

HM greetings to Gambia president

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to President Adama Barrow of Gambia on his re-election for a new presidential term. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president wishing him success in leading the friendly people of Gambia towards more progress and prosperity. – ONA



P10

ALGERIA LIFT
FIFA ARAB CUP
IN STUNNING
FASHION



P13

MADAYN OUTLINES
INVESTMENT
OPPORTUNITIES LINKED TO
FOUR INDUSTRIAL CITIES



P20

YOUNG OMANI
CLIMATE ACTIVISTS
LEAD WAY TO
GLOBAL ACTION



MUSCAT

OVER 32,000 RECEIVE 3RD DOSE OF COVID JAB

The Ministry of Health has said that 32,412 people received the third dose of Covid-19 vaccine in the Sultanate of Oman, taking the total number of doses administered in the country to 6,042,371.

The number of people who have received the second dose reached 2,889,245 or 86 per cent, and the number of those who received the first dose is 3,120,714 or 93 per cent of the total targets.

The MoH said the vaccine is given to citizens in primary healthcare institutions in all wilayats, in addition to the Old Airport building (field hospital) in Seeb. SEE P3

SHORT FILM FESTIVAL OPENS

Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, opened the first short film festival organised by the Oman Society for Films and Theatre (OSFT) at the society on Saturday. The one-week-long festival from December 18 to 23 will screen 27 locally made films from 7pm to 9pm everyday.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Saif Nasser al Maawali, Director, Omani Short Film Festival, said that the response from the local artists was overwhelming.

“We received hundreds of entries and 27 films were short-listed to take part in the festival.” SEE P3

Basic services to get lion’s share in 2022 budget

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samuelkuttyvp](#)

Budget 2022, drafted in alignment with the 10th Five-Year Plan and priorities in Oman Vision 2040, envisages increased spending on basic services like education, health and social welfare.

“The budget aims to achieve a number of economic and social goals, among them maintaining safe levels of government spending, giving priority to projects of economic and social objectives and finalising digital transformation, to name a few,” said Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, last week.

The total general revenues of the State Budget 2022 are estimated to be six per cent higher than revenues expected to be collected by the end of 2021.

Oil revenues are calculated on the basis of \$50 a barrel, compared with \$45 in 2021, and the volume of general

“

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SULTAN BIN SALIM AL HABSI
Minister of Finance

expenditure estimated for fiscal year 2022 stands at about RO 12.1 billion, with an expected two per cent increase in spending during 2022.

The ministry estimates that the country achieved a 56-per cent increase in net oil revenue and a 40-per cent uptick in natural gas income in 2021 from a year earlier.

According to Abdullah bin Salim al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, the spending of civil ministries in 2022 is estimated at RO 4.3 billion.

“One of the most important pillars of the state’s general budget for 2022 is maintaining safe and sustainable levels of public spending, while continuing to raise non-oil revenue contributions, and giving priority to the implementation of projects related to the productive sectors and others,” Al Harthi said.

Spending on basic services such as education, healthcare, housing and social welfare are expected to be higher than the 2021 budget which represented over 40 per cent of the current spending. TURN TO P5



Weather makes Muscat top city for relocation

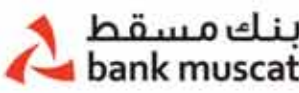
LIJU CHERIAN
[@lijucherianoman](#)

Muscat, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Manama and Doha are among the top 10 relocation destinations worldwide for best weather, according to money.co.uk, a UK-based price comparison website in its new report.

The study analysed the average temperatures and precipitation rates for each city to give a normalised score out of 10, with higher temperatures and lower levels of rainfall being ranked with the highest revealing the top relocation destinations with the best weather.

Capital Muscat was ranked at fifth spot and is a top relocation destination home to the best weather, as per the report.

