

His Majesty issues 5 Royal Decrees

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued five Royal Decrees. Royal Decree No 69/2021 transfers to the Diwan of Royal Court the affiliation of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. Article (1) states that the affiliation of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science (SQHCCS) shall be transferred to the Diwan of Royal Court, to which all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of SQHCCS shall also be transferred, and so do the employees of the SQHCCS, along with their current financial grades. **DETAILS ON P5**



VISIT AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE VARIOUS AREAS OF INTEREST

SAUDI CROWN PRINCE ARRIVES

MUSCAT: HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, arrived in the Sultanate of Oman on Monday on an official visit lasting two days.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik led the welcoming party for the Saudi Crown Prince. When the jet of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the

Sultan met the Royal guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his official delegation a pleasant stay in his second home the Sultanate of Oman.

Along with His Majesty the Sultan, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman was received by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court,

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior (Head of the Mission of Honour), Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Saudi Arabia, and Abdullah bin Saud al Anazi, Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and HRH Prince Mohammed bin

Salman headed to the main vehicle of the motorcade which, flanked by two rows of the Royal Guards of Oman, proceeded to Al Alam Palace.

The Saudi Crown Prince is accompanied during his visit to the Sultanate of Oman by an official delegation comprising HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Energy, HRH Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of

State, Member of the Council of Ministers, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Sports, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Interior, HRH Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of the National Guard, HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al Saud, Foreign Minister, HRH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saud, Minister of Culture, Dr Musaed

bin Mohammed al Aiban, Minister of State, Member of the Council of Ministers, Dr Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and acting Minister of Media, and Abdullah bin Saud al Anazi, the Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

The visit will be an opportunity to explore various areas of interest to the two countries and their peoples' aspiration for further progress and prosperity. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2&3



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq welcomes HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, upon his arrival in the Sultanate of Oman on Monday.

Saudi Crown Prince begins visit





OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

13 MoUs signed on economic cooperation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have signed thirteen memoranda of understanding to activate joint action in promising economic sectors.

The pacts, sealed by firms owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) with Saudi counterparts, in coincidence with the visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, KSA Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. They manifest the two countries leaderships' vision aimed to meet the aspirations of their peoples.

OQ signed three MoUs in the fields of petrochemicals, renewable energy and green hydrogen sector: the first with ACWA Power, the second with Aramco and the third with Sabic.

In the field of dry dock and logistic services, Asyad signed an MoU with a Saudi Shipping Company.

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Oman Mining Company signed an MoU with Saudi Mining Company to assess opportunities for explorations in the mining sector.

Omran signed an MoU with Dar Al Arkan Real Estate Development Company for the development of a tourism project in Yetti area.

MoUs on investment in the fisheries sector were signed by Oman Fisheries Company and Naqua Fisheries company.

In the field of securities, Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) signed an MoU with Tadawul Stock Exchange.

Oman Communications and Information Technology inked an MoU with the National Information Technology Company (NITC), while a contract was signed between Khazaen Economic City and Naqel Express of Saudi Arabia to set up a vehicle assembly unit in Khazaen City.

The MoUs also included an MoU between Oman Project Development Company and Alkhorayef Petroleum.

An MoU was signed in the field of entrepreneurship by Oqal Oman and its Saudi counterpart.

Oman Integrated Logistics Company signed an MoU with Saudi Arabia's Al Zajel company to develop cooperation in the field of logistics and transport.

— ONA



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Meeting shares experiences in information programmes

MUSCAT: A joint meeting was held on Monday by the Government Communication Centre and its Saudi counterpart on the sidelines of the current visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister

and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The meeting discussed ways of exchanging experiences and expertise and exploring various aspects of cooperation. The two sides studied common areas of

specialty and approaches that serve and complete the systemic government communication.

The visiting delegation explored strategic projects now being undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed the

Saudi side's communication practices and its experience in developing a unified information programme.

The Saudi side was represented by Dr Abdullah al Maghlooth, Undersecretary of the Saudi Information

Ministry for Communication and official spokesman of the Ministry, Ibrahim al Shaalan, Director of the Government Communication Centre, and Majid al Hatheel, Senior Public Relations Specialist.

— ONA



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



OSBC plays a significant role in consolidating communication between the two countries' government and private sectors.

OSBC strives to broaden and deepen partnership

MUSCAT: The Omani-Saudi Business Council (OSBC) held a meeting here on Monday during which it discussed the latest steps taken to form sectoral committees representing the two sides.

Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that the meeting, the third this year, coincides with the visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to the Sultanate of Oman.

The visit, Al Saleh observed, comes in pursuance of the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the KSA,

Investment and commercial exchange opportunities are abundant and requires the two sides to rally efforts to activate and streamline cooperation

AJLAN BIN ABDULAZIZ AL AJLAN

Chairman of Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry

to develop bilateral relations and achieve the desired level of economic integration between

their countries.

The OSBC plays a significant role in consolidating communication between the two countries' government and private sectors, said Al Saleh.

The OSBC went a long way in its strive to deepen partnership between the two sides and this was evinced through the formation of joint sectoral committees covering the sectors of energy and mining, food security, technology, logistics, industry, constructions and services—all to operate within Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030.

Meanwhile, Ajlan bin Abdulaziz al Ajlan, Chairman of Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said that investment and commercial exchange opportunities are

abundant and that this requires the two sides to rally efforts to activate and streamline cooperation.

On his turn, Shaikh Ali bin Hamad al Kalbani, Head of Omani side at the OSBC, said that, over the next few days, sectoral committees will hold direct meetings to forge joint visions about investment projects and submit the same to the respective ministers. His Saudi counterpart, Nassir bin Said al Hajiri, said that cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia is not limited to specific areas; it expands to cover a wide spectrum of matters of interest for the two countries and reflects their deep-rooted history.

Al Hajiri expressed his confidence that the Omani-Saudi partnership will be a model of full-fledged cooperation. — **ONA**

50 years of modern ties

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are pressing ahead with the development of their decades-old modern relations to maximise benefits for the peoples of the two countries under the wise leaderships of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the KSA. The visit to the Sultanate of Oman by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of KSA, underpins the accomplishments of the state visit of His Majesty the Sultan to Saudi Arabia, which included the signing of agreements and the establishment of the Omani Saudi Coordination Council.

The Omani-Saudi Coordination Council will see to the sustainability and expansion of cooperation between the two countries, with great scopes for more agreements and memoranda of understanding. Over the past 50 years, the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia have signed a host of agreements, among them one on border demarcation inked on March 21, 1990. Their relations are marked by mutual respect and cooperation in various regional and international issues.

Abdullah bin Saud al Anzi, KSA Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, said that the visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman comes in reaffirmation of the depth of historical ties and that the visit will upgrade bilateral relations into wider horizons of cooperation.

Al Anzi told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the

visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Saudi Arabia and his meeting with King Salman earlier this year constitute a major shift forward in developing Oman-Saudi relations, whose modern foundations were laid down by late Sultan Qaboos bin Said upon his first visit to the Kingdom. “Today, that course of action is clear and pursued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham,” Al Anzi added.

The visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman ushers in a new era of advanced relations, said Al Anzi, noting that the two countries will cement their ties of cooperation within the framework of their development strategies — Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030, Al Anzi affirmed, noting that emphasis will be laid on investment and economic partnership, in addition to the fostering political relations, values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of others.

A key objective over the near future is the opening of the Rub Al Khali desert highway, which will expand the rate of land travel between the two countries, said Al Anzi.

The ambassador reiterated that the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia share common views on regional and global issues. The two countries share the noble values of Islam, reject terrorism and boost international efforts to establish peace in Yemen, said Al Anzi, noting that the Sultanate of Oman is a forerunner in peace and supports international and Saudi efforts for the realisation of a peaceful settlement in Yemen. — **ONA**

Business forum explore intensifying joint cooperation

The Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia share various potentials and common approaches for economic integration, among them Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040

MUSCAT: The Omani-Saudi Business Forum, held here on Monday, explored opportunities for joint cooperation between the two sides in economic and investment fields and scopes for forging agreements and strategic partnerships.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that “a manifestation of deep-rooted historical relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia and the keenness of their leaderships — His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, requires us to intensify efforts to meet the aspirations of the two countries’ peoples, notably the need to speed up joint projects that realise economic diversification and other goals”.

Al Saleh added that the



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inauguration of the desert highway between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia will pave the way for a new era of partnership, provide more direct access for the flow of goods and services and, generally, spruce up economic and commercial activities.

Meanwhile, Ajlan bin Abdulaziz al Ajlan, Chairman of the Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce

and Industry, said that the business forum “sets in pace a blessed approach espoused during July 11, 2021 Summit held in NEOM in Saudi Arabia by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The summit provides for continuous cooperation towards the expansion of areas of

cooperation in all fields and the utilisation of available investment opportunities in the business sectors”.

Al Ajlan pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia share various potentials and common approaches for economic integration, among them Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040.

Meanwhile, Azan al Busaidy of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion gave a presentation titled “Invest In Oman”, which portrayed the competitive business opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman and how economic growth gives impetus to endeavours of the private sector and entrepreneurs.

Azan said that the Sultanate

of Oman’s business climate is motivating and open to the world.

The presentation also touched on the Economic Stimulus Plan and the incentives it provides, including customs exemptions for investors, as well as free trade agreements already signed by the Sultanate of Oman and offering 50 opportunities for investment in the industry sector that stand at more than RO 207.8 million.

On his turn, Muneer al Muneeri of Oman Investment Authority presented a paper featuring the potential of the Investment Fund of Infrastructure projects (Rakeeza).

In another paper, Dr Badr al Munthri spoke about Oman Telecommunications and Information Technology Company, while Eng Khalid al Mahrooqi presented a paper about Khazaen Economic City.

Nassir bin Said al Hajiri, Head of the Saudi side at the Omani Saudi Business Council, presented a paper about the activities of Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company, stressing that the petrochemical industries sector provides a good alternative for crude oil export. In the meantime, Hakeem al Rasheed spoke about the experiences of Alam Company in supporting digital progress in Saudi Arabia. — **ONA**

HM ORDER CONFERRED ON AL FARSI



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Renaissance of Oman (2nd Class) Order on Abdullah Shaban al Farsi, Head of the Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Diwan of Royal Court, in appreciation from His Majesty for Al Farsi's efforts during his tenure at the Diwan of Royal Court. The order was handed over by Sayyid Khalid Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received him at his office on Monday. — ONA

Saudi media delegation visits Information Ministry



MUSCAT: A media delegation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Monday visited the headquarters of the Ministry of Information on the sidelines of the visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of KSA, to the Sultanate of Oman.

The delegation toured various departments of the Information Ministry and was briefed about the role of media establishments in conveying a sound media message at the local and regional levels. The delegation also took note of the modern equipment, techniques and the media staff operating

in different print, audio, visual and electronic fields. The media delegation included Dr Khalid al Ghamdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for International Media Relations, Dr Fahd bin Hassan al Aqran, President of the Saudi Press Agency (SPA), representatives and editors-in-chief of various Saudi media establishments.

The Saudi delegation was received by Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Information Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Information and Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, the Ministry's Under-Secretary for Radio and Television, among other officials. — ONA

HM issues 5 Royal Decrees

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Royal Decree No 69/2021 transfers to the Diwan of Royal Court the affiliation of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science.

Article (1) states that the affiliation of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science (SQHCCS) shall be transferred to the Diwan of Royal Court, to which all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of SQHCCS shall also be transferred, and so do the employees of the SQHCCS, along with their current financial grades.

Article (2) cancels Royal Decree No 52/2012 on establishing the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. It also cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date

of issue.

Royal Decree No 70/2021 transfers the affiliation of the Environment Conservation Office from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Environment Authority.

Article (1) states that the affiliation of the Environment Conservation Office shall be transferred from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Environment Authority, to which all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of the Environment Conservation Office shall also be transferred, and so do the employees of the Environment Conservation Office, along with their current financial grades.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

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

Royal Decree No 71/2021 endorses the organisational

structure of the Diwan of Royal Court.

Article (1) endorses the organisational structure of the Diwan of Royal Court in accordance with the Annex attached to this decree.

Article (2) cancels all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

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

Royal Decree No 72/2021 cancels the National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation.

Article (1) states that all allocations, origins, rights, obligations and assets of the National Field Research Center for Environmental Conservation shall be transferred to the Diwan of Royal Court.

Article (2) transfers to the Diwan of Royal Court the employees of the National Field Research Center for

Environmental Conservation, along with their current financial grades.

Article (3) cancels the National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation. It also cancels all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

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

Royal Decree No 73/2021 appoints a Chairman for the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court.

Article (1) appoints Habib Mohammed al Riyami as Chairman of Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court, along with his current financial grade.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue. — ONA

SQU holds graduation ceremony

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, Chairperson of SQU Council, presided over the graduation ceremony of the 31st of students of the Sultan Qaboos University, at the open air theatre, on Monday.

Sayyid Dr Fahad bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), delivered a speech at the graduation ceremony in which he said that the Sultan Qaboos University, since its foundation by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has been a prospective project for the future of the Sultanate of Oman and has adopted an ambitious vision to meet the demand for

competent and qualified cadres.

