the 'Excellence in Islamic Retail Banking' Award. The Bank also received the JP Morgan Chase '2021 Elite Quality Recognition' Award for maintaining an outstanding 99.9 per cent modification-free rate for the bank's remittance in US dollars," Al Hatmi added.

In its bid to offer more customer service access points and expand its reach to the wider banking community, the bank has opened six new branches during the year, three of which are for ahlbank and three for Ahli Islamic, distributed in different governorates in Oman. ahlbank's CSR commitment has also led to the deepening of its involvement in community and national projects and initiatives. Of particular significance is its participation in the National COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign and in the relief program to support people and communities affected by cyclone 'Shaheen'. The bank is keen to support Oman Vision 2040's objectives through implementing the Nationalisation strategy and has achieved a 94.34% of Omanisation across its different divisions, effectively contributing to the joint efforts of the government in empowering the national workforce. To build competencies of individuals and prepare them to meet the requirements of the work environment, ahlbank provides learning and skill enhancement opportunities for existing employees, through its development programs. The bank has also welcomed the 7th batch of its flagship program 'Himam' as well as the 5th batch of its leadership and training Business Graduate programme aiming at building a robust pipeline of future leaders in the banking sector.

VISIT



Delegation briefed on strategic projects at Special Economic Zones in Duqm

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (Opaz) organised a visit for a number of residents and non-residents, military attachés in the embassies of brotherly and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm on February 15 and 16. The visit programme included a number of presentations on the capabilities of the zone and the advantages, incentives, and facilities offered to businessmen and investors, as well as the basic facilities, the location, the strategic projects that have been implemented and the ongoing projects,

in addition to the services provided and the lifestyle of the zone. The delegation included a number of senior officers and retired senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces Command. Upon their arrival to the building of management of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the delegation met with Dr Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy, chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and a number of officials from the management of the zone and the companies operating at Duqm. The visit also included a field visit to several projects in the zone including Oman Dry Dock, Port of Duqm, Emdaad logistics, and Duqm Refinery.

FORUM

Oman-UAE economic forum to kick-off today

DUBAI: The second edition of the Oman-UAE economic forum will kick off today in Dubai. The event comes on the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai. Mohsin bin Khamis Al Balushi, Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Commissioner General of Oman at Expo 2020 Dubai, said that Oman's delegation in the forum will be chaired by Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with the participation of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (Opaz), The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Oman Investment Authority and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The forum aims to strengthen cooperation, discuss investment opportunities in the targeted sectors, and increase the volume of trade exchange between the two



countries. The two sides will present several working papers during the forum. Moreover, a set of economically feasible investment opportunities will be offered during the event. The forum's programme includes bilateral meetings between major companies from both sides in sectors of priority and common interest in a bid to discuss opportunities for cooperation and investment. The indicators of trade exchange for 2020 showed remarkable growth between the two countries. The volume of trade exchange exceeded OMR4 billion. The investments of UAE companies are based on various sectors, foremost of which are construction, trade, and services. -ONA

AGREEMENT

Dhofar Insurance customers can now pay insurance premium through Khedmah app

Times News Service

MUSCAT: As part of the newly introduced service in the Khedmah app for collecting vehicle insurance premiums, Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) Khedmah, recently signed another collaboration agreement with Dohfar Insurance. Said Ahmed Safrar, CEO of OIFC and Sonil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance, signed the agreement. Customers of Dhofar Insurance Company can now pay their insurance premiums for the renewal of their vehicle insurance thanks to a direct link between Khedmah and Dhofar Insurance Company's systems. New clients can also use the app or the website to get competitive quotations from the insurance provider and apply for vehicle insurance. Such digital services are known to provide ease and convenience, allowing customers to make transactions or browse for options



COLLABORATION: Said Ahmed Safrar, CEO of OIFC and Sonil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance, signed the agreement. - Supplied picture

from the comfort of their homes. For Dhofar Insurance customers, downloading the Khedmah App on their smartphones or logging onto the website, can now reduce their need to visit the branches. This will save them time, effort and money.