Muscat has an average temperature of 27.30 degrees Celsius with an annual precipitation of 100.00 mm and scored 9.8 on 10 for weather. TURN TO P5



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WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 24°C Min 16°C SALALAH: Max 26°C Min 20°C NIZWA: Max 25°C Min 14°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:43 FAJR: 05:23 DHUHR: 12:09 ASR: 15:09 MAGHRIB: 17:29 ISHA: 18:45

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الطَّيِّبَةُ طُوبَى لَكَ بِمَا كُنْتِ تَعْمَلِينَ فَاخْذِي فِي عِبَادَةِ رَبِّكِ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَكَانٍ لَكَ الْغَنِيُّ

صَدَقَ اللَّهُ الْعَظِيمُ

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our
beloved founder,

Mr. Majid Al Futtaim

Mr. Majid Al Futtaim was a visionary entrepreneur who
transformed the face of business across our region.

His lifetime achievements have been an inspiration for many, none
more so than for the proud employees
of his company.

His legacy lives on in our businesses and culture, which shall
continue to create innovative brands, exceptional destinations, and
spaces that incubate happiness for our people and our customers.

His passing is a tragic loss for our company,
our communities and our region, and our thoughts and prayers are
with his family and loved ones during this difficult time.

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

ماجد الفطيم
MAJID AL FUTTAIM

المووج
al mouj
مسقط muscat

مول عمان
Mall of Oman

سيني سنتر
مسقط muscat

سيني سنتر
القرم qurm

سيني سنتر
صحر sahrah

VOX
سينما cinemas

كارفور
Carrefour

ماجيك بلانيت
agic planet

Over 32,000 receive 3rd dose of Covid vaccine

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health has said that 32,412 people received the third dose of Covid-19 vaccine in the Sultanate of Oman, taking the total number of doses administered in the country to 6,042,371.

The number of people who have received the second dose reached 2,889,245 or 86 per cent, and the number of those who received the first dose is 3,120,714 or 93 per cent of the total targets.

The MoH said the vaccine is given to citizens in primary healthcare institutions in all wilayats, in addition to the Old Airport building (field hospital) in Seeb.

The field hospital will continue to provide vaccinations from Sunday to Thursday from 8 am until 2 pm for citizens and residents.

"The third dose is available in all health institutions for the target groups of 18 years and above



who have completed six months of receiving the second dose of the Covid-19 vaccine," officials in the MoH said.

"For expatriates, the first and second doses are available at the Old Airport building while the schedule for the third dose will be announced in the coming weeks," sources in the MoH said.

Meanwhile, WHO said, based on the current evidence, the Omicron variant of concern is spreading at a rate not seen with any other previous variant including Delta.

"Severity is not yet clear whether infection with the Omicron variant of concern causes more

severe disease compared to infection with other variants, including Delta.

There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with the Omicron variant of concern are different from those of other variants. All variants of Covid-19, including Delta, can cause severe disease or death for the most vulnerable people, and thus prevention is always key."

Preliminary evidence suggests there may be an increased risk of reinfection with Omicron as compared to other variants, but the information remains limited, WHO said.

The Supreme Committee last week issued a decision prohibiting the wedding and funeral ceremonies in mosques, halls and other public places. As the number of Omicron cases is rapidly rising in the country, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has urged people to avoid non-essential travel and mass gatherings.



ABHS meet discusses regulations

AMMAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, is taking part in the meetings of the Executive Office of the Arab Board of Health Specialisations (ABHS), which began on Saturday in the Jordanian capital Amman.

The meetings are headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health and President of ABHS Supreme Council.

The meetings discussed several topics including the regulations of the ABHS, human resources system and enhancing cooperation with the WHO. — ONA

Short film fest opens



KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

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The one-week-long festival from December 18 to 23 will screen 27 locally made films from 7pm to 9pm everyday.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Saif bin Nasser al Maawali, Director, Omani Short Film Festival, said that the response from the local artistes was overwhelming.

"We received hundreds of entries and 27 films were short-listed to take part in the festival. The response from the directors, artistes and technicians is a clear

indication that cinema in the Sultanate of Oman is growing in leaps and bounds," Dr Saif said.

As many as 27 films comprising 11 feature films, 10 documentaries, and 6 animation films with the duration ranging from 3 minutes to 50 minutes will be screened during the festival.