The SQU vice-chancellor said: "Today we see the graduates of SQU assuming leadership positions in various fields and many of them are among the pillars of the renewed renaissance overseen by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and are leading the many institutions and also involved in the implementation of Oman Vision 2040."

The 31st batch comprises 2,969 graduates of bachelor's, diploma, master's and doctoral degrees.

A total of 1,498 students graduated on Monday from the colleges of Arts and Social Sciences, Economy and Political Sciences and engineering. — ONA



Arab justice ministers council meets

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs on Monday took part in the 37th session of the Council of Arab Justice Ministers.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the session, which was held at the Arab League premises in Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The meeting discussed a number of topics, notably the council's technical secretariat report on the updates regarding the implementation of decisions, recommendations and Arab agreements.

The ministers further discussed the Arab guidance draft project on preventing hate speech, and the Arab guidance draft project on protecting and supporting the elderly rights, among other relevant topics. — ONA

هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (the Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred on it by the Law for the Regulation and Privatization of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree (No.78/2004) (the Sector Law), proposes to grant OQ (SAOC) an Exemption Order to authorize undertaking the regulated activity of Generation and Transmission of electricity from its Production Facilities with maximum Production Capacity of (145 MW) for the purpose of its Self-Supply.

The Exemption Order to be granted to OQ (SAOC) will be effective from the grant date and shall be valid for a period of 15 years unless revoked pursuant to the Sector Law or the conditions of the Exemption Order. The draft Exemption Order has been placed in the Authority's Public Register and available for review at the offices of the Authority at the address mentioned below.

Any person has any objection to the grant of the Exemption Order shall submit details of their objection to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice pursuant to the provisions of Article (102) of the Sector Law.

Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights | Block No 9993 | Building .No. 95 | First Floor

Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair | P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
email: enquiries@apsr.om
+Tel: 9824609700
Fax: +968 24609701

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (57/2021)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Serial No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Inquires Submission	Deadline for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	34/2021/MM/PA-5 Recall-1	Hiring of Non-potable Water Tankers (5000 GLN) for Irrigation at Al-Seeb	25/- OMR	14/12/2021	20/12/2021	22/12/2021
2	35/2021/MM/PA-6 Recall-1	Hiring of Tankers to Provide Drinking Water and Sewage for Labour Camp at Al-Musfah - Bouwsher	25/- OMR	14/12/2021	20/12/2021	22/12/2021

- Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.
- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.
- Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.**
- Clarifications and support:**
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
 - For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Sayyid Asaad bids farewell to Russian ambassador

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Monday Dmitry Dugadkin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate of Oman from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people, which had enabled him to carry out his duty.

He wished His Majesty good health, happiness and long life, and the Sultanate of Oman further progress and growth under the wise leadership of His

Majesty.

On his turn, Sayyid Asaad expressed his utmost thanks to the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in serving relations between the Sultanate of Oman and his country. He wished him permanent success and the Russian people further progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at the Office of Sayyid Asaad. — ONA

Gen Numani receives ambassadors

MUSCAT: General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Monday Shaikh Jassim Abdulrahman al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed the advanced relations between the two countries and areas of the joint cooperation.

The two sides also exchanged views on topics of common interest.

Gen Al Numani also received in his office Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman; Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia to the Sultanate of Oman, and Ligia Maria Scherer, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meetings reviewed joint cooperation and means of promoting relations between the Sultanate of Oman and their respective countries.

— ONA



GCC commemorative coin gifted to HM



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), has received a hallmark commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a gift for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

The memento was delivered to HH Sayyid Taimour by Dr Mohammed Yousef al Hashel, Governor

of Kuwait Central Bank, when he received the latter in his office here on Monday.

The meeting touched on aspects of cooperation between the financial and banking sectors and ways to develop integration among GCC monetary systems.

The meeting was attended by Tahir bin Salim al Amri, CEO of the CBO, and Dr Sulaiman bin Abdullah al Harbi, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Sultanate of Oman and Cyprus review ties

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received here on Monday Kornelios Korneliou, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Republic of Cyprus.

The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Cyprus and discussed several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, Andreas Nikolaides, Ambassador of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman and officials from both sides.

POLITICAL TALKS

Meanwhile, the second round of political talks between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Cyprus was held at the general diwan of the Foreign



Ministry here on Monday.

The Omani side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, while Kornelios Korneliou, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Republic of Cyprus, chaired his country's side.

The session reviewed the

bilateral relations between the two countries as the two sides stressed their keenness to continue promoting them in deferent fields. The two sides also exchanged views on various international and regional issues of common interest.

The session was also attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Salim al

Shanfari, Ambassador of Oman to Cyprus, Andreas Nikolaides, Ambassador of Cyprus to the Sultanate of Oman and officials from both sides.

VISIT TO MSC

Kornelios Korneliou and his delegation visited the Maritime Security Center (MSC) at Al Murtafaa Garrison on Monday.

They were received by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), head of the Maritime Security Committee.

The guest toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was also briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre within its national duties, as it coordinates with relevant authorities in search and rescue missions for the safety of the maritime environment. — ONA

Ukrainian trade delegation explores opportunities

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Monday received a business delegation from Ukraine, headed by Dmytro Senik, Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine.

The visit aimed at enhancing relations between the two countries on various economic and trade fields, besides increasing trade exchange between the two sides.

During the meeting, Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, OCCI Chairman, underlined the importance of promoting business relations between the two countries.

He further added that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys commercial and investment potentials that would attract business owners from various countries.

OCCI Chairman also stressed

the need for establishing commercial partnerships between the Omani businesspersons and their Ukrainian counterparts, as well as organising visits for the trade delegations between the two countries to enhance trade relations.

The meeting was attended by members of the OCCI Board and businessmen from both sides.

— ONA



In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES REOPENS SCHOOLS AS COVID CASES EASE

Some children in the Philippines' capital Manila returned to school on Monday after a near two-year suspension as the country, which has imposed some of the world's toughest coronavirus curbs, tries to get life back to normal. Wearing face masks and sitting at desks fitted with plastic screens, the children are part of a trial at 28 schools in the capital region. The government aims to reopen all schools in January.

"I also feel scared since there is still Covid, but we have to brave it so my child can learn," said Lara Vedasto as she waited for her daughter outside the campus. — **Reuters**

■ KATHMANDU



NEPAL STARTS CENSUS OF ENDANGERED ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS

Nepal started counting endangered Royal Bengal tigers in its vast forested southern plains, officials said, as conservationists help the big cats claw their way back from near extinction. Deforestation, habitat encroachment and poaching have devastated tiger populations across Asia, but Nepal and 12 other countries signed a pledge in 2010 to double their numbers by next year.

Technicians began installing cameras in Chitwan National Park, the country's biggest tiger conservation area, with wildlife experts to identify individual animals by their unique stripes. — **AFP**

■ JAKARTA/KUALA LUMPUR



BLINKEN DUE TO VISIT INDONESIA, MALAYSIA

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due to visit Indonesia and Malaysia next week as the Biden administration ramps up engagement in Southeast Asia, a bloc it sees as central to its efforts to counter China's growing influence. Gede Ngurah Swajaya, Indonesia's director general for American and European Affairs, told reporters on Monday that Blinken will visit Jakarta on December 13-14, the third and most senior US official to visit the region in two months.

Blinken was also expected to visit Malaysia on December 14-15 in his maiden trip to the region. — **Reuters**



National League for Democracy chairperson Aung San Suu Kyi

SUU KYI JAIL TERM HALVED TO 2 YEARS

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief has reduced the jail sentence of ousted leader Aung San suu Kyi to two years from four, state media said on Monday.

Suu Kyi and former president Win Myint had their sentences for incitement against the military and flouting coronavirus rules "pardoned to two years", from four by junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, state TV said.

Earlier, President Win Myint was also sentenced to four years in prison, said a source following proceedings who spoke on condition of anonymity, as the court delivered its first verdicts in numerous cases against Suu Kyi and other civilian leaders detained by the military in a coup on February 1.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the coup against Suu Kyi's democratically elected government led to widespread protests and raised international concern about the end of tentative political reforms following decades of military rule.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since the coup along with most senior leaders of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Others

The conviction of the State Counsellor following a sham trial in secretive proceedings before a military-controlled court is nothing but politically-motivated

MICHELLE BACHELET
UN human rights chief

are abroad or in hiding and no party spokesperson was available for comment.

"The conviction of the State Counsellor following a sham trial in secretive proceedings before a military-controlled court is nothing but politically-motivated," UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said in comments echoed by the European Union and others.

A military spokesman did not respond to attempts by Reuters to reach him for comment on the sentencing, which was widely reported in domestic media.

The military has not given details of where Suu Kyi has

been detained and it was not immediately clear if the sentencing would mean any immediate change in her circumstances.

Dr Sasa, a spokesperson for Myanmar's shadow civilian government set up following the coup, called on the international community to step up sanctions against Myanmar's military rulers.

The trial in the capital Naypyitaw has been closed to the media and the junta's public information outlets have not mentioned the proceedings. Suu Kyi's lawyers have been barred from communicating with the media and public. Suu Kyi faces a dozen cases that include multiple corruption charges plus violations of a state secrets act, a telecoms law and Covid-19 regulations, which carry combined maximum sentences of more than a century in prison.

Suu Kyi and co-defendant Win Myint received jail terms of two years for incitement and the same term for breaches of coronavirus protocols. They had denied the charges. Western countries have demanded Suu Kyi's release and condemned the violence since the coup in which some 1,300 people have been killed, according to rights groups. — **AFP**

REACTIONS

BANGKOK: Here are reactions to news of the judgement:
BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY LIZ TRUSS:

"The sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi is another appalling attempt by Myanmar's military regime to stifle opposition and suppress freedom and democracy. "The United Kingdom calls on the regime to release political prisoners, engage in dialogue and allow a return to democracy. The arbitrary detention of elected politicians only risks further unrest."

ZHAO LIJIAN, SPOKESPERSON, CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY, BEIJING:

"As a friendly neighbour, we sincerely hope that all parties in Myanmar will proceed from the long-term interests of the country, bridge their differences under the constitutional and legal framework, and continue to advance the hard-earned democratic transition suitable for Myanmar's national conditions," he said in reply to a query at a regular briefing.

RICHARD HORSEY, MYANMAR ANALYST, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP:

"The charges were ludicrous, designed as retribution against popular leaders. So the guilty verdicts and prison terms are no surprise.

"No one other than the regime itself will be convinced by this outcome."

MATTHEW SMITH, CO-FOUNDER OF FORTIFY RIGHTS:

"This conviction is fooling no one, and it's part of a widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population. "This conviction is part of imprisonment as a crime against humanity perpetrated by the junta since February 1. "The junta should release the state counsellor and all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally."

MAW HTUN AUNG, DY MINISTER OF MYANMAR'S EXILED OPPOSITION NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT:

"I don't expect anything out of this broken justice system."

ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS:

"Since the day of the coup, it's been clear that the charges against Suu Kyi, and the dozens of other detained MPs, have been nothing more than an excuse by the junta to justify their illegal power grab.

"Despite this most recent attempt to demonstrate their power, the Myanmar people continue to risk their lives everyday to show that this ridiculous ruling is a travesty of justice. "This sentencing is further evidence that, for the sake of its own credibility and future, the Asean must hold the line against this illegal takeover.

MING YU HAH, DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF CAMPAIGNS FOR RIGHTS GROUP AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL:

"The harsh sentences handed down to Suu Kyi on these bogus charges are the latest example of the military's determination to eliminate all opposition and suffocate freedoms in Myanmar. "The court's farcical and corrupt decision is part of a devastating pattern of arbitrary punishment that has seen more than 1,300 people killed and thousands arrested since the military coup in February.

"There are many detainees without the profile of Suu Kyi who currently face the terrifying prospect of years behind bars simply for peacefully exercising their human rights. They must not be forgotten and left to their fate."

AUTHOR AND HISTORIAN THANT MYINT U:

"Removing Aung San Suu Kyi from politics isn't a by-product of the coup, it was the entire reason for the coup.

"Many in the current generation of generals had come to feel that the reformist ex-generals of 10 years ago had gone too far in their political liberalisations and had made a specific mistake in allowing her back on the political scene. "She remains far and away the most popular (figure) in Myanmar politics and may still be a potent force in what's to come." — **Reuters**

Poor weather hampers search, rescue efforts

INDONESIA VOLCANO TOLL AT 22



A man looks at a damaged home at Sumber Wuluh village in Lumajang following a volcanic eruption from Mount Semeru that killed a least fourteen people. — **AFP**

SUMBERWULUH: Indonesia's Mt Semeru volcano continued to spew hot clouds of ash on Monday, days after a powerful eruption killed 22 people and left dozens more missing.

The tallest mountain on the island of Java erupted dramatically on Saturday shooting a towering column of ash into the sky that blanketed surrounding villages. Aerial footage of the affected areas showed roofs jutting out of an ashen landscape, while on the ground, military officers, police and residents dug through mud with their hands to extricate victims.

The death toll rose to 15 by Monday, while 27 people remain missing, Indonesia's disaster mitigation agency said in a statement.

The volcano erupted again on Monday morning, Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (PVMBG) confirmed via its Twitter account, warning of

continued seismic activity.