At the same time, they can avail the integrated services that Khedmah provides such as paying their electricity, water and telecommunications bills, recharging the phone, electricity prepaid meter bills, entertainment recharge as well as making payments to the

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and other solutions. Khedmah constantly seeks to keep abreast with current market trends to provide its customers with services that suit their dynamic lifestyle and make their life easier. The latest tie-up with Dhofar Insurance Company is a testament to this approach and it reflects OIFC's constant efforts in analysing market trends as well as customer requirements who are looking for fast and safe ways to finalise their daily needs from the comfort of their home or office. Khedmah provides for them an integrated platform they can utilise to benefit from a plethora of smart and seamless solutions. Along with Khedmah's wide array of solutions, Customers interested in subscribing to Awasr and Omantel home internet products as well as Omantel postpaid packages can also easily do so at any of the Khedmah branch offices.

TAUT BALANCE

Oil prices hold steady as Russia-Ukraine tension cools

SINGAPORE: Oil prices steadied on Wednesday after retreating more than 3 per cent in the previous session as investors gauged the impact of easing Russia-Ukraine tension against a taut balance between tight global supplies and recovering fuel demand. Brent traded at \$93.19 a barrel at 02:53 GMT, down 10 cents, having slid 3.3 per cent overnight after Russia announced a partial pullback of its troops near Ukraine, yet to be verified by the United States. US West Texas Intermediate crude also held steady and last traded at \$92.13 at 0247GMT, after the contract ended Tuesday's session down 3.6 per cent. Both benchmarks had hit their highest since September 2014 on Monday. -BNA

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MARKET

MSM index ends higher

Muscat Desalination, up 9.91 per cent, was the top gainer while, Takaful Oman, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 4,090.72 points, up by 0.21 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended down by 0.64 per cent at 497.19 points. Muscat Desalination, up 9.91 per cent, was the top gainer while, Takaful Oman, down 10.00 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of United Finance were the most active in terms of the number of shares traded while Oman Refreshment was the most active in terms of turnover.

A total number of 659 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR5.46 million, with more than 24.4 million shares changing hands. Out of 51 traded securities, 18 advanced, 8 declined and 25 remained unchanged. At the session close, domestic investors were net buyers for OMR274,000 while

foreign investors were net sellers for OMR185,000 followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR89,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 6489.16 points, up by 0.12 per cent. Prices of United Finance, Vision Insurance, Muscat Finance, Global Financial Investments, and National Bank Oman were up by 4.62 per cent, 4.04 per cent, 3.39 per cent, 2.86 per cent, and 2.2 per cent respectively. Industrial Index closed at 5749.97 points, up by 0.59 per cent. Prices of Dhofar Cattle Feed, National Aluminium, Oman Fisheries, Oman Cables Industry, and Jazeera Steel Products were up by 7.02 per cent, 5.56 per cent, 5 per cent, 3.11 per cent, and 2.13 per cent respectively.

Services Index was up by 0.58 per cent before closing at 1647.17 points. — **United Securities**

MUSCAT SECURITIES MARKET

OMAN STOCKS

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	4,090.72	4,082.50	4,090.72	4,081.98	8.74	0.21
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,489.94	6,476.52	6,489.16	6,481.28	7.88	0.12
Industry Index	5,751.10	5,713.85	5,749.96	5,716.15	33.81	0.59
Services Index	1,647.17	1,639.25	1,647.17	1,637.59	9.58	0.58
MSX Shariah Index	497.82	497.20	497.20	500.42	-3.22	-0.64
MSX TR INDEX	4,924.19	4,914.29	4,924.19	4,913.67	10.52	0.21

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
24,408,791	5,461,679	659	22,023,579,551	18	8	25	51

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PD	LAST BD	LAST OFFER	PDA VALUE	MARKET CAP
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REGULAR MARKET