The biennial Muscat International Film Festival (MIFF), which was supposed to be held in early 2020, was called off due to the Covid pandemic and plans are afoot to hold the same in a bigger manner from next year, according to the organisers.

Dr Humaid al Amri, Chairman of OSFT, Dr Mohammed al Kindi, Omani film director, Khalil al Sinani and other local and expatriate film personalities were present at the opening ceremony.

LPIC launching ceremony today



SUHAR: His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will preside over the launching ceremony of Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a RO 2.7-million mega project of OQ, at Suhar Industrial Port, on Monday.

The LPIC is part of the govern-

ment's plans to diversify income sources and enhance infrastructure as one of the investment projects in the petrochemicals industry that aims to boost the value of natural resources in the Sultanate of Oman.

LPIC consists of four packages, three of which have already entered commercial operation phase while the integrated commercial operation of package 1 is

under way. The local added value of the project during the construction phase was nearly RO 578 million.

The project aims to boost the infrastructure sector by adding 838,000t/yr of polyethylene (PE) and about 300,000t/yr of polypropylene (PP), raising total production of both products in the country to 1.4m t/yr from around 1m t/yr. — ONA

OCCI at Islamic chambers meeting

MAKKAH AL-MUKARRAMAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), took part in the 32nd meeting of board of directors of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, which was held in Saudi Arabia with the participation of over 15 heads of Islamic chambers and associations.

The delegation was headed by Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI.

— ONA



FLOATING TENDERS

Oman Airports Company announces the following tenders:

Tender REF. NO	TENDER TITLE	DOC'S FEE OMR	Last date for DOC'S DISTRIBUTION	TENDER SUBMISSION DATE
PC-211207	Supply and Installation of Video Wall Screens at Muscat International Airport	25	23 rd December 2021	06 th January 2022
ITC-211201	Provision of license Renewal and Support for Veeam Software at Muscat International and Salalah Airport	100	30 th December 2021	13 th January 2022
PC-211206	Provision of ROP Forensic laboratory Works at Muscat International Airport	25	30 th December 2021	13 th January 2022
PC-211207	Provision of Outsourcing Internal Audit Activities for Oman Airport's Business Units	25	30 th December 2021	13 th January 2022

Tenders Collection: Specialized companies may obtain Tender Documents/ Specifications from Procurement Department upon receipt of complete payment of tender fees by Cash Transfer/ deposit into below OAMC bank account and submittal of clear scanned copy of deposit Receipt along with a copy of Company Commercial Registration Certificate to Email: **(FinanceTenders@omanairports.com)** provided with company name, tender number & contact person as a mandatory.

OAMC Bank Account Details:

Account Name: Oman Airports Management Co. S.A.O.C.
Account No: 0423010849180012
Name of Bank: BANK MUSCAT
Branch: Corporate Branch, CBD Area, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRX

Required Bond: All participating Companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank, for the sum of not less than 1% of the Tender value, addressed to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, valid for 90 days from the date of submission of the Tenders.

Submission: All bids shall be submitted as per mentioned instructions in the tender documents and late bids will not be entertained.

Bidder holding Riyada card of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are exempted from Tender Fees and Submission of Bid Bond.

All Technical Queries shall be sent to:
oamctenders@omanairports.com

The committee is not bound to accept the lowest tender.
Any payment received after last date of documents distribution will not be refunded

Headquarter Address:
Muscat International Airport
South Forecourt Building, First Floor
Oman Airports Management S.A.O.C
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

Note: All Correspondence / Clarification / Enquiries send an e-mail:
oamctenders@omanairports.com




Oman Trading Enterprises LLC

Sultanate of Oman Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN

For Chery Arrizo vehicles




Date of Campaign : 19 / 12 / 2021

Campaign Type : Safety

Recall Segment : Fuel

Product Description : Chery Arrizo (3) 2018 model and Chery Arrizo (6) 2020 model

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2018	Chery	Arrizo 3	LVVDC21B0J0010533 to LVVDC21B0J0010541	43
2020	Chery	Arrizo 6	LVVDC21B0L0010468 to LVVDC21B0L0010474	113

Description:
Some of the Arrizo (3) 2018 model and Arrizo (6) 2020 model year it mentioned in user manual, that the recommended fuel grade is (92), whereas the correct fuel grade is (91)

Procedure: Dealers will replace the stickers in the mentioned vehicle with new corrected stickers

For More information:
Customers of above-mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC.