"Semeru is one of the most active volcanoes in Indonesia. Before and after the December 4 eruption, it will continue be

active," Liswanto, the head of the Semeru Volcano Observatory said.

As some anxious residents returned to their homes to check on belongings and livestock,

Liswanto urged people to keep a safe distance.

"People need to be more vigilant because the potential threat is still there," he added.

In the Sumberwuluh area, rescue teams battled poor weather to retrieve victims from the rubble.

"We were looking for nine people reported missing in this village and thank God we found [the bodies of] three victims," said Estianto Hendriantono, chief of the local search and rescue effort. "The challenge for the evacuation was that they were trapped under logs and rocks, and the soil was still hot."

On Facebook, people have posted photos of their missing relatives, with public pleas for any information about their whereabouts.

Complicating logistics and rescue efforts, lava flows from Saturday's eruption destroyed a bridge connecting two areas in the nearby district of Lumajang with the city of Malang.

Public kitchens and health facilities have been set up for more than 1,700 people who have been displaced.

— **Reuters**

Sudan police fire tear gas as thousands protest



Sudanese women chant slogans as they rally in Khartoum to protest a deal that saw the Prime Minister reinstated after his ouster in a military coup in October. — AFP

KHARTOUM: Sudanese police fired tear gas on Monday as thousands of protesters rallied against the military-dominated government near the presidential palace in Khartoum, witnesses said.

The demonstrators marched from various districts of the capital, many carrying national flags or chanting, “No to military rule” and, “The army might betray you, but the street will never betray you”.

Protesters, in the latest of many

rallies in recent weeks, set up road barricades with rocks and burning car tyres, the black smoke billowing into the sky.

Sudan’s top general, Abdel Fattah al Burhan, seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on October 25 but, after international condemnation and mass protests, reinstated him in a deal signed on November 21.

Critics lambasted the agreement and accused Hamdok of “betrayal” as pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the

military-civilian authority.

The top general has long insisted the military’s move was “not a coup” but a step “to rectify the transition” towards full democracy that started with the 2019 ouster of autocratic president Omar al Bashir.

Hamdok, prime minister in the transitional government, has defended the deal, which he signed after his release from effective house arrest.

He has said he partnered with the military to “stop the bloodshed”

that resulted from crackdowns on anti-coup street protests, and so as not to “squander the gains of the last two years”.

Nearly 45 people were killed in street rallies between October 25 and November 22 in clashes with security forces, and hundreds more wounded.

Sudan, has recently also suffered runaway inflation and embarked on tough economic reforms, including slashing subsidies on petrol and diesel and launching a managed currency float. — AFP

Nobel literature winner receives medal in UK

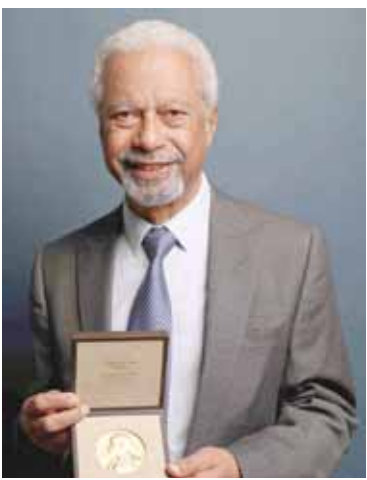
LONDON: British novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah on Monday received his medal as winner of this year’s Nobel Prize for Literature, in a brief ceremony held in London due to the coronavirus pandemic. Gurnah won the prestigious award in October for his novels unflinchingly portraying the effects of colonialism and the plight of refugees.

The 72-year-old author bowed to Sweden’s ambassador to Britain, Mikaela Kumlin Granit, as she handed him his medal and diploma at a ceremony at her official residence. He smiled as he showed off the award to warm applause and posed for waiting photographers.

Traditionally, Gurnah would have received his prize from Sweden’s king, but coronavirus restrictions put paid to travel for the second year in succession.

“Since you cannot go to Stockholm, your Nobel Prize medal and diploma has been brought to you here today,” said Granit.

A main awards ceremony, at



which Gurnah’s achievement will be detailed in full, is due to take place in Stockholm on December 10.

The prize also comes with a sum of 10 million Swedish kronor (about \$1.1 million).

Gurnah became the fifth African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, with the most recent previously being South African writer J M Coetzee in 2003. Born in Zanzibar off the coast of east Africa, now part of Tanzania, Gurnah fled to Britain as a refugee in the late 1960s, later acquiring British citizenship.

New Austria chancellor sworn in

VIENNA: Austria’s former Interior Minister Karl Nehammer was sworn in as the country’s third chancellor in as many months on Monday, after the fallout from a corruption scandal shook his ruling People’s Party. President Alexander Van der Bellen formally swore Nehammer in at a ceremony at Vienna’s Hofburg Palace just after 1 pm local time.

The previous Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg offered his resignation on Thursday, hours after his predecessor and close ally Sebastian Kurz announced he was resigning as head of the conservative People’s Party (OeVP) following a corruption scandal.

On Friday the party nominated Nehammer, 49, to take over as party head and chancellor.

Nehammer’s first act has been to send Schallenberg back to his previous post as foreign minister and appoint new finance, interior and education ministers.

Speaking to reporters after Monday’s ceremony, Nehammer acknowledged there was an “unbelievable” amount to do to steer the country out of the partial coronavirus lockdown imposed on November 22 in response to rising case numbers.

The lockdown is due to end this weekend and Nehammer said he would consult with experts and the opposition in the

Karl Nehammer
Austrian chancellor

Age: 49

Former lieutenant in the Austrian army

- 2017 First elected as a lawmaker
- January 2020-December 2021 Interior minister
- October 2021 Resignation of the chancellor Sebastian Kurz, embroiled in a corruption scandal
- December 3 Becomes head of the ruling conservative party, replacing Kurz
- December 6 Sworn in as chancellor

AFP Photo

AFP

coming days on the next steps.

Austria is also set to make coronavirus vaccination compulsory. According to leaks of the draft law for the measure, those refusing vaccination will be punished with a \$680 fine which could be re-imposed every three months. The measures have prompted much opposition, in particular from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), and a series of large demonstrations. — AFP

Moscow, Delhi sign military deal

MOSCOW: Moscow and New Delhi signed a deal on Monday that will see India produce more than 600,000 AK-203 assault rifles, Russian weapons maker Kalashnikov said.

The deal was struck during President Vladimir Putin’s visit to India for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Russia hopes to deliver more S-400 missile systems to India within the current deal’s option, Interfax cited Russia’s state arms exporter as saying on Monday.

Despite pressure from Washington, India signed a \$5.5 billion deal with Russia in 2018 for five of the surface-to-air missile systems, giving the Indian military the ability to shoot down aircraft and missiles at unprecedented ranges.



India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Russian President Vladimir Putin in New Delhi. — AFP

Earlier, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Russian President Vladimir Putin in New Delhi on Monday, with trade

and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan both on the agenda.

Afghanistan’s takeover by the Taliban earlier this year has led

to a humanitarian crisis in the country, which New Delhi and Moscow have both previously said risks destabilising the region.

“The fight against terrorism is also a fight against drug trafficking and organised crime,” Putin said in introductory remarks broadcast by Indian media. “In that regard, we are concerned about developments of the situation in Afghanistan.”

Earlier on Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said a deal to supply India with S-400 air defence missile systems was being implemented despite what he said were US efforts to undermine the accord. India and Russia are expected to cement several trade and defence pacts at the summit. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

UAE security official pays rare visit to Iran

The UAE senior national security adviser met his Iranian counterpart and President Ebrahim Raisi in a rare visit to Iran on Monday. Shaikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al Nahyan’s visit took place days after Tehran and world powers broke off talks in Vienna as Western officials voiced dismay about Iran’s sweeping demands for salvaging the 2015 nuclear pact, which the US abandoned three years ago, reimposing harsh sanctions on Tehran.



“Improving ties with the regional countries is my government’s priority, therefore we welcome improving ties with the UAE,” Raisi told Shaikh Tahnoon, according to Iranian state television. — Reuters

LONDON

British premier defends new Omicron travel rules

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has denied a scientist’s allegation that introducing travel restrictions to slow the spread of Omicron is like ‘shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.’ The Prime Minister insisted the UK was the first country to take ‘decisive measures’ in relation to the new strain.

From Tuesday all travellers arriving in England will be required to take a Covid-19 pre-departure test in an attempt to



limit the spread of the Omicron variant. Nigeria was added to the red list at 4 am on Monday, and arrivals from the African country must now spend 11 nights in a quarantine hotel. There are 11 destinations on the list. — dpa

ROME

Italy tightens curbs on unvaccinated

Italy tightened curbs on Monday on people still not vaccinated against Covid-19, limiting their access to an array of places and services.

The measures were announced last month, even before the discovery of the Omicron variant, and come as cases of coronavirus are starting to tick up across the country, albeit at a slower rate than in many other European nations.

Under the new rules, only people who have been vaccinated



or have recently recovered from Covid-19 can access indoor seating at bars and restaurants, visit museums, go to cinemas and clubs and attend sporting events. — Reuters

Austerity, far right, feminism: Merkel’s legacy

HUI MIN NEO

Crises have a knack for felling leaders. Not Chancellor Angela Merkel.

During 16 years in power, the veteran navigated Germany through the 2008 financial turmoil and ensuing eurozone debt crisis, the 2015 refugee influx and then the coronavirus pandemic.

While largely admired at home and abroad even in the final days of her reign, the legacy she leaves behind is marked both by light and shadows.

Merkel scraped to a narrow win in 2005 against incumbent chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of the Social Democrats, putting her conservative CDU-CSU alliance on the path of power for over a decade.

At the zenith of her popularity, Merkel led the conservatives to a thumping win with 41.5 per cent of the vote in 2013.

With her track record, she was able to end a crucial TV election debate that year with the simple closing words “you know me”.

But her exit from politics was marred by a succession crisis in her party, culminating in a humiliating loss at September’s general elections that sent it into the opposition for the next four years.

Once dismissed as the sick man of Europe, Germany cemented its reputation as the continent’s economic engine on Merkel’s watch. Unemployment is at record lows — 5.3 per cent in November even as the economy is struggling with the impact of the pandemic. Budget surpluses chalked up from 2012 also allowed the ageing nation to pay down a huge debt mountain, giving it a buffer against the impact of the health emergency.

But Germany’s fixation with balanced budgets has left a sour taste, particularly among southern Europeans battered by the financial and eurozone debt crises. Merkel appeared to ignore pleas for debt relief when Greece was on the brink of economic collapse, triggering huge demonstrations in the country.

While credited with securing huge European bailouts that saved Greece from crashing out of the euro, it was achieved at a heavy social cost including massive job losses. But it was Covid-19 that forced her to make a drastic U-turn on her resistance to mutualising European debt. — AFP

“When I look at the situation, no one can say that we have done enough for the environment. Time is pressing. I can understand the impatience of young people

ANGELA MERKEL
German Chancellor



PLAY TIME

A Palestinian man plays with a child during sunset in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Monday. — AFP

Reputation is the best marketing tool



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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THE BOLD ONES
MEANWHILE
ARE MOVING
FROM ONE FIELD
TO THE OTHER,
WHICH WAS NOT
THE CASE IN THE
PAST

Each person must have something they like to do in which they have keen interest. For the lucky few their passion turns out to be a way of life.

Practicing their hobby can also be a sanctuary in its own right. In fact, it is the hobby at times that makes a career. The reason being sheer practice taking the person’s ability to professional standard. If the hobby generates income then it is a career.

It is dedication that brings in the extra finesse.

We often criticise children being on mobile phones and playing video games and rightfully so because physical fitness is important. But we must think again before shooing them off from technology because this is where the jobs are going to be. The field is evolving and we are already approaching 2022 and the experts are talking about the career opportunities in 2030.

The current youth are already finding it difficult to find the right opportunity but that is not to say they cannot adapt the new scenario and create a niche for themselves.

The bold ones meanwhile are moving from one field to the other, which was not the case in the past. The chosen major in the past was a life long investment but now it looks like we might have to make quite a few manoeuvres to keep going. The adaptability would be one of the most needed capabilities.

Listening to Dr Amer al Rowas, Chairman of Oman Society for Petroleum Services, Opal, at Future Skills and HRD AI 2021 talk about the future where humans could be the service providers, which were the role of software made one realise how soon it is becoming a reality. He also touched upon the reality where companies might move on to take up services from freelancers.

It probably means if you are a graduate waiting for the right break maybe it is about time to begin experimenting with freelancing. There is a disadvantage though — when one is employed (their term might be old fashion soon) there is quite a bit one learns by just being in an organisation. So this could be a loss.

On the other hand the freelancers can enjoy the freedom of providing services in more than one organisation. In the Sultanate of Oman there are youngsters who have created space for themselves. This also means an opportunity for SMEs to enjoy services, which might not be otherwise available due to the expense of employing a professional.

This is also an ideal situation for retirees. They can be back in the career providing their expertise and SMEs would benefit again.

All this probably means developing communication skills because now it is not just about finding a job and staying there with a huge build In system to back

you up.