OM000000920	VISION INSURANCE	60,200	6,188	8	0.100	0.105	0.100	0.103	0.099	0.004	4.040	0.102	0.102	0.104	0.100	10,300,000
OM000000180	MUSCAT FINANCE	1,095,288	66,422	58	0.060	0.061	0.060	0.061	0.059	0.002	3,390	0.061	0.060	0.063	0.100	18,735,926
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDSTR	12,500	11,611	4	0.900	0.932	0.900	0.928	0.900	0.028	3,111	0.932	0.932	0.932	0.100	83,241,600
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INV	13,735	1,287	3	0.083	0.094	0.083	0.094	0.082	0.012	2,174	0.094	0.094	0.094	0.100	8,460,000
OM0000000178	JAZEERA STEEL PROD	37,500	14,385	5	0.382	0.384	0.382	0.384	0.376	0.008	2,128	0.384	0.378	0.384	0.100	47,960,817
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SER	1,370,035	613,193	27	0.448	0.450	0.444	0.444	0.444	0.004	0,901	0.450	0.404	0.448	0.100	105,911,680
OM0000003988	QOERDOO	251,013	90,352	5	0.358	0.360	0.358	0.360	0.358	0.002	0,559	0.360	0.358	0.360	0.100	234,339,923
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	15,939	6,922	2	0.428	0.428	0.428	0.428	0.428	0.002	0,469	0.428	0.424	0.428	0.100	94,160,000
OM0000000418	RAYSUT CEMENT	350	64	1	0.184	0.184	0.184	0.192	0.192	0.008	0,000	0.184	0.188	0.194	0.100	38,400,000
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	1,968	468	3	0.234	0.235	0.234	0.236	0.236	0.002	0,000	0.235	0.233	0.235	0.100	78,085,960
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	3,273,700	265,442	99	0.082	0.082	0.080	0.081	0.081	0.001	0,000	0.081	0.080	0.081	0.100	16,200,000
OM0000002786	BANK MUSCAT	838,930	432,833	55	0.516	0.518	0.514	0.516	0.516	0.000	0,000	0.518	0.480	0.518	0.100	1,001,844,428,993
OM0000003000	AI MAHA MARKTING	30,000	20,600	4	0.688	0.688	0.684	0.688	0.688	0.000	0,000	0.684	0.684	0.684	0.100	47,472,000
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	286,616	213,997	15	0.736	0.800	0.736	0.800	0.800	0.000	0,000	0.736	0.736	0.736	0.100	6,000,000,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INT BANK	66,871	7,222	2	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.000	0,000	0.108	0.108	0.111	0.100	322,928,727
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	25,000	7,460	2	0.300	0.300	0.298	0.298	0.300	-0.002	-0.667	0.298	0.298	0.300	0.100	199,172,897
OM0000003077	AL OMANIYA FINIS	30,000	4,020	1	0.134	0.134	0.134	0.134	0.135	-0.001	-0.741	0.134	0.133	0.137	0.100	39,119,313
OM0000006005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	1,055,000	481,184	17	0.460	0.460	0.452	0.456	0.464	-0.008	-1.724	0.452	0.452	0.460	0.100	25,080,000
Total	18	8,444,675	2,242,821	309												