Contact Details: Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8:00 am to 1:00 pm & 2:00 pm to 5:30 pm with effected from date 19.12.2021



LOVE ADVENTURE? HERE IT IS



KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

A French study conducted on the ground has selected the Sultanate of Oman, with its diverse terrain dominated by the vast ranges of rugged mountains, to be the best adventure tourism destination.

This recognition is besides the recent appraisal by the Lonely Planet as one of the countries for leisure tourism and included it in the first seven countries to visit in the region.

The Sultanate Oman was ranked 7th on the Lonely Planet's list for its natural beauty, Bedouin values and rich heritage.

A French pro-athletes' team has been exploring the country since December 9, 2021 and biking across various incredible mountainous regions of the country.

It was announced at a seminar on tourism in the Sultanate of Oman – Global Adventure by the Oman French Association (OFA) under the auspices of Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman, which witnessed more than 80 Omani and French adventure tourists and panelists sharing their experiences and expertise in adventure tourism in the country.

They also explored ways to grow a strong, safe, respectful and employment-rich tourism industry in the country. Oman Air, Oman Automobile Association, Al Bustan Palace, JCDecaux and Marvelous World Travel joined hands with the organisers in the event.

Cycling and mountain biking has risen in popularity in the Sultanate of Oman, with both amateur and professional cyclists appreciating the country for its stunning diverse landscapes and the new challenge that riding in the country presents.

A video of mountain biking in the Sultanate of Oman prepared by the French pro-athletes' team was shown to the audience that evoked all-round interest from various corners besides receiving hits to the tunes of hundreds of

thousands online.

"The Sultanate of Oman has a great potential to grow itself to be the most-wanted adventure tourism destination globally as there has been a real interest for the same from across various continents. Such an event on adventure tourism discussion gathering attracts many different actors together to have a global view on the subject," Marie Elicagaray, OFA coordinator, told the *Observer*.

The Sultanate of Oman is the best adventure tourism destination, says a French study. The country was ranked



7th on the Lonely Planet's list for its natural beauty, Bedouin values and rich heritage

The annual cycling event, Tour of Oman, professional road race, is the largest outdoor event by far which attracts cycling enthusiasts and spectators from all over the world and has succeeded in instilling interest for cycling in the young generation.

A panel discussion on how to match the potential of outdoor activities in the Sultanate of Oman with expertise from France with various experts in the subject was held. The first panelist, Thomas Manfé, Project

Manager of Sidekick (France), spoke about how outdoor activities can be developed as an asset for tourism in the country, connecting them with big brand and adventure industry abroad. Ludovic Henry, Technical Director, Velo Concept (France), explained online how activities that tourists are looking for have changed in France and what are the options that are possible to offer in France that could also be replicated in the Sultanate of Oman.

"The Sultanate of Oman needs to have biking trails sustainable and in congruence with surroundings without disturbing the existing ecosystem as little as possible. After having heard so much about the possibilities that exist in the Sultanate of Oman and after experiencing the natural wonders, I find the country the best destination for adventure tourism," Ludovic, who had experience in building over 450km of mountain biking trails in the Pyrenees (France), said.

Khaled Abdul Malak, surgeon and explorer, continued the panel showing what makes the Sultanate of Oman's landscape unique when it comes to developing it as an adventure sport destination. Abdullah al Harthi, guide, spoke about the importance of involving the local people of the area where adventure tourism activities are being developed. Sophie al Wahabi, co-owner of Couleurs d'Oman, explained what the French tourists in the Sultanate of Oman are looking for and insisted on the importance of trained guides for the safety aspect at the panel moderated by Mohana Prabhakar.