As Dr Rowas said, “Each one would have to deal with making customers happy because you are not just a problem solver at the service providing organisation, for example.” In other words you provide the service but also deal with the customer. Gig economy has a whole list of jobs: web designer, graphic designer and branding, freelance writing, pet sitting, driving for Uber, food delivery or being virtual assistant.

Gig economy has already been here in the Sultanate of Oman for many years where taxi drivers also had morning jobs.

Again it has its challenges because a normal job guarantees many benefits such as retirement plans and health insurance, members of gig economy are on their own. It also means they have to be their own accountants and marketing promoters.

But while the wait is on there are some youngsters (graduates) who are taking up delivery jobs currently. The parents are not so sure about it, but in fact they should be proud of them. Instead of falling into the trap of negative thoughts they are on the move to make their time matter.

For no matter what the economy is, attitude and aptitude make all the difference to scale oneself, as where there is competition these two qualities become part of the branding. Reputation is the best marketing technique.

Putin in India with eye on military, energy ties

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in India on Monday for just his second overseas trip since the pandemic, seeking to bolster military and energy ties with a traditional ally being courted by Washington.

In its efforts to address a rising China, Washington has set up the Quad security dialogue with India, Japan, and Australia, raising concerns in both Beijing and Moscow.

India was close to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, a relationship that has endured, with New Delhi calling it a “special and privileged strategic partnership”.

“The friendship between India and Russia has stood the test of time,” Modi told Putin at a virtual summit in September. “You have

always been a great friend of India.”

It is only the Russian leader’s second trip abroad since the coronavirus pandemic began — he skipped both the G20 and COP26 summits this year — after a June summit with US President Joe Biden in Geneva.

“It’s hugely symbolic,” said Nandan Unnikrishnan from the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think tank.

“There has been a lot of speculation about the nature of the India-Russia relationship and whether it is fraying because of Russia’s closeness with China and India’s with the US, but this visit puts all that to rest.”

Nonetheless Putin has to contend with complex regional dynamics, with tensions mounting

between New Delhi and Beijing, traditionally an ally of Moscow, following deadly clashes in the Himalayan region.

“Russia’s influence in the region is very limited,” said Tatiana Belousova of OP Jindal Global University in Haryana, “mostly because of its close ties with China and unwillingness to act in dissonance with the Chinese regional interests.”

The Kremlin said last week the talks will be dominated by defence and energy issues, with the boss of Russian energy giant Rosneft, Igor Sechin, also attending as a “number of important energy agreements” were on the table.

Russia has long been a key arms supplier to India, which is looking to modernise its armed forces, and one of their most high-

profile current contracts is for the long-range S-400 ground-to-air missile defence system.

The deal, worth over \$5 billion, was signed in 2018 and deliveries have reportedly begun, but it threatens to upend the burgeoning relationship between New Delhi and Washington.

The United States has threatened sanctions under the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which is aimed at reining in Russia, and the state department said last week that no decisions had been made on any waivers for India.

“Our Indian friends clearly explained that they are a sovereign country and that they will decide whose weapons to buy and who will be India’s partner,” Kremlin

spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday.

New Delhi has long sought to diversify its military imports but analysts believe it could take some time before it moves away from Russia. Military equipment was “paramount” to India given “unabated” tensions with Pakistan, according to Unnikrishnan. “You’re going to try and nurture whatever is required to ensure that.”

India is also keen to increase domestic production and has launched a joint venture with Russia to manufacture AK-203 assault rifles. India and Russia normally hold annual summits, but the leaders’ last in-person meeting was on the sidelines of the 2019 BRICS Summit in Brazil.

— AFP

sport



Team France wraps up SATT 2021 title in style

MUSCAT: Team France claimed the Sailing Arabia — The Tour 2021 trophy with another win in the final leg at Al Mouj Muscat. The debuting crew led from start to finish, winning seven of the ten days. Competition for places behind them was fierce but the fleet was ultimately unable to close the gap to the eventual winners.

The winning teams were awarded at a prizegiving ceremony held under the patronage of His Excellency Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Executive President of Oman Investment Authority.

DB Schenker, representing The Tour's official logistics partner and flying the flag of Germany with a mixed male and female Omani crew, never gave up — winning two days along the way and finishing second on five occasions — to

finish second overall. Organisers Oman Sail ended The Tour in third with Oman Investment Authority fourth. Spanish team Barceló Mussanah Resort finished fifth and Nastro Rosa of Italy ended the race in sixth.

The final leg of The Tour featured two days of racing. Team France earned another victory on the first day with Oman Sail in second and DB Schenker in third, giving them enough of a lead to secure the title. With first place secured, Team France eased off on the final day which allowed DB Schenker to take the win and confirm their position as runners up. Oman Sail finished second on the day and sealed third place overall. Barceló Mussanah Resort finished third on the day with Team France fourth, Oman Investment Authority fifth and Nastro Rosa sixth.

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Antoine Rucard, skipper of Team France, said, "Today was the last day of Sailing Arabia — The Tour. We are a bit sad to go back to France, because there it is 3-4 degrees and, here, we are sailing in shorts and t-shirt! It was a good day for the team and a good way to finish with some guests on board, too. A good fight on the water with perfect conditions. We are really happy about this last day."

"During Sailing Arabia — The Tour, it was super nice to look at many different places in the Sultanate of Oman. We had a lot of fun, discovered many beautiful places. Wadi Shab, a really nice place in Sur, souqs and mosques, and our guide took us to the best places!" he added.

Akram al Wahabi, skipper of DB Schenker, said, "Today is the last day, we pushed hard and were

aiming for the podium. We fought all the way and finished second thanks to our teamwork and the effort of our crew — Ibtisam al Salmi, Nasser al Mashari and Marwa al Khaifi. This has been a great experience for us and we hope to do even better next year."

TEAMWORK

Gilles Chiorri, Sailing Arabia — The Tour race director, said, "The sport of sailing uses the "power of sail and wind" to propel the boats. It requires a combination of skills, passion and an incredible amount of teamwork. This event is organised by a passionate team within Oman Sail, and was not only able to engage well-known famous sailors, but also diversify the port destinations in the Sultanate of Oman and in the GCC to showcase an exceptional

backdrop of progress and development. Travelling along the unique coastline, we get a taste of the Omani culture, meet new people, and experience the natural and historical landmarks of the country. Sailors go back home carrying a message of a warmth and exceptional hospitality."

The event was supported by national carrier Oman Air, OQ and the Barceló Mussanah Resort as official partners, and Be'ah as environmental supporter. The National Mineral Water Company Salsabeel Water provided all essential water supplies for the event while the Royal Navy of Oman provided medical support throughout.

For more information about the event, the schedule, and safety guidelines, visit the official website <https://sailingarabiathetour.com/>



Ibrahimovic wants to stay at AC Milan for life

MILAN: AC Milan striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic said he wants to stay at the Serie A club for the rest of his career, admitting he is "scared to stop" playing due to uncertainty as to what comes next after retirement.

CONTRACT EXPIRES

The 40-year-old Swede's current contract expires at the end of the season, but Ibrahimovic has no plans to hang up his boots just yet.

"I want to play as long as possible. As long as I have that adrenaline, I will continue," Ibrahimovic told Italian talk show Che Tempo Che Fa on Sunday.

"Let's put pressure on Milan

Let's put pressure on Milan here to give me an extension and I hope to stay at Milan for life. I still have objectives that I can achieve and I want to win another Scudetto

ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC
AC Milan striker

here to give me an extension and I hope to stay at Milan for life. I still have objectives that I can achieve and I want to win another Scudetto.

"I don't know what will happen after football, so I am a little scared to stop. We'll see, but I want to continue playing so that I don't have any regrets."

Ibrahimovic was on the bench as Milan beat bottom side Salernitana 2-0 on Saturday to move one point clear at the top of the Serie A standings.

Stefano Pioli's side host Liverpool in the Champions League on Tuesday, where only victory will do if they are to have any chance of reaching the last-16. — Reuters



INDIA JUGGERNAUT ROLLS ON AT HOME AS SPINNERS WREAK HAVOC

MUMBAI: India's spinners once again bared their fangs, sealing a record 372-run victory against New Zealand in the second and final test at the Wankhede Stadium on Monday to secure a 14th consecutive series triumph at home.

It was the biggest margin of victory by runs for India in a home match, eclipsing their 337-run win against South Africa in a Delhi test in 2015.

The 1-0 victory meant India have not lost a home series since their 2-1 defeat by England in 2012 and it also helped Virat Kohli's side reclaim top spot in the Test rankings, pushing New Zealand to second.

With the series victory, the hosts also avenged their loss to New Zealand in the final of the inaugural World Test Championship in Southampton in June.

India's spinners wasted little time in removing New Zealand's remaining batters on Monday, sealing the victory in a little over three days on the spin-friendly track at the sun-bathed ground overlooking the Arabian Sea.

Rahul Dravid, the side's newly-appointed head coach, said the score did not reflect how hard India had to work for the series win after the first test in Kanpur ended in a draw.

"I know this result looks a bit one-sided but right through the series we've been made to work hard," said the former India captain and batting great.

"There have been phases of the game where we've been behind



The 1-0 victory meant India have not lost a home series since their 2-1 defeat by England in 2012 and it also helped Virat Kohli's side reclaim top spot in the Test rankings, pushing New Zealand to second

and had to fight back. Credit to the team for pulling themselves out of some difficult positions."

Spin-bowling all-rounder Jayant Yadav did most of the damage on the fourth morning, picking up 4-49 — his career-best figures — to cut through New Zealand's middle and lower order.

With just a few hundred fans present in the stands to cheer the team on, Ravichandran Ashwin took the final wicket to finish with 4-34 as their opponents were all out for 167 in their second innings, chasing an improbable 540 for victory.

The wily off-spinner, the world's leading wicket-taker this year with 52, took eight in Mumbai and was adjudged the player of the series for his tally of 14 wickets from two matches.

CLINICAL PERFORMANCE

The victory will taste sweeter for India after they rested a number of established regulars while also missing a spate of players due to injuries.

"To play test cricket you need

SCOREBOARD	
India first innings: -----	325
New Zealand first innings: -----	62 all out
India second innings: -----	276/7 dec
New Zealand second innings: -----	
T Latham lbw Ashwin -----	6
W Young c (sub Suryakumar) b Ashwin -----	20
D Mitchell c Jayant b Axar -----	60
R Taylor c Pujara b Ashwin -----	6
H Nicholls st Shaha b Ashwin -----	44
T Blundell (run out) -----	0
R Ravindra c Pujara b Jayant -----	18
K Jamieson lbw Jayant -----	0
T Southee b Jayant -----	0
W Somerville c Agarwal b Jayant -----	1
A Patel (not out) -----	0
Extras (B-9, LB-1, NB-2) -----	12
Total (all out, 56.3 overs) -----	167
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-45, 3-55, 4-128, 5-129, 6-162, 7-165, 8-165, 9-167	
Bowling: Siraj 5-2-13-0, Ashwin 22-3-9-34-4, Axar 10-1-42-1, Jayant 14-4-49-4, Umesh 5-1-19-0	

passion and intent," Kohli told reporters.

"Indian cricket is in safe hands when you have so many people who have that. People are hungry to play tests well. It's nice to see youngsters want to feel what it is to play tests."

Opening batter Mayank Agarwal, who played because of players being injured or rested, picked up the player of the match award for his scores of 150 and 62.

It was also a happy return for Kohli, who was rested for the three-match Twenty20 series and the drawn first test in Kanpur.

"To come back with a win again, it's a great feeling as a team and for me returning as captain as well," he said at the presentation. "It was just a clinical performance, something we've seen from our team time and again.

"You want individuals to step up and I think in this match they did." — Reuters

Rafiullah powers Stallions to big win

MUSCAT: Rafi Ullah's all-round heroics helped Oman Stallions to a thumping 79-run victory against Yalla Shabab in a 50-over Premier Division League clash at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Rafi topscored with a scintillating 70 off 39 including eight powerful sixes in Stallions' score of 258 all out in 48.1 overs. Opener Akshaykumar Patel batted well too, scoring an equally entertaining 66 off 42, spanking seven huge hits over the fence.

Fast bowler Hassnain Ali was the pick of Yalla Shabab bowlers, taking 5 for 63 whereas Wasim Ali claimed 3 for 35.

Rafiullah and Mehran Khan struck twice in their opening spells reducing Yalla Shabab to 59 for 4. The side never really recovered from the early blows and was dismissed for 179 in the 36th over. Karan Sonavale was brilliant with the ball too, taking three late wickets for only one run. Young Wasim Ali was the main scorer with a fluent 74 off 73 that included 3 big sixes.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): Oman Stallions 258 all out in 48.1 overs (Rafi Ullah 70 – 3x4, 8x6, Akshaykumar Patel 66 – 4x4, 7x6, Hassnain Ali 5-63, Wasim Ali 3-35) beat Yalla Shabab 179 all out in 35.3 overs (Wasim Ali 74 – 6x4, 3x6, Karan Sonavale 3-1, Mehran Khan 3-49, Rafi Ullah 2-43) by 79 runs.

Sankarlal helps Danmark to victory

Sankarlal Sasidharan's superb batting powered Danmark CT to a comfortable 46-run win over Mazoon Up in a T20 D Division match at Muscat Municipality



ground 2 on Friday.