Parallel Market

OM0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	1,001,657	121,781	26	0.122	0.122	0.115	0.122	0.111	0.011	9,910	0.122	0.122	0.116	0.100	18,977,149
OM0000001301	DHOFAH CATTLE	5,100	309	2	0.060	0.061	0.060	0.061	0.057	0.004	7,018	0.061	0.061	0.062	0.100	4,931,850
OM0000000319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	136,625	12,997	13	0.095	0.098	0.093	0.095	0.090	0.005	5,556	0.093	0.091	0.095	0.100	3,189,288
OM0000001566	OMAN FISHERIES	1,062,038	66,790	45	0.060	0.066	0.059	0.063	0.060	0.003	5,000	0.066	0.066	0.066	0.100	7,875,000
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	8,604,063	582,946	137	0.066	0.069	0.066	0.068	0.065	0.003	4,615	0.069	0.069	0.071	0.100	23,741,820
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV H	534,017	88,338	21	0.069	0.072	0.069	0.072	0.070	0.002	2,857	0.071	0.071	0.073	0.100	14,400,000
OM0000001485	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	7,000	1,302	2	0.186	0.186	0.186	0.186	0.182	0.004	2,188	0.186	0.186	0.187	0.100	302,434,022
OM0000004925	ALBATTINAH POWER	7,000	343	1	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.048	0.001	2,083	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.100	33,089,484
OM0000004735	SEMOCORP SALALAH	53,304	3,991	13	0.074	0.078	0.074	0.075	0.074	0.001	1,351	0.075	0.073	0.075	0.100	71,592,896
OM0000009848	NATIONAL FINANCE	20,000	2,360	3	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.117	0.001	8,855	0.118	0.113	0.118	0.100	63,865,194
OM0000001426	OMAN REFRESHMENT	1,194,630	1,779,999	1	1.490	1.490	1.490	1.750	0.000	0.000	1,490	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.100	75,500,000
OM0000001517	HISCB BANK OMAN	310	30	0	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.000	0,000	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.100	196,030,653
OM0000002275	SHELL OMAN MRK	30	27	1	0.892	0.892	0.892	0.896	0.896	0.000	0,000	0.892	0.000	0.892	0.100	55,120,000
OM0000002549	BANK DHOFAH	275,000	32,450	5	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.118	0.000	0,000	0.118	0.118	0.129	0.100	353,569,469
OM0000002572	OMAN OIL MARKETING	80,000	69,760	6	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.000	0,000	0.092	0.064	0.092	0.100	9,285,420
OM0000002804	ASAFAA FOODS	2,117	286	1	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.000	0,000	0.135	0.132	0.135	0.100	16,200,000
OM0000003821	GALFAR ENGINEER	300,297	21,221	17	0.072	0.072	0.070	0.071	0.071	0.000	0,000	0.071	0.070	0.072	0.100	14,412,038
OM0000003711	SOHAR POWER	49,431	2,076	6	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.042	0.001	0,000	0.042	0.042	0.044	0.100	9,285,420
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	95,000	4,180	5	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.044	0.000	0,000	0.044	0.044	0.047	0.100	8,783,968
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	734,000	71,932	7	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.000	0,000	0.098	0.097	0.098	0.100	219,221,397
OM0000004788	MADINA TAKAFUL	44,000	4,184	6	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.000	0,000	0.098	0.098	0.098	0.100	16,625,000
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	3,000	147	2	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.000	0,000	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.100	35,005,911
OM0000005983	PHOENIX POWER	2,148	107	2	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.050	0.000	0,000	0.050	0.048	0.049	0.100	73,130,073
OM0000007407	DHOFAH GENERATING	750	41	1	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.051	0.051	0.000	0,000	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.100	11,334,240
OM0000001881	OMAN EMIRATES HO	53,000	3,460	4	0.070	0.070	0.069	0.069	0.070	-0.001	-1.429	0.069	0.069	0.069	0.100	8,409,375
OM0000004689	SHANGYAH DESALIN	1,390,892	194,684	9	0.137	0.140	0.137	0.140	0.143	-0.003	-2.098	0.140	0.140	0.137	0.100	13,692,302
OM0000001159	OMAN NAT ENG	37,200	4,678	3	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.115	0.118	-0.003	-2.542	0.114	0.117	0.114	0.100	14,860,000
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	10,999	693	1	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.070	-0.007	-10.000	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.100	6,300,000
Total	28	15,700,219	3,020,712	340												

DATA

India's mineral production rose by 16% during April-December 2021

NEW DELHI: India's mineral production rose by 16 per cent year-on-year during the April-December period of the current financial year, led by impressive growth in the output of magnesite, gold, bauxite, lignite and natural gas, the government data showed.

The index of mineral produc-

tion of the mining and quarrying sector for December 2021 at 120.3, was 2.6 per cent higher as compared to the level in December 2020, according to data released by the Ministry of Mines.

As per the provisional statistics of the Indian Bureau of Mines, the cumulative growth for the period

April-December 2021-22 over the corresponding period of the previous year stood at 16 per cent.

The production of important minerals showing positive growth during December 2021 over December 2020 includes Magnesite, Gold, Bauxite, Lignite, Natural gas (utilised), coal and Chromite. — **ANI**

CHIP SHORTAGES

South Korea's automobile production, exports and sales drop

SEOUL: South Korea's automobile production, exports and sales all decreased last month due to suspension of operation at some factories and global automotive chip shortages.

However, exports exceed \$4 billion for three consecutive months with strong sales of eco-friendly vehicles. According to the 'Automobile Industry Trends in January 2022' report released by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy on the 15th, automobile production last month was amounted to 271,054 units, down 13.7 per cent year-on-year. The decrease of production was affected by the suspension of operation at Hyundai Motor's Asan plant, GM Korea's Changwon plant, and Bupyeong plant to build production facilities for new cars.

The Ministry of Industry said, "It is analysed that the production decline was highly affected by Hyundai Motor and GM Korea's factory shutdown, which account for about 53.3 per cent of total domestic automobile production."

By company, Hyundai and Kia produced 119,621 units and 115,941 units. — **ANI**

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20 MINUTES OF DAILY EXERCISE AT 70 MAY STAVE OFF MAJOR HEART DISEASE LATER

Exercise at an older age is always recommended so that older people can avoid contracting diseases due to lack of physical movement. Now, research has suggested that twenty minutes of daily moderate to vigorous exercise in early old age (seventy - seventy-five) may best stave off major heart disease, including heart failure, in late old age (eighty plus).

The research was published online in the journal 'Heart'.