Labib Mohsin, owner of Muscat Bikes, presented what exists currently in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of cycling trails, and what is the local level of interest in the sport — from sports associations as well as the general public. He shared his views on what he would like to see in this area to help the country realise its potential.

Sultanate of Oman, Bahrain mark Arabic Language Day

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain held a celebration to mark the World Arabic Language Day which falls on December 18 each year, at the United Nations on Saturday.

Ambassador Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, said that the Arabic language is the source of our nation's strength and it is our duty to preserve it.

UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, affirmed that the Arabic language is one of the oldest languages spoken by humans since the dawn of history linking peoples through literature, music, poetry and philosophy. He added that Arabic was the common language of communication in trade, arts and science.

The UN secretary-general said that Arabic is a rich and living language that unifies hundreds of millions of people in 22 Arabic-speaking countries and is used by 2 billion Muslims in their prayers. He added that the Arabic language contributes



to communication between peoples and nations and to moving towards a multi-language organisation that brings all peoples under its umbrella.

While we celebrate Arabic language

today, we should enhance dialogue and mutual understanding and we celebrate together the diversity of the human family, the UN secretary-general concluded. — ONA

Muscat top city for relocation

FROM PAGE 1

Dubai topped with first place and is the best relocation destination if one is looking for sunnier climes, as it scored a perfect 10. The average temperature in Dubai is 28.2 degrees Celsius, with only 68mm of rainfall a year.

The capital of the UAE scores slightly lower than its neighbour with Abu Dhabi achieving 9.9 on 10. Temperatures are slightly lower at 27.9 degrees, but there is less rain on average with only 42mm falling.

Manama is the third best city in terms of weather having the same average temperature as Abu Dhabi, but sees a much higher rainfall at 85mm.

The other cities in ranking are Las Vegas (US), Bangkok, Tel Aviv, Las Palmas and Alicante (Spain) from sixth to tenth spots in the survey.

Further study insights place Basel, Switzerland, as the most expensive city to relocate to as the annual cost of living

is €63,754.

Istanbul was the most affordable relocation destination where average annual living costs are only £12,753. This is £40,995 less per year than moving to Basel, and £15,963 less than the studied average.

Doha is the top relocation destination located on the coastline, this city scored 7.53/10. Water temperatures in Doha are 24.83 degrees on average; it also has high wages of €48,341.

Recently, money.co.uk had named the Sultanate of Oman as the 8th best city to relocate to in the world, according to new research.

The study analysed factors that are often taken into consideration when deciding where to relocate to, including house prices, living costs, average salary, weather conditions, number of restaurants and green spaces, internet speed and life expectancy, to reveal the best places to relocate to around the globe.

Tourist vehicles launched



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Al Hamra National Tourist Company has introduced tourist vehicles on a trial basis. Eng Ghaleb bin Ali al Abri, chairman of the Board of Directors of the company, said that the project has

been launched for the convenience of visitors to the Wilayat of Al Hamra.

He said vehicles will take tourists to see the archaeological and natural monuments in the area and the company is planning to add more vehicles, which tourists can book in advance via mobile application.

Oman Air honoured at World Travel Awards

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 18

Oman Air has received internationally acclaimed recognition at the 28th Annual World Travel Awards. The airline was named 'World's Leading Airline — Customer Experience 2021'.

Commenting on the World Travel Awards, Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer, Oman Air, said, "Oman Air remains committed to a safe and exceptional journey for all its valued guests, and we are delighted to once again be recognised for delivering on that commitment. Any win at the World Travel Awards is an honour; we're extremely proud to take home a win in the Customer Experience category, and this from among many of the world's leading airlines. It confirms that everything we do — and continue to do as a premium airline — translates into memorable journeys with Oman Air.

This achievement is a testament to

the dedication and professionalism of our pilots, cabin crew and ground staff and is particularly significant at a time when airlines around the world are facing unprecedented challenges."