Sankarlal topscored with a magnificent 66 off 36 whereas his partner Muhammed Bashir struck 34 off 36 in an opening stand of 105 as Danmark went on to post 157 for 6 on the board. Fahad Mohamed picked up 4 for 26.

Brief Scores (D Division): Danmark CT 157 for 6 in 20 overs (Sankarlal Sasidharan 65 – 7x4, 2x6, Muhammad Bashir 34 – 5x4, Fahad Mohamed 4-26) beat Mazoon Up 111 all out in 17.5 overs (Bilawal Ali 37 – 6x4, Syamlal Sasidharan 3-27, Rajeesh Ravindran 3-29, Mohammed Wasim 2-24) by 46 runs.

Waseem bats Global to big win

In another D Division game at the same venue, opener Waseem Abbas struck a sizzling 77 off 37 to guide Global Corp Logistics to a big 80-run victory against OCT Al Mabela.

Brief Scores (D Division): Global Corp Logistics 208 for 4 in 20 overs (Waseem Abbas 77 – 9x4, 3x6, Azeem Abdul 46 – 4x4, 2x6, Marshal Barmeda 44 – 4x4, Asif Al Balushi 2-27) beat Oct Al Mabela 128 for 8 in 20 overs

Suhail lifts ISC veteran's singles title

MUSCAT: In the Veteran's singles final between two experienced players, Suhail Khan played with conviction and packed power in his serves and ground-strokes as he routed Mohan Kannan 6-1, 6-0 to win the Veteran's Title in the annual tennis tournament organised by Indian Social Club Oman.

Certainly both are best players of Indian Social Club and have played brilliant all-round tennis in many venues in around Muscat. Mohan, though, made his presence felt by playing long rallies but Suhail's power and consistency were too hot and there was very little that Mohan could do to counter the assault. Mohan reached the finals defeating Junaith K scoring 7-6 and 6-3 while Suhail



Mohan Kannan and Suhail Khan (R)

had an easy walk through from Hemachandran scoring 6-1 and 6-0 in the semifinals.

In other matches of Veteran's singles, Ganesh beat Harish M 8-1 and Junaith K beat Prasanna 8-0. Hemachandran beat PI Raj 8-0 while Junaith beat Ganesh scoring 6-0 and 6-1.

Stokes looking good ahead of first Ashes Test: Root

SYDNEY: England captain Joe Root said he did not "feel comfortable" naming his team for the first Ashes test on Monday but he left little doubt that Ben Stokes would be in it.

All-rounder Stokes was a late addition to the squad after taking an indefinite break from the game in July to focus on his mental health, while also recovering from a second operation on a broken finger.

Stokes, who tortured Australia with an unbeaten 135 at Headingley to pull off an improbable run chase in the 2019 Ashes, made light of his long layoff by taking 2-31 and scoring 42 not out against the

It's really been good to see Ben back involved in the frame of things and to get into the limited game time that we had, and to look as good as he did as well

JOE ROOT
England skipper

England Lions last week.

"It's really been good to see Ben back involved in the frame of things and to get into the limited

game time that we had, and to look as good as he did as well," Root told reporters at the Gabba.

"I always know that when he gets into that game, he'll want to put his mark on it, put his stamp on it."

Asked about whether he would need to manage the number of overs Stokes bowled, Root said it was important not to pile too much expectation on the 30-year-old after four months on the sidelines.

"Our whole bowling group, collectively, we can work together to take those wickets," Root said.

"I'm sure Ben will have a big say in that. It's something we'll be definitely working to get right this

whole series, particularly in that first game."

England last won a test at the Gabba in 1986 and Root said he was not in any rush to announce the side he hopes will break that 35-year hoodoo, despite his Australian counterpart Pat Cummins naming his team on Sunday.

"I'm not into mind games, I'm just not in a position right now to name my team," he said. "Fair play that they've announced their 11. Doesn't really concern me or change anything from our perspective.

"We'll conduct our business how we want to and let you know when we're ready." — Reuters





(From L) Russia's Evgeny Donskoy, Andrey Rublev, Daniil Medvedev, Karen Khachanov, Aslan Karatsev and Russia's Davis Cup captain Shamil Tarpishev pose for pictures with the trophy. – AFP

Russia beat Croatia to win third Davis Cup

MADRID: Russia claimed a third Davis Cup title on Sunday after Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev both won their singles matches to defeat Croatia.

Medvedev's 7-6 (9/7), 6-2 victory over Marin Cilic came after Rublev had earlier prevailed 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) over Borna Gojo, giving Russia an unassailable 2-0 lead in Madrid.

Croatia's greatest chance would have been in the doubles with world number one pair Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic, but they always needed a surprise in the singles to take the tie to the final rubber.

Instead, Medvedev and Rublev, ranked two and five in the world respectively, held their nerve to make it nine out of 10 victories for Russia's power pair in the tournament.

"I can say that for all of us it's

very important to win here. It's still the Davis Cup," said Medvedev in a press conference.

"We still see Novak (Djokovic) playing. Rafael (Nadal) won it last time.

"No matter the format, the best players in the world are happy to represent their country. It's Davis Cup and we are the winners of it. That's the most important thing."

Cilic and Gojo were far from overwhelmed and, with Real Madrid's Luka Modric supporting in the crowd, they rose to the occasion in a compelling final that in the end turned on two close tie-breaks.

Russia have not won the Davis Cup since 2006 and failed to reach a single quarterfinal between 2011 and 2018.

But Medvedev and Rublev are the leaders of a new generation of talent that could enjoy repeat



Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns the ball to Croatia's Marin Cilic during the men's singles final. – AFP

successes in the future, with Aslan Karatsev and Karen Khachanov also ranked in the top 30.

Victory for the men also completes a Russian one-two after the women's team won the

Billie Jean King Cup in Prague last month. The last country to do the double was the Czech Republic in 2012.

Croatia were no strangers to this stage, this their third Davis

Cup final in five years after their 2016 defeat to Argentina and 2018 victory over France.

But Russia were firm favourites and it was always going to take something special either from Cilic, the 33-year-old former US Open champion, or Gojo, who is ranked 279th in the world.

Cilic had chances in the first set, including a break point on Medvedev's second serve at 4-3 but an aggressive backhand return hit the tape and instead it went to a tie-break.

They changed over with Cilic up 4-2 after a Medvedev forehand skimmed wide but Medvedev won four out of the next five points to create a set point on the Cilic serve.

Cilic saved it with a courageous smash only to send a forehand approach just out to give Medvedev a second chance, which he spurned with a double fault.

A big serve down the middle though gave Medvedev 8-7 and this time Cilic caved, a backhand going awry to hand away the set.

With Cilic tiring and Medvedev growing in confidence, the second set was more of a stroll. Medvedev secured a break in the fourth game when a Cilic forehand popped up kindly off the net-chord before confirming victory with a second break when a Cilic forehand fell short.

Rublev's precision from the baseline had earlier proved decisive but Gojo pushed him hard, particularly in the second set, when the Croatian led 5-4 in the tie-break. Yet Rublev delivered under pressure, arrowing a superb pass down the line before an inside-out forehand winner opened up match point, which he converted when a Gojo backhand drifted long. — AFP

Hamilton wins Saudi thriller, goes level with Verstappen

JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA: Lewis Hamilton kept his hopes of an eighth world championship title alive with a thrilling victory in a dramatic and at times chaotic Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Sunday.

The result left the seven-time champion level on 369.5 points with title rival Max Verstappen ahead of the final race in Abu Dhabi next weekend.

Hamilton was behind Verstappen for much of the 50-lap race which was stopped twice because of crashes and interrupted numerous times by the safety car and virtual safety car.

But Hamilton, nursing a damaged front wing caused by a collision with Verstappen, came through late, to claim his eighth win of the season and the 103rd of his career.

The title will be settled in Abu

Dhabi, although if neither finishes in the points it will be Verstappen, who has nine victories, who will take the title.

"I have been racing a long time but that was incredibly tough," said Hamilton who gained an extra point for the fastest lap.

Verstappen finished second, 11.825secs behind in spite of being given a five-second penalty after colliding with the Mercedes star.

He was later sanctioned by 10 seconds by the stewards although that did not impact his finishing position.

"Just trying to race and this sport is more about penalties than racing," said Verstappen.

"For me this is not Formula 1, but at least the fans enjoyed it and I gave it all today, but clearly not quick enough."

Hamilton's team-mate Valtteri Bottas pipped Alpine's Esteban



Red Bull's driver Max Verstappen (L) and Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton compete in the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit in Jeddah. – AFP

Ocon on the line for third place to give Mercedes a 28-point lead in the constructors' championship.

JEDDAH FIRST

It was the first time that Jeddah had hosted a Grand Prix and the problems that the drivers, including Verstappen, had had in practice and qualifying were

apparent again.

It was also the first Grand Prix since the death last month of Frank Williams and was played out against a backdrop of concerns about Saudi Arabia 'sportswashing' their human rights record.

For once Mercedes made the perfect start. Having locked out

Hamilton was behind Verstappen for much of the 50-lap race which was stopped twice because of crashes and interrupted numerous times by the safety car and virtual safety car

the front row, they succeeded in holding Verstappen at bay.

The safety car made its first appearance on lap 10 when Mick Schumacher spun on Turn 22 and slammed his Haas into the wall.

Hamilton pitted immediately to switch tyres with Bottas following a lap later while Verstappen stayed out to take the race lead. Red Bull's gamble looked to have paid off when the race was red-flagged shortly after in order for repairs to

be done on the crash barriers. That handed Verstappen a 'free' pitstop and allowed him to begin from the front when the race restarted, ahead of Hamilton and Bottas.

When the race resumed, Hamilton slipped past Verstappen who then barged his way around the outside, going off the track, to regain the advantage. Behind them Sergio Perez was clipped by Charles Leclerc's Ferrari, causing the Red Bull to spin off.

That in turn triggered a domino effect with George Russell (Williams) and Nikita Mazepin (Haas) also going off.

COLLISION

The stewards decided that Verstappen's manoeuvre was illegal and promoted Alpine's Ocon to pole for the third start of the race, with Hamilton in second and Verstappen in third. — AFP

business

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MAISARAH

making life easy

PDO inaugurates landmark Yibal Khuff project



MILESTONE VENTURE: 'Yibal Khuff Project is of high strategic value towards meeting the Sultanate of Oman's growing medium and long-term oil and gas demands'

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 6

Under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) celebrated on Monday the inauguration of its Yibal Khuff Mega Project (YKP).

The event, which was held at PDO's Mina Al Fahal headquarters, was attended by several senior government officials, members of the company's Board and executive committee and representatives from both the public and private sectors.

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, said: "Oil and gas industry remains the main enabler of the national and global economy.

Indeed, the production start at PDO's Yibal Khuff Project is of high strategic value towards meeting the Sultanate of Oman's growing medium and long-term oil and gas demands.

"This national mega and technically complex project involved Omani skilled workforce who worked on the design, construction and commissioning as well as awarding contracts to Omani



As we transition to a full-fledged energy company, this trailblazing project will be essential in powering the country, generating revenue for the nation, and funding research and development for renewables and investment in greener energy installations and infrastructure

STEVE PHIMISTER
Managing Director, PDO

companies for the provision of goods and services.

It certainly sets an example for the implementation of national projects, especially as the Sultanate of Oman witnesses further growth and development in all areas under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik."

Spanning an area of 1.68 square kms within the Yibal



cluster area, YKP is the second largest, and most technically complex project in PDO's history — with Covid-19 adding another layer of complexity over the past two years of construction and commissioning activities.

This project will be delivering five million cubic metres of gas per day and around 20,000 bpd

of crude, in addition to extracting 235 tonnes of sulphur per day.

In his speech on the occasion, PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister said: "This venture is a world-class addition to our portfolio and was delivered with a remarkable safety record. As we transition to a full-fledged energy company, this trailblazing project



will be essential in powering the country, generating revenue for the nation, and funding research and development for renewables and investment in greener energy installations and infrastructure.

"We are proud of everyone who worked on this project from the company and our contractors Petrofac, Galfar and Arabian

Industries as they demonstrated commitment and perseverance to overcome logistical, technical and operational challenges to deliver on promise and ensure this project's safe and timely delivery."

This project has achieved several significant firsts, including the first to deliver the tallest column ever fabricated for PDO in the Sultanate of Oman.

This 'Made in Oman' acid gas recovery unit absorber stands at 48 metres high, four metres in diameter, and weighs 291 tonnes. It has also delivered one of PDO's first Steam Turbine Generators, taking the heat from some of the facilities' processes and using it to generate steam.

The plant will be able to generate 13MW of electrical power, supplementing the 45MW of the Yibal Khuff Power plant. It is also the first project to allocate a scope for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Around 1,200 Omanis have been employed on site in the construction of the facilities, with a further 200 nationals deployed as fully qualified welders.

Alizz Islamic Bank, Shaden Devt sign new financing agreement

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has strengthened its strategic partnerships with real estate development companies in the Sultanate by signing a new agreement with Shaden Development SAOC to provide easy and flexible financing facilities to customers who wish to buy an apartment in Shaden Al Hail Residential Complex, which is one of the most prestigious residential complexes in Muscat.