The findings reinforced the maxim of 'better late than never,' when it came to exercise, but earlier on in older age is better still, concluded a linked editorial.

It's no secret that physical activity is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease and a longer life, irrespective of gender and ethnicity, with the benefits accruing in tandem with the effort expended.

But relatively few studies have looked exclusively at whether exercise in later life can help ward off heart disease and stroke in old age.

To plug this knowledge gap, the researchers drew on data from the Progetto Veneto Anziani (ProVA), a study of 3099 older Italians (sixty-five and above).

Initial assessments, including a detailed medical history, physical examination, scans, and a battery of blood tests were carried out between 1995 and 1997, with two further assessments four and seven years later.

At the start of the study, women were more likely than men to have four-plus coexisting conditions, with

a higher prevalence of osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, and chronic kidney disease; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes were more common among the men.

Participants filled in questionnaires on their physical activity levels at each of the time points. Moderate physical activity included walking, bowls, and fishing, while vigorous physical activity included gardening, gym work-outs, cycling, dancing, and swimming.

Those whose physical activity added up to twenty or more minutes a day were defined as active; those who clocked up less than this were defined as inactive. Men were more likely to be physically active than women.

Changes in physical activity patterns were defined as: stable-low (inactive-inactive); high-decreasing (active-inactive); low-increasing (inactive-active); and stable-high (active-active).

Other potentially key background information on household income, educational attainment, number of household members, and smoking and drinking was also collected.

The health of all the participants was then tracked through linkage to hospital discharge records and death certification up to the end of December 2018. The final analysis included 2754 participants with complete data, of whom 1398 were women (60 per cent).

During the monitoring period, 1037 new diagnoses of heart disease, heart failure, and stroke were made.

Increasing levels of physical ac-

tivity as well as maintaining an active lifestyle over time were associated with lower risks of cardiovascular disease and death in both men and women.

The largest reduction in risk was observed for new cases of coronary heart disease and heart failure in late old age. No significant association between physical activity and stroke was observed.

Most of the participants had stable active physical activity patterns over time. Patterns of stable-high physical activity were associated with a significantly (52 per cent) lower risk of cardiovascular disease among men compared with those with stable-low patterns.

The greatest benefits seemed to occur at the age of seventy. The risk was only marginally lower at the age of seventy-five, and no lower at the age of eighty-eight five, suggesting that improving physical activity earlier in old age might have the most impact, said the researchers.

A J-shaped curve for exercise length was also observed, with the sharpest reduction in heart disease and heart failure associated with a period of between twenty and forty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

While the observed associations were strongest among men, the researchers emphasized, "Women doing more physical activity had consistently lower incidence rates of almost all cardiovascular outcomes despite the fact that the risk reduction did not reach statistical significance, but when considering overall mortality, risks were significantly reduced."

This was an observational study,

and as such, it can't establish cause. The researchers acknowledged that the study relied on participant recall, that physical activity levels were subjectively assessed, and that no data were available on mid-life physical activity levels, all of which might have influenced cardiovascular risk profiles in late life.

Nevertheless, they concluded, "These results suggest that public health policies should be targeted at promoting or beginning physical activity in mid-and early late life, given a probable greater effectiveness in reducing cardiovascular risks."

"At least twenty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day should be recommended to achieve the greatest cardiovascular benefits."

In a linked editorial, Drs Enrico Fabris and Gianfranco Sinagra of the University of Trieste, Italy, explained that physical activity helps to improve arterial blood flow and may reduce its stickiness and so the formation of blood clots.

"However, the detailed mechanisms by which [physical activity] can reduce the future risk of [cardiovascular disease] remain not fully understood," they pointed out.

"The favourable effect of [physical activity] may be simply explained by its capability of slowing down the atherosclerosis process through a better control of blood pressure, blood glucose level, and lipid profile."

But the findings showed, "that 'movement is medicine' also in late life. Even a small amount of [physical activity] may confer beneficial effects in older people, but if undertaken early rather than late," they concluded. -ANI



BEIJING 2022

MEMORABLE MOMENTS AT THE WINTER GAMES

The Olympic Games are the biggest stage in sports. This year’s winter edition has already offered joy, despair, medals and tricks. DW has picked out some of the highlights of Beijing 2022 so far.



Between the cultures
“In America I’m American, in China I’m Chinese.” Eileen Gu repeats this sentence like a mantra at almost every press conference. The 18-year-old is already the face of the Games, and was so even before the start in Beijing. Born and raised in the United States, the ski freestyler has been competing for China for some time and won gold in the big air competition in Beijing on February 8.