This latest award follows previous Oman Air wins in the World Travel Awards Middle East Programme. In 2020, it won 'Middle East's Leading Airline 2020: Business Class' and 'Middle East's Leading Airline 2020: Economy Class'.

The airline has been awarded the Middle East's Leading Airline: Business Class' title every year since 2016, as well as in 2014; and the 'Middle East's Leading Airline: Economy Class' title for 6 years running — from 2014 to 2020.

On December 1 this year, it earned a Five-Star rating in the Major Airline category by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), the second consecutive year it has won the award. Oman Air has also earned a Five-Star Covid-19 Airline Safety Rating from Skytrax.

Basic services to get lion's share in 2022 budget

FROM PAGE 1

In 2021, the government committed a spending provision of RO 3.6 billion to maintaining basic services of education, health, housing and social welfare.

Speaking at a media briefing, he said that the state budget 2022, which targets safe and sustainable levels of spending, gives priority to productive sectors.

Al Harthy added that government investment spending during 2022 will reach RO 5 billion.

While there are no plans to raise the value-added tax rate, the budget will include periodic bonuses for state employees. Steps will be continued to be taken to create as many as 27,000 job opportunities annually for citizens, in addition to the expatriate replacement initiative by the Ministry of Labour.

New premises of Nizwa library to boost quest for knowledge

AMAL AL RIYAMI

NIZWA, DEC 18

Nizwa Public Library organised a ceremony to mark the official reopening of the library at its new premises.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The new modern building has many facilities for researchers and general readers. Salim bin Hamad al Kamiani, Chairman of the library's Board of Directors, in his speech congratulated the people of the wilayat for the reopening of the new premises which will boost spirit of scientific temperament and quest for knowledge. "The



reconstruction was supported by the generous contribution of donors."

The event included a video presentation documenting Nizwa's scientific and religious

legacy from which the idea of establishing the library came and the stages of its development over twenty years. The chief guest toured the facilities and looked

at books, documents and manuscripts. Old manuscripts, which belonged to researchers Khalfan bin Salim al Busaidy and Mohammad bin Abdullah al Saifi were also on display.

The library was started in 2000 in a room attached to a mosque.

Then it moved to an old house in 2004 until 2017. The board of directors decided to build new premises with the support of the people from all over the Sultanate of Oman.

It includes a large hall for reading. The new premises holds over 8,000 titles in religion, languages, geography, history, and sciences. It also has an Internet facility for the public.

The library is open six days a week and allows members to read and borrow books.



ROYAL OMAN POLICE PENSION FUND LLC
Post Box 2265, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Telephone: 24706119/24702815, Facsimile: 24799855, Email: roppt@omantel.net.om

TENDER NOTICE
CONSTRUCTION OF 4 STAR 200 KEYS
INTERNATIONAL BRAND HOTEL AT HILL
FIRQ, NIZWA, SULTANATE OF OMAN

The Royal Oman Police Pension Fund invites tenders from competent contractors registered with the Tender Board, under category Grade-I and above, who are capable of executing Construction of 4 Star 200 Keys International Brand Hotel at Hill Firq.

Those interested in participating may purchase the tender documents from the Fund's office located on 1st floor, Al Barakat Building (ROP Pension Fund Building), Building No.1617, Way No.2726, Bank Al Markazi Street, Muttrah Business District, between 8:00am and 1:00pm on working days from (19/12/2021) onwards, against a non-refundable tender fee of RO.500/= per set.

An unconditional tender bond or certified cheque from a licensed bank in the Sultanate, drawn in favour of His Excellency The Inspector General of Police and Customs – Chairman of the Fund, in the sum of 1% of the tender value, valid for a period of 60 days from the date of submission, must accompany the tender, failing which no tender will be accepted.

Sealed tenders should be addressed to Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs, Chairman of Investment Committee, Royal Oman Police Pension Fund and the envelope must not reveal identity of the bidder.

The last date for submission of tenders shall be 12:00hrs. on Wednesday (16/2/2022).

The Royal Oman Police Pension