This agreement comes within a variety of housing financing options offered by Alizz Islamic Bank represented by the Retail Banking Department, all of which are in compliance with the provisions and principles of Islamic Sharia.

The signing ceremony of the agreement was held at the head office of Alizz Islamic Bank in CBD, Ruwi, coinciding with the Sultanate's celebrations of the glorious National Day.

The memorandum was signed by Mohammed al Ghassani, AGM — Chief Consumer Banking Officer on behalf of Alizz Islamic Bank, and Engineer Abdul Rahman Ba Omar, Board Member of Shaden Development Company on behalf of Shaden Development Company.

The signing ceremony was attended by the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank, Suleiman al Harthy, and a number of senior



management members.

According to this agreement, Alizz Islamic Bank will provide financing facilities to customers who wish to purchase an apartment in Shaden Al Hail project for eligible customers with exemption from profits and transaction fees for a period of up to 48 months or 4 years

Shaden Development Company will bear the transaction fees and profits on behalf of customers during this period, as well as the Takaful insurance fees, with the possibility of extending according to the agreement that is also concluded between the customer and the developer.

The validity of this offer is from November 18 to December 31, 2021.

Alizz Islamic Bank will provide

housing finance under the Diminishing Musharakah concept with a financing rate of up to 80% of the value of the housing unit for eligible customers in accordance with the bank's policy, as well as the Debt Burden Ratio (DBR) and the approval of the valuation report for each financed unit from appraisers approved by the bank in accordance with the current procedures; and at a rate of 90% of the value of the housing unit for customers who take home financing for the first time in accordance with the applicable internal bank policies and procedures

In addition, Alizz Islamic Bank offers financing facilities at a reduced profit rate with a very fast completion of banking transactions, as all services and products offered by Alizz Islamic

Bank have been approved by the Fatwa and Sharia Supervisory Board in accordance with the principles of the Islamic Sharia.

Under the principle of "Diminishing Musharakah", Alizz Islamic Bank will enter into a diminishing Musharakah agreement with the customer, whereby each party contributes to the Musharakah assets a certain percentage of jointly owning the property.

The parts of the bank and the customer that are joint in the partnership assets are divided into equal shares when the construction stages are completed, and the bank begins to transfer the ownership of its share in the real estate by selling its shares to the customer gradually, and the customer buys the bank's shares in the real estate from time to time by paying the sale price in scheduled instalments.

Accordingly, upon maturity of the participation, the ownership of the bank in the property must be transferred exclusively to the customer, and accordingly, the customer is considered the sole owner of the property.

As for customers who wish to take advantage of this exceptional offer and do not hold accounts with Alizz Islamic Bank, all they have to do is contact the customer service centre or visit the nearest branch of Alizz Islamic Bank.

Bank Muscat's Al Jawhar Privilege Banking offers unrivalled benefits



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat's Al Jawhar Privilege Banking opens a world of opportunities and unrivalled benefits to its customers making it one of the most popular Premier Banking options in the Sultanate of Oman.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, Bank Muscat is keen to provide a banking experience that is in line with customer expectations and global banking trends.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, Deputy General Manager — Premier Banking, said: "Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers enjoy an excellent banking experience based on Recognition, Rewards and Solutions. The bank is continuously launching new products and services in response to customer feedback and global banking trends. We look forward to warmly welcoming new customers to our unmatched Privilege Banking services, which are in line with the

bank's customer-centric vision."

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers are eligible for exclusive 2-for-1 deals on food, entertainment and shopping that are available through the 'VISA Xperience App' on their smartphones.

They also have access to a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO 800, the chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO 500 every month for a year as well as other exclusive and high value Al Mazyona prizes that are especially reserved for them in the 2021 Al Mazyona scheme.

Al Jawhar Privilege Banking customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO 10,000 in their accounts are automatically entered into the monthly draws for 20 prizes of RO 5,000 each. Al Jawhar customers will also be excited to know about the draws for 10 special prizes of RO 20,000 each, which are reserved for them in the upcoming End-of-Year draw.

Win free gold coins at Malabar Gold & Diamonds Festival

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of 260 retail outlets spread across 10 countries has launched the 'Malabar Gold & Diamonds Festival' in the Sultanate of Oman.

The festival brings unprecedented opportunities to win free gold coins with jewellery purchases. Customers can get free 1 gm gold coin on diamond jewellery purchase worth RO 400 and free ½ gm gold coin on diamond jewellery purchase



worth RO 250. The above offers will be running till December 25, 2021 across all outlets in the Sultanate of Oman.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also unveiled the latest collection of jewellery in gold, diamonds and precious gems to suit the tastes of their multicultural and multinational customers.

These designs have been incorporated as a part of various brands presented at Malabar Gold & Diamonds' namely Ethnix — Handcrafted Designer Jewellery, Era — Uncut Diamond Jewellery, Mine — Diamonds Unlimited, Divine — Indian Heritage Jewellery and Precia — Gem Jewellery.

Mazoon Electricity gives safety tips on using water heater

MUSCAT: With advent of winter season and as part of its plan to spread awareness about electrical safety among customers, Mazoon Electricity Company, the leading electricity provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has stressed that the maintenance of the electric heater is one of the most important preventive measures against the dangers of electrocution.

Mazoon Electricity has urged customers to seek the assistance of licensed electricians to install



electric heater and apply all safety precautions while installing electrical connections.

Asking customers to ensure the safety of the electric heater

connections to avoid shock, it urged them to guarantee that the appliance has proper earthing.

As a safety measure Mazoon Electricity also explained the importance of turning on the heater well before use and switching it off before using the water.

These awareness efforts come within the framework of the company's objective to spread safety awareness among customers to exercise safe practices when using various electrical appliances.

Gazoo Racing celebrates spectacular WEC win in Bahrain

MUSCAT: Gazoo Racing (GR) completed its history-making hypercar season in style with a one-two victory in the 8 Hours of Bahrain on a day of destiny for the 2021 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) Drivers' Championship crown.

An emotional finale to the season saw Kazuki Nakajima bring the curtain down on his glittering endurance career in style, with victory in the No. 8 GR010 Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) he shares with team-mates Sébastien Buemi and Brendon Hartley.

Meanwhile, Le Mans winners Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi and José María López retained the Drivers' Championship title by finishing second during the sixth and final round of the season in the No. 7 GR010 HEV.

Kobayashi is now Japan's first

two-time World Champion on four wheels, while López becomes only the second Argentinian to win five FIA World Championships.

On a day of new milestones, GR became the first team to win every race in a WEC season. The team extended its unprecedented winning run to nine in its 70th event since first entering the series in 2012.

The last two events of the season took place over two consecutive weekends in Bahrain following the cancellation of round five in Fuji due to ongoing travel restrictions related to Covid-19.

Victory during the first weekend of the Bahrain double-header meant Toyota had already secured its fourth Manufacturer's Championship title before the final race began. Despite clean sweeps in all round



five sessions, the GR010 HEVs played catch-up during the opening laps of the season finale.

However, some exciting wheel-to-wheel racing put the team back in front and they never looked back. As the race moved into the night, the No. 8 GR010 HEV

established an ever-stronger grip at the front. Nakajima took the wheel for the final stint, and his last laps in the WEC.

A journey which started with the roll-out of the TS030 Hybrid in January 2012 ended when Nakajima took the chequered flag

7.351secs ahead of López, whose second place delivered another world title to the No. 7 GR010 HEV crew.

Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "First of all, congratulations on the team championship! We won all six races in the first year of Hypercar, and were able to run through with the tremendous efforts of the drivers and team. I am really grateful that these two cars have become champion cars.

To Kamui, Mike, and José, congratulations on winning Le Mans and the Drivers' Championship. It is very nice! Thanks to the partners who supported the battle in the new Hypercar class and the fans who continued to support us. Thank you for fighting with us this season."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race.

Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

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Sultanate of Oman's food projects are modelled on circular economy design

SYNERGIES: Energy – food sector nexus can help support carbon management in the country

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Food security projects being conceived and delivered by Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), the food investment and development arm of the Omani government, are increasingly driven by the principles of the circular economy to ensure they are not only sustainable, but can also help position the Sultanate of Oman as a food hub for the wider region.

According to a high-level official of wholly government-owned OFIC, an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the Sultanate's integrated sovereign wealth fund, the circular design of the company's projects helps enhance efficiency and output, while also reducing harmful environmental impacts.

"In the food system we are developing in the Sultanate of Oman, we are trying to make sure we are a responsible investor that is caring for society and the environment, while making sure that more food is produced more for less," said Eng Saleh Al Shanfari, Group CEO.

"Currently, most agro food is produced through linear methods, which ignore circularity as a major drive."



Speaking during a recent webinar organised by Gulf Intelligence on the theme, 'Food Energy – Water Nexus?', the official cited the example of OFIC's flagship investment – the RO 100 million Mazoon Dairy project in Al Buraimi Governorate – as a testament to the group's circular economy based project design.

"Mazoon Dairy is an example of project design circularity at its best in the Omani food production context," Eng Al Shanfari said.

"The bioreactor installed at site is the first of its kind in the dairy sector in the region, while the biogas plant is the first in the country. Both are a demonstration of the possibilities to harness energy from biogas, converting

harmful gases into energy and useful nutrients, capturing and reusing water, and so on."

Oman Food Investment is currently overseeing a portfolio of food security related investments in excess of \$1 billion, spanning multiple sectors of the food economy and extending across the value chain.

Over the next five years, new projects involving capital investments of a further \$1.2 billion are anticipated in an array of strategic food areas.

In his comments, Al Shanfari underlined the potential for the food sector to work in collaboration with energy companies to help support the country manage its output of carbon dioxide (CO2) – the greenhouse gas

responsible for climate change.

"We can look at the potential to convert carbon into food," said the official. "Oil & Gas companies can become carbon companies and work with the food sector. For example, captured carbon can be injected into greenhouses to speed up cultivation of fruits and vegetables. We can transform the industry by building the nexus together."

Al Shanfari rejected any suggestion that OFIC's food projects benefit from government subsidy. "The notion of subsidy coming from an abundance of oil resources does not reflect the way we do business today," he stressed.

"In the food sector, we have moved away from government subsidy to make sure the



The bioreactor installed at site is the first of its kind in the dairy sector in the region, while the biogas plant is the first in the country

ENG SALEH AL SHANFARI

Group CEO, Oman Food Investment Holding Company

projects we develop are self-sustainable and bankable, which will also make the Sultanate of Oman a food hub for the region."

This underlying philosophy is also helping strengthen the Sultanate of Oman's food security objectives, the Group CEO noted.

"The country has already secured the second rank in food security in the Arab world and 32nd globally. Indeed, food supply wasn't disrupted during the Covid pandemic: there was no panic buying or shelves running short, which affirmed the resilience of the country's food reserves system," he added.

Weaker foreign demand sinks German industrial orders



Staff wear protective masks at the Volkswagen assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany. — Reuters

BERLIN: Weaker demand from abroad drove a much bigger than expected drop in German industrial orders, including cars, in October, data showed on Monday, further clouding the growth outlook for manufacturers in Europe's largest economy.

A pandemic-related scarcity of microchips and other electronic components has caused massive supply bottlenecks and production problems in Germany's mighty automobile industry and other important sectors of the economy.

Orders for goods 'Made in Germany' dropped 6.9 per cent on the month in seasonally adjusted terms after a revised rise of 1.8 per cent in September and a plunge of 8.8 per cent in August, figures from the Federal Statistics Office showed.

A Reuters poll of analysts had pointed to a smaller decline of 0.5 per cent on the month in October.

"After incoming orders climbed to an all-time high in mid-2021, the index has lost more than 16 points in recent months," the economy ministry said, adding that the second sharp decline within three months put a further damper on the economic outlook. — Reuters

Oil gains more than \$1 per barrel after Saudi price hike

SINGAPORE: Oil prices rose by more than \$1 a barrel on Monday after top exporter Saudi Arabia raised prices for its crude sold to Asia and the United States, and as indirect US-Iran talks on reviving a nuclear deal appeared to hit an impasse.

Brent crude futures for February gained \$1.69, or 2.4 per cent, to \$71.36 a barrel by 0033 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude for January were at \$67.84 a barrel, up \$1.66,

or 2.5 per cent.

On Sunday, Saudi Arabia raised January official selling prices for all crude grades sold to Asia and the United States by up to 80 cents from the previous month.

The price hikes were implemented despite a decision last week by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies including Russia, a group known as Opec+, to continue increasing supplies by 400,000 barrels per



A worker fills a vehicle with petrol at a gas station in Riyadh. — Reuters

day in January.

Prices were also buoyed by diminishing prospects of a rise in Iranian oil exports after indirect US-Iranian talks on saving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal broke off last week. European officials voiced dismay on Friday at sweeping demands by Iran's new, government.

The talks are expected to resume middle of this week. Both benchmarks rebounded after falling last week for their

sixth week in a row for the first time since November 2018 on concerns that the new coronavirus variant Omicron could impact global economic growth and fuel demand.