Dazzling debut
Kaillie Humphries on her way to winning the first-ever gold in the monobob on February 14. The discipline was added for the Beijing Olympics and is exclusive to female athletes. The individual version of bobsleigh joins the preexisting two-person and four-man events.



Magnifique!
French duo Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron broke the world record to win the “medaille d’or” in the ice dance, or “patinage artistique,” on February 14. The pair have known each other since the age of 9, when Papadakis’ mother, an ice dancing instructor, paired them together at their ice skating club. Seventeen years later, they’ve made history in Beijing.

Brotherly love
Norwegian brothers Johannes Thingnes Boe and Tarjei Boe both finished on the podium for the 10 km biathlon sprint race on February 12. Johannes, left, took the gold as Tarjei took the bronze. “It’s a fairy tale, to be on the podium with Johannes,” said Tarjei. “It is big for me... there is a lot of joy but also relief... to share this together both as a team and for the rest of our lives.”



Crucial crash
There was devastation for Japan in the women’s speed skating as Nana Takagi (right) slipped during the team pursuit on February 15. Japan were on track for the gold medal before the incident, with Canada taking advantage to grab the win. Her teammates Miho Takagi (left) and Ayano Sato (center) waited for her before crossing the line together to win silver.



A legend bows out
Saying goodbye to a legend: Shaun White has been a snowboarding pioneer for the past two decades, from winning gold at the 2006 Turin Winter Games to inspiring the next generation of stars. His fifth and final Olympics ended in heartbreak, as a fall on his final run on February 11 saw him miss out on the podium. But he retires with three golds, and a legacy that can never be tarnished.

FEATURE



HOW TO PREVENT THE PLANET FROM BECOMING AN UNINHABITABLE DESERT

Deserts across the world are rapidly expanding as more and more soils dry out and lose their fertility. How can we breathe life back into desolate sandy landscapes and green the desert? Here are four ideas.

Stretching across Mongolia and China's northwest is the fastest growing desert on Earth. It's already 1.2 million square kilometres in size, but each year the Gobi Desert adds around another 6,000 to that number.

As it expands, it devours grasslands, swallows whole villages and turns vast swathes of fertile land into an uninhabitable wasteland. Tens of thousands of people have already been forced to relocate, and only a few thousand can still live in the region.

Desertification — the process whereby previously fertile soil degrades into a desert — can be caused by natural processes. But humans play a decisive role in its rapid spread.

There are four main reasons for deteriorating soils worldwide: Excessive water usage in industrial agriculture, more frequent and severe droughts, deforestation, and the overgrazing of grassland from livestock.

Previously fertile and lush landscapes are turning into hostile, sandy regions that threaten the livelihoods of around one billion people worldwide, as well as the survival of millions of species. Projections suggest that by the middle of this century, a quarter of all soil on Earth will be impacted by desertification.

It's a grim outlook. But the good news is that it can be reversed.

Harnessing torrential rain in the desert

One promising solution is found near Mecca. It's called the Al Baydha project. There, experts in desert agriculture have developed a system to bring desolate soils back to life with the help of torrential rain.

When it rains in Saudi Arabia, a huge amount of water often falls in a short space of time — as was the case in April 2021 when entire cities were briefly flooded. But it's difficult for soils to store water when it comes all at once.

"We thought, if we can get that water into the ground, it could be a sustainable source of water, even if it doesn't rain for 20 months," said Neil Spackman, an expert in regenerative agriculture

and former director of the Al Baydha Project.

Together with villagers living in the area, the agricultural experts built dams and terraces along the rock walls that border the valley in western Saudi Arabia, along with kilometer-long ditches. Now when it rains, the water collects and is directed to where it is needed and where it can slowly seep into the ground. This style of irrigation works all over the world and was used by the Incas in South America centuries ago.

Experts initially used artificial irrigation to kickstart this natural cycle in Saudi Arabia. But the trick was that significantly more water was put into the soil than was taken out. Where there was once just sand and stone, native trees, shrubs and grasses started to grow again — even surviving a 30-month long drought without irrigation.

How renewable energies make it rain

Not far away from Saudi Arabia, countries in North Africa are experimenting with technology to prevent desertification taking over, too.

At more than nine million square kilometres, the Sahara is the largest desert on Earth, and like the Gobi, it continues to grow — in some areas almost 50 kilometres every year. The regions that surround the Sahara are arid, but alive — though perhaps not for long, as human destruction of fertile soils means they are more threatened by desertification than anywhere else in the world. Poverty, water shortages and land ownership conflicts are all made worse by the constant threat of environmental degradation.

That's where solar panels and wind farms come in — these are another potential solution to stopping the desert from taking over.

How? By making it rain.

It works like this: The black surface of the solar panels heats the air, which then rises higher into the atmosphere. Likewise, the rotation of thousands of wind turbines pushes the air upwards. "When these air masses reach higher altitudes, they cool [...] So it's colder and the moisture condenses, becomes rain and falls down," says Safa Mote, a physicist at the Uni-



versity of Maryland and co-author of a study on the topic.

Experts estimate that if one fifth of the Sahara Desert was used for solar and wind farms, it would generate about five centimeters more rain per year in the south of the Sahara. That may not sound like much, but it could increase the region's plant cover by 20 per cent and boost agriculture enormously — a win-win for people and the environment.

According to Mote, a solar and wind farm of that size could produce four times as much electricity in a single year as is consumed worldwide today. That could help African countries become more sustainable. If there is the political will to get behind the project, the physicist is convinced that the gigantic implementation costs of an estimated \$20 trillion (€17.5 trillion) would be manageable.

Reversing desertification

Another, nature-based way of making the desert

fertile again is being tested in China. And it's already seen success.

Only a few decades ago, deserts in China were growing by 10,000 square kilometers per year, according to the country's State Forestry and Grassland Administration. Today, they are shrinking by more than 2,000 square kilometers a year.

But how?

In 1988, people started planting trees in the Kubuqi Desert northwest of Beijing to protect the transport routes of a salt mine. Over the past decades, this has developed into one of the most successful reforestation programs in the world.

Rather than just planting trees in the usual fashion, special water jets were developed to plant the trees in the sand dunes. These jets drill holes in the sand and simultaneously water the young cuttings. "This has reduced the planting time from ten minutes to ten seconds, a very efficient and important method," says Barron Joseph Orr, Lead Scientist for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

In Kubuqi, farmers also put straw rolls on the dunes to protect young plants from the wind.

The new grasslands now serve as grazing and cultivation areas for farmers, who grow liquorice and other herbs that fare well in arid climates and are in high demand for traditional Chinese medicine.

The greening of the Kubuqi Desert has even had positive impacts as far away as Beijing — some 800 kilometres from the desert — where air pollution from sandstorms has since decreased significantly.

So, can the right technology fix desertification?

It is possible to revive degraded soils and vegetation, and to restore disrupted water cycles — be it with nature-based methods or using high-tech strategies.

But the costs and effort involved are too high to transform all the world's desertified areas back into healthy soils.

Experts say the only way to prevent fertile soils from drying out and deserts from spreading is to stop the relentless exploitation of soils and overuse of finite water sources. -w



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ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat trains its branch employees in Arabic sign language

In collaboration with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired, the bank has been identifying branches, which serve the maximum number of hearing-impaired and speech-impaired persons, and accordingly training a number of employees in sign language over the past few years

MUSCAT: Financial inclusion is an important aspect of the growth and development of economies around the world. Hence, in line with its commitment to deliver long-term benefits to Omani society and the nation, Bank Muscat has always extended strong support to initiatives that promote the welfare and financial inclusion of disabled persons.

Recently, the bank announced that it has trained a number of its employees at different branches across the Sultanate in Arabic sign language to improve service delivery and facilitate their inclusion into mainstream economic activities. In collaboration with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired, the bank has been identifying branches, which serve the maximum number of hearing-impaired and speech-impaired



persons, and accordingly training a number of employees in sign language over the past few years. At present as many as 93 bank employees have completed two levels of the Sign Language course in order to better serve customers. Speaking on the occasion, Said Salim Al Afi, General Manager –

Human Resources and Administration, said: “Bank Muscat has always been a pioneer in promoting financial inclusivity. We are very happy to continue our partnership with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired and to train our employees in sign language so as to promote greater participa-

tion in economic activities by all sections of our society. Employees who complete these courses are able to communicate effectively with customers with hearing and speech disabilities, and understand their various financial needs, thereby ensuring that we are able to better serve them, every day. Going ahead, the bank will continue its efforts for greater all round financial inclusivity, which is a key enabler of the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat has been undertaking many measures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In 2021, the bank contributed a number of wheelchairs and electric beds to persons with severe disabilities in partnership with the Oman Association for the Disabled.