In another sign of the turmoil unleashed by the ever-changing pandemic, the head of IMF said the global lender is likely to lower its global economic growth estimates because of the new variant. Omicron has spread to about one-third of US states. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

HONG KONG

Bitcoin tumbles 5 per cent after weekend battering

Bitcoin tumbled almost 5 per cent on Monday as the start of the week offered little respite to the world's largest cryptocurrency after a bruising weekend where at one point it lost over a fifth of its value.

The rout sent bitcoin's price and the amount invested in bitcoin futures back to where they were in early October, before a massive price surge that sent the token to an all-time high of \$69,000 on November 10.

It was last down 3.9 per cent



at \$47,567.

Traders said the weekend fall was connected to a broad move away from riskier assets in traditional markets over worries about the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. — Reuters

PARIS

Renault to cut fewer jobs than initially planned

French carmaker Renault said on Monday it had revised down its forecast for engineering and support jobs cuts in France between 2022 and 2024 to 1,700 from the 2,000 job losses previously expected.

Renault said in September it would start talks with unions on plans to cut up to 2,000 engineering and support jobs in France as it shifts into electric vehicles and hires for different posts.

"Given the increase of the



number of people departing the company on a voluntary basis ... there has been a readjustment of the 2022-2024 plan's targets", a spokesperson said, confirming the 1,700 figure reported by Les Echos. — Reuters

SHANGHAI

Alibaba overhauls e-commerce businesses

Alibaba Group Holding Ltd said it will reorganise its international and domestic e-commerce businesses and replace its CFO — changes that come as the tech giant grapples with an onslaught of competition. It will form two new units — international digital commerce and China digital commerce which it said was part of efforts to become more agile and accelerate growth.

The international digital commerce unit will include AliExpress which sells to retail



buyers particularly in Europe and South America, its Southeast Asian e-commerce business Lazada and Alibaba.com which is more focused on selling to overseas business customers. — Reuters

China property market faces more nationalisation

China's private homebuilders might struggle to stay private for much longer. Evergrande, the country's most indebted developer, has admitted it might formally default. With \$10 billion in property bonds maturing in January alone, officials are under pressure to keep the sector from collapsing without softening their hard line on debt levels. It is unsurprising that China Evergrande is unlikely to come up with the money. Chairman Hui Ka Yan has even resorted to tapping his personal wealth..

But so far only a few smaller peers have officially defaulted in the public market. Now Evergrande says it has received a payment request under a \$260 million guarantee obligation, having already failed to make \$82.5 million in coupon payments.

The 30-day grace period is up on Monday, at which point Evergrande will have officially defaulted for the first time.

Financial regulators issued statements on Friday arguing Evergrande is an isolated case.

That evening Premier Li Keqiang flagged an upcoming bank reserve requirement ratio cut, while Evergrande's provincial government in Guangdong sent a work group to oversee "risk management".

That sounds similar to what happened to aviation conglomerate HNA before a restructuring. But while HNA was somewhat unique, Evergrande is just the worst member of a troubled crew with \$1.5 trillion in loans outstanding in September. In January alone they need to find \$10 billion for maturing offshore and onshore bonds, according to data.

Policy easing has been underwhelming. Central bank official said banks should not over-tighten credit to developers, and there are signs that some are being allowed to issue onshore bonds and asset-backed securities.

But the beneficiaries have primarily been state-controlled developers like Poly Developments and China Merchants Shekou.

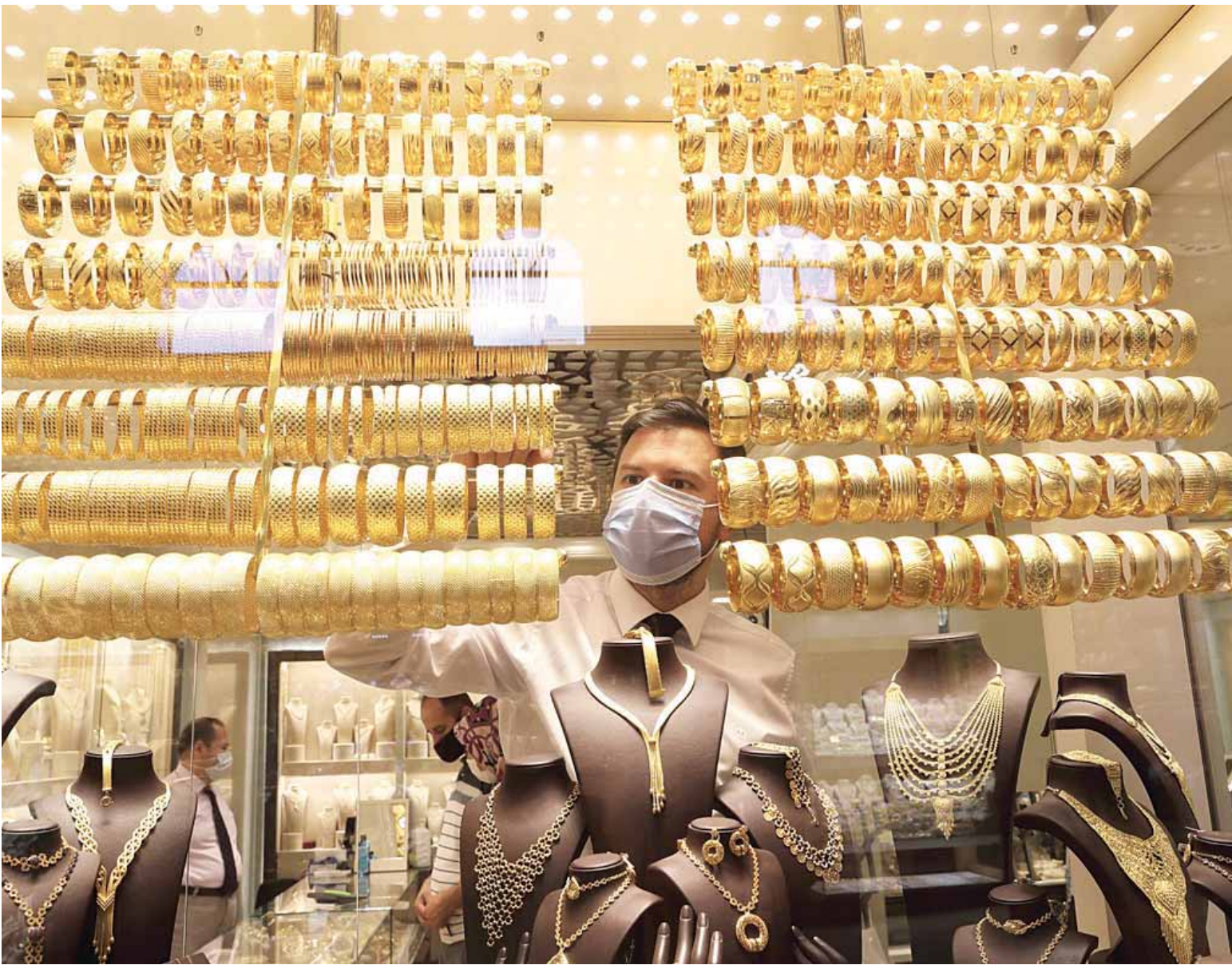
One property executive said that some bankers informed him they received guidance to steer clear of private real estate firms.

As private companies like Kaisa and Sunac — the biggest dollar bond issuers after Evergrande — try to conserve cash, they are struggling to complete pre-sold projects and pay suppliers.

This is where the contagion risk lies, and Beijing must head it off. As capital flows to state-owned developers, they will be first on the hook to step in to help, and another once-vibrant part of China's private economy will come under increasing state control. — Reuters

Banks should not over-tighten credit to developers, and there are signs that some are being allowed to issue onshore bonds and asset-backed securities

CENTRAL BANK OFFICIAL



FIXING THE YELLOW ASSET

A salesman arranges golden bangles at a jewellery shop at the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Turkey.

Gold prices held steady on Monday as market participants weighed the prospect of a faster ending to pandemic-era asset purchases by the US Federal Reserve after data suggested the labour market was rapidly tightening. Spot gold was little changed at \$1,783.91 per ounce. — Reuters

Multilateralism's secret sauce



HAROLD JAMES

The author is Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University.

THERE IS A BETTER PATH. WE SHOULD FOCUS ON HOW THE CURRENT PROBLEM CAN BE MEASURED, RATHER THAN ON HOW IT ORIGINATED

One clear lesson from last month's damp squib of a climate summit in Glasgow is that multilateralism is difficult to pull off. This has always been the case.

Many of history's biggest international pow-wows ended in failure, not least the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the 1933 London World Economic Conference, and pretty much every G7 or G20 meeting.

Big successes like the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference and the April 2009 G20 meeting in London were exceptions that prove the rule.

Does the latter meeting, convened amid the global economic turmoil triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers the previous September, offer a blueprint for improving international summits?

One takeaway is that whatever emergency is meant to be addressed, participants need to define their objectives precisely.

The lack of a clear vision — or at least a basic understanding of the goal — will inevitably produce failure. Reflecting on the world's collective inability to provide solutions to the Great Depression, John Maynard Keynes suggested that a workable plan could be produced only by "a single power or like-minded group of powers."

Blame games also tend to produce failure. Nowadays, pretty much every global issue invites debate about who is originally responsible. Consider refugees.

The European Union blames Belarus and Russia for funnelling Middle Eastern migrants to its borders, whereas Russia argues that it is Britain and America who destabilised the Middle East in 2003 (or was it in 1991, or even 1919?).

The same dynamic applies to Covid-19.

Since the virus emerged in China, shouldn't China pay? The Trump administration thought so and even issued that demand in international fora. Climate change is the subject of a similar debate.

If the original acceleration in the rise of Earth's temperature is a consequence of the early industrialisation that enriched Western countries (above all the United States and the United Kingdom), don't they have a responsibility to pay up?

To a historian, this all sounds like the poisonous reparations debates after 1918, when the argument was over who bore responsibility for the outbreak of World War I.

There is a better path. We should focus on how the current problem can be measured, rather than on how it originated.

Unless phenomena can be mastered through calculation, they will remain abstractions, fuelling nervousness and recrimination. Reliable data about costs are essential to building a consensus on solutions.

The success of the Bretton Woods negotiations enabled the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to tackle development in a new way, because they

were operating under a new framework of national income accounting.

Although that framework had been developed in industrialised countries to meet the challenge of mobilising resources for war, it could also be used for building peace.

Now, it is the old framework that gets in the way. It is too simple for today's world, and it directs attention in the wrong direction.

When journalists report on the twice-yearly IMF meetings, they focus on the participants' assessments of GDP growth, because that is what the IMF puts front and centre. Yet when it comes to the biosphere, GDP is not an asset but a liability, eroding rather than enhancing the wealth of nations.

The threat of biosphere degradation is not the only development that should provoke concern.

Another worrying megatrend that demands international attention is the data revolution, and the application of new techniques to manage it, not least artificial intelligence.

Managing these developments calls for more detailed and more frequently updated data. The ideal is real-time data provision, not once every six months when the IMF releases a new World Economic Outlook. Securing correct and timely data from member countries has always been a contentious issue for the IMF.

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Modi's reform reversal to deter investment in agriculture

India's repeal of agriculture laws aimed at deregulating produce markets will starve its vast farm sector of much-needed private investment and saddle the government with budget-sapping subsidies for years, economists said.

Late last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government introduced three laws meant to open up agriculture markets to companies and attract private investment, triggering India's longest-running protest by farmers who said the reforms would allow corporations to exploit them.

With an eye on a critical election in populous Uttar Pradesh state early next year, Modi agreed

to rescind the laws in November, hoping to smooth relations with the powerful farm lobby which sustains nearly half the country's 1.3 billion people and accounts for about 15 per cent of the \$2.7 trillion economy.

But by shelving the most ambitious overhaul in decades, Modi's backtracking now seemingly rules out much-needed upgrades of the creaky post-harvest supply chain to cut wastage, spur crop diversification, and boost farmers' incomes, economists said.

"This is not good for agriculture, this is not good for India," said Gautam Chikermane, a senior economist and vice president at New Delhi-based

Observer Research Foundation. "All incentives to shift towards a more efficient, market-linked system (in agriculture) have been smothered."

The u-turn does allay farmers' fears of losing the minimum price system for basic crops, which growers say guarantees India's grain self-sufficiency.

"It appears the government realised that there's merit in the farmers' argument that opening up the sector would make them vulnerable to large companies, hammer commodities prices and hit farmers' income," said Devinder Sharma, a farm policy expert who has supported the growers' movement.

But the gruelling year-long standoff also means no political party will attempt any similar reforms for at least a quarter-century, Chikermane said.

And, in the absence of private investment, "inefficiencies in the system will continue to deliver wastage and food will continue to rot," he warned.

India ranks 101 out of 116 countries on the Global Hunger Index, with malnutrition accounting for 68 per cent of child deaths. Yet it wastes around 67 million tonnes of food every year, worth about \$12.25 billion — nearly five times that of most large economies — according to various studies.

Inadequate cold-chain storage, shortages of refrigerated trucks and insufficient food processing facilities are the main causes of waste. The farm laws promised to allow private traders, retailers and food processors to buy directly from farmers, bypassing more than 7,000 government-regulated wholesale markets where middlemen's commissions and market fees add to consumer costs.