The bank also recently contributed laptops and BrailleSense devices to visually-impaired students at Sohar University and hearing aids to the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired.

Bank Muscat had earlier sup-

ported the construction of a playground at the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre for children with severe disabilities and is also at present helping provide a sports field at the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. The bank has also previously installed a special ATM with a special transaction flow for blind and visually-impaired people on the premises of the head office of the Al Noor Association of the Blind. Also, special access ramps and other arrangements for easy access have been made available at different branches and ATMs in Oman.

Financial inclusion is very important to Omani society and the Renewed Renaissance of Oman. Bank Muscat is constantly innovating to improve and enhance inclusivity through its various CSR and sustainability programmes. It must be noted that the bank has been honoured in the past by the Ministry of Social Development, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Fourth Oman Forum for Partnership and Social Responsibility for its efforts in this regard.

NEW SUV



Maserati Family Fleet: Grecale takes to streets

MODENA: A special event: Grecale is on the road ahead of the Global Première.

Grecale's energy is unstoppable and the new SUV is already covering many miles with the Maserati Family at the wheel: the “Everyday Exceptional” already forms part of the everyday lives of the Grecale's designers, makers and those who have made it a reality.

This time, the Brand has se-

lected a new look for the light camouflage featured on the cars of the Maserati Family Fleet: a series of messages offers a preview of the Grecale's technical specifications.

The camouflage features just one main message: “I'm the Maserati Grecale. I can't tell you much more”. Everyone's questions will be answered and all of the missing information will be provided on 22 March. Stay tuned.

OFFER

Own Toyota Fortuner with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The Toyota Fortuner is now even more exciting to own with exclusive benefits. The benefits include 1-year insurance or cash gift instead of Insurance from OMR 250 up to OMR 300. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply.) The campaign is valid up to March 9. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The powerful Fortuner is equipped with Petrol Engines that include a 2.7 Litre Four-Cylinder Engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque. For even more exciting experiences, the 4.0 Litre V6 Engine churns out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of Torque. The 6-speed Automatic Transmission, available as a standard option, provides thrilling acceleration.

Rugged and adroit, the Fortuner also is known for its high standards on the inside. Premium Leather Seats, Leather and Wood finished Steering Wheel with Paddle Shifts, Cool Glove Box, Cruise Control and a whole bunch of other goodies augment its interior ambience.

Toyota Fortuner has a powerful Air Conditioner. Other innovative touches include a Navigation System. The Rear View Camera ensures peace of mind when Re-



verse Parking. The 6-speaker Audio System enhances its harmonious ambience. And to add to the convenience, there is a Power Back Door System which adds to the sheer convenience.

The Fortuner is equipped with Comprehensive Safety Systems to protect its occupants. These include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) that prevents the tyres from locking during braking.

The Fortuner is equipped with SRS Driver Airbag, SRS Front Passenger Airbag, Side Airbag, Curtain Airbag and SRS Knee Airbag (driver only). In terms of seatbelts, three-point Emergency Locking Retractor (ELR) seatbelts are equipped. When the impact is experienced during a collision, the Seatbelt Locks to restrain the passenger. Other reassuring safety features include the

Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

Specifications of vehicles imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the In Oman, the nationwide parts and service network of Saud Bahwan Automotive supports Toyota's outstanding product quality. No wonder today, 'Toyota is one of the most trusted and well-known brands.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY LEVEL

Oman Oil Industry Supplies records new achievement



MUSCAT: Oman Oil Industry Supplies & Services Company accomplished a new achievement in the level of occupational safety within the company by recording more than 3 consecutive years without any lost time injuries.

The company celebrated this occasion in the presence of the senior management from ARA Petroleum alongside a group of contractors approved by the company.

Commenting on this achievement, Laurentiu Popa, General Manager encouraged all employees of the company and as well as of the contracting companies to adhere to the application of the highest standards of occupational safety to prevent any harm to the company's

employees. This will contribute to ensuring the return of all employees to their homes safely after performing their daily duties.

“This achievement reflects the keenness of Oman Oil Industry Supplies & Services Company in applying the highest standards of health and safety in all its departments to preserve the health and safety of its workers. The company reviews and develops these standards periodically to include all potential risks and mitigate them to provide a safe work environment across various work sites,” he added.

The company is one of the leading Omani companies that provides chemical, fire & safety, mechanical, instrumentation services.

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