Ending the rule that food must flow through the approved markets would have encouraged private participation in the supply chain, giving both Indian and global companies incentives to invest in the sector, traders and economists said. — Reuters

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SALE OF COMPANY ASSETS

BDO LLC, the Official Liquidators, hereby makes the final announcement for the sale of the fixed assets (comprising of leased building, plant and machinery and furniture and fixtures) of Oman Chemical Industries Co. SAOG (Under Liquidation) on "as is where is" basis along with the usufruct rights of the land owned by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates admeasuring 34,367 sq. mtrs located at Plot no. 119 and 120, Block No. Phase-1A, Sohar Industrial Area. All interested parties should contact Mr. Mudather Al Hooti either on his direct office no. 24955121 or GSM no. 92990093 for further details within 30 days of this notification. Arrangements will be made for the interested parties to visit the premises at Sohar for inspection of the fixed assets, after which the parties would be required to submit their offer in a sealed envelope either to the Liquidator's office located in Suites 601 & 602, Pent House, Beach One Building, Way No. 2601, Shatti Al Qurum or PO Box 1176, Ruwi, PC 112, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. The last date for receiving offers is 6 January 2022.

BDO LLC
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features

Recalling memories in pebbles

Creating art on rocks and stones is not much different than painting on papers, canvas, or walls. Theme-based pebble artworks is also becoming a trend nowadays and it is within this space that Inaam Naboulsi, a Lebanese lady, is focusing her art on... **P20**



DISCOVERY

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‘Featherweight’ planet discovered orbiting a red dwarf star

AN EXTRASOLAR PLANET with half the mass of Earth and a day of less than eight hours has been discovered, according to findings published on Thursday.

The celestial body, named GJ 367 b, is a low-mass rocky planet with a radius 72 per cent that of Earth's and a mass 55 per cent that of Earth's. Researchers say it is "one of the lightest among the nearly 5,000

exoplanets known today."

An international team of scientists led by the German Aerospace Center (DLR) Institute of Planetary Research made the discovery.

Researcher Szilard Csizmadia said its "high density indicates the planet is dominated by an iron core."

GJ 367 b, which is just under 31 light years away from Earth, takes about eight hours to orbit

its parent star, a red dwarf called GJ 367 which is only about half the size of the Sun.

"It seems to have similarities to Mercury," said DLR's Kristine Lam, who led the international team with Csizmadia.

"This places it among the sub-Earth sized terrestrial planets and brings research one step forward in the search for a 'second Earth'."

The planet, however, cannot be considered a "second Earth" due to the very high levels of radiation it is exposed to which are "more than 500 times stronger than what the Earth experiences," said Csizmadia.

"The surface temperature could reach up to 1,500 degrees Celsius — a temperature at which all rocks and metals would be melted."

The findings were published in the scientific journal *Science* on Thursday. — dpa





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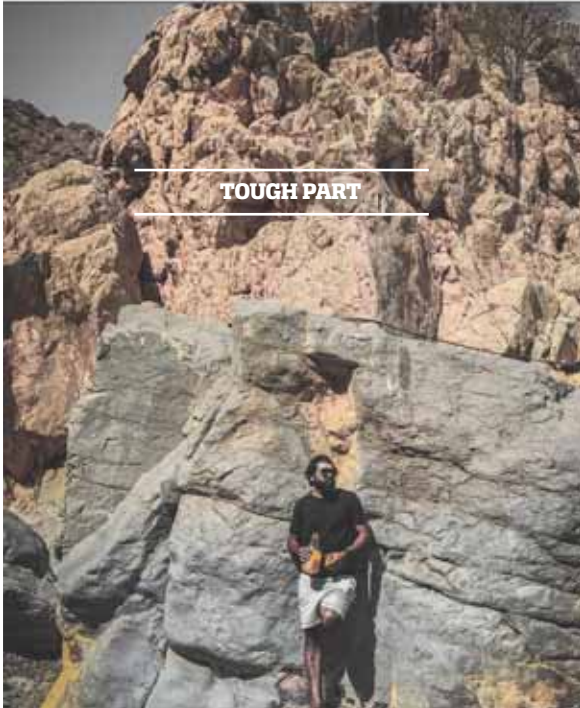
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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Louvre Abu Dhabi contact extended until 2047



THE LOUVRE ABU DHABI'S licence has been extended by 10 years to 2047, the French presidency said on Friday during a visit by Emmanuel Macron to the United Arab Emirates.

The French president and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed agreed to the "extension for 10 years of the partnership over the Louvre Abu Dhabi, a vector of French influence abroad", the French presidency said.

The move will see Abu Dhabi pay 165 million euros (\$186 million) between 2022 and 2023 for the extra decade, said French Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot, who signed the deal.

In exchange, the Louvre has agreed to lend four of its works, the details of which were not



provided.

"It was very important to extend (the agreement) over the long term as the Louvre Abu Dhabi is absolutely magnificent and sparks wonder in all who visit it," Bachelot said.

"This agreement only has positives."

The announcement came as Macron visits the UAE as part of a two-day Gulf tour.

Opened in 2017, the art collection of the Abu Dhabi branch of the Louvre is housed in a spectacular museum designed by French architect Jean Nouvel.

Under a 30-year agreement, France provides expertise, lends works of art and organises exhibitions, in return for one billion euros (\$1.16 billion).

The museum also exhibits a collection acquired by the Abu Dhabi authorities.

Macron opened the Louvre Abu Dhabi in late 2017.

The museum attracted some two million visitors in its first two years of operation, before being forced to close for 100 days in early 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

— AFP

CULTURE



Pok ta Pok: Mayan ball game is serious business

WITH LITTLE REGARD for joints or bones, bare-chested men hurl their bodies at a hard floor and contort their limbs to strike a heavy rubber ball with their hips.

They are practitioners of the ancient sport of Pok ta Pok, sometimes translated as Mayan ball, and have been competing in the game's very own World Cup.

Participants, mostly indigenous Mayans from three Mexican states, as well as Guatemala, Panama and reigning champions Belize, vied for the world title in the Mexican town of Merida.

Belize won the championship once again, defeating Mexico in the final on Friday.

But unlike ancient Pok ta Pok athletes, these competitors were not playing for their lives, merely pride.

In pre-Columbian times, the outcome could be worse than defeat: players risked being sacrificed, usually by decapitation.

The tradition varied over the centuries, researchers say: sometimes, it was the winners who were killed, which was considered an honour. Sometimes the losers were the ones to pay the ultimate price.

The game was banned by the Spanish conquistadors shortly after their arrival in Mexico in 1519.

Like in most ball team sports, the aim of Pok ta Pok is to get the ball through the opposing team's defences to score.

Four members per team play in two halves of 13 minutes each, and may touch the solid rubber ball weighing more than two kilos



(4.4 pounds) only with their hips.

If another body part gets involved, points are deducted.

Each team can strike the ball only once before the turn passes to their opponents.

And while lives are no longer at stake, the game is not without risk.

"I come to bless the players so they don't twist a foot, so they don't break a bone, (tear) a tendon or something," said Tiburcio Can May, a Mayan healer who blew on a shell and shook smoke at participants in a pre-games ceremony.

"In order for them to be able to run well on the field, we have to ask the lord of the underworld, Xibalba, we have to ask the 13

gods, we have to ask the lord of the Universe, Mother Earth, because they are going to play a very sacred game."

For France Novelo, a player from Belize, Pok ta Pok is "a way to rescue culture in our country."

Jose Manrique, president of the Central American and Caribbean Association of the Ancestral Sport of the Mayan Ball, added: "We have to honour the memory of our grandparents, we have to honour our Mayan gods. That is why the ball game continues to be a ceremony for us."

The previous games were held in Chichen Itza, Mexico, in 2015, Guatemala in 2017 and El Salvador in 2019. For now, it is an all-men event. — AFP

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



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Last Night's Vision

The following are translations of poems by the Omani poet Hilal al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

1 HEADACHE

Last night's vision
How can I deflower it
this morning?
What were the mythical
cats
Dancing in my head?
I recall glancing in my
old solitude
At visions of voluptuous
women.
And as I'm
From the "East" of leg-
ends and self-denial,
I only bewailed
Their bloody wounds
in my heart
With words of wooing
and images of despair.
But
What were those
words whose
Splinters still fill my
mouth?
Oh! I've just remem-
bered
The details of the
scene:
They were no women
I didn't sing love
songs
I
Was
Just
Immersed in Omar
Khayyam's Rubaiyat 1
!

The horses of anar-
chy
And their fascist car-
riages
Run over me
Leaving my days
Like a corpse
1 Omar Khayyam was a
12th century Persian mathemati-
cian, astronomer
and a poet. He wrote
rhymed quatrains
called in Arabic and
Persian rubaiyat. His
poetry has been
translated to several
languages, including
both Arabic
and English. Perhaps
the most famous
English translation is
that of Edward
Fitzgerald (1809-
1883) (the translator).
Robbed by solitude
and self-slashing.
The cup of bald
Shakespeare
Is no longer enough
To drink my life's
vantage wine in,
The life that trots too
much
With no reins of love
Or even a single
glance of a damsel!

2 A FEMALE FEAST

This whole feast
Of women
How close to it is the
friend
I know so well?
His age has bent
Dreaming
Of the vision of a
woman
Or
The thigh of a chick-
en.

3 GLOOM

O I wish it would...
I wish it would...
No escape is there
from loss.
When I cling to
A thread of certainty

4 OPTIMISM

Who will help me
Make straight
My raw loneliness?
I've long since
Wanted to put wood on
it
From the East and
West.
Bitter it is
Bitter
If it were not
For the moments of
absence
That clothe me at
evening.
No...
Who says life is odi-
ous?!

Tell the world's insects
To give me
The skins they discard
in vain.
I may clasp them
If even for a moment!



Recalling memories in pebbles

BY ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

Arts, with all its forms, come in different shapes and sizes and artists use all manner of materials to create their creative masterpieces. While some produce arts on traditional canvas, others use hardboard or parts of driftwood to capture their creativity. On the other hand, some are searching for more inspiration to demonstrate their unique imagination. Hence, they get stuck between a rock and a hard place to get their art piece done.

Creating art on rocks and stones is not much different than painting on papers, canvas, or walls. The supplies are almost the same, but the surface is just different and that is what can be challenging for artists. The small stones and rough surfaces are not the easiest to paint, especially if you want fine details. It is attributed that every stone owns a statue and it is the task of the sculptor to dis-

cover it. Thus, every stone brings a different sculpture or story, reflecting its place in nature.

On beaches, for instance, inspiration sources are abundant, especially the rocky and pebbly ones. What if you live in the Sultanate of Oman that has the most magnificent beaches! Possibly, many artists are looking for ideas on how to get inspired by beach stones as they visit the beach quite often. The eye-catching pebbles, as an example, make them always think that they should be creating something distinguished with them! Beach pebbles inspiration is for everyone, both adults and kids, and is generously offered to people by nature.

Pebbles, even as small as your thumbnail, or huge stones have the power to tell interesting stories that our world needs to hear. Every beach pebble is there for a parent, a teacher, an artist, a writer, a poet and a craftsperson to

special occasion such as birthdays, family celebrations, graduation, wedding anniversary, new baby or even farewell parties. What is great about this kind of art is that each design is wonderfully embellished in an array of brightly coloured pebbles. Each pebble or shell is always uniquely chosen for a specific artwork and to tell a different story! Moreover, many other different elements or crafting materials could be used on hand to personalise customers' gifts", Inaam explained.

Inaam's first pebble artwork was on the theme 'family'. People started to notice her works when she gifted some of her creations to her friends on birthdays and other special occasions. As friends and family encouraged her, she took this hobby seriously, so she made numerous theme-based artworks using pebbles, drawings, threads and other simple art material. She opened her Instagram page last October 2020. Also, she took part in an exhibi-



tion at Art & Soul Gallery. So far, she had been able to produce over 300 pieces, recording a range of people's memories in such an ingenious way. She believes that the truth is not in the touch of a stone, but in what the stone tells you. "There will always be rocks in the roads ahead of us; either as stumbling blocks or stepping-stones. However, it all depends on how we use and shape these stones. Pebbles are the same; how we use them is what defines the value of each piece we have in hand", she commented.

As much of the history of the world's civilisations is recorded in stone, so are the memories mirrored in pebble art. It is thought that a stone from the hand of a friend is like an apple, so does Inaam convey the same with all the pebble artworks she produces! All you need to recall your memories in an inspiring way is to just approach Inaam on @pebbleartoman to make your memorable moments well designed for you.

Theme-based pebble artworks stand as the hottest new gift idea nowadays, which Inaam Naboulsi, a Lebanese lady, is mastering here



discover its beauty. Perhaps, one has to give it a shot and take a trip of discovery to get inspired and create a mesmerising piece of art. There are various yet to be discovered treasures in nature that our modern world has forgotten or undervalued.

Among these natural gems are the beach pebbles, which are widely used worldwide in pebble art or pebble painting today. The name says it all; it is represented in stones or pebbles that are combined in a framed artwork, narrating someone's story or memory. These pebbles can be personalised by the artist with a message written along with a creative pebble artwork for every story or memory that needs to be conveyed. Likewise, pebbles can also be colourfully hand-painted to have a more attractive artwork.

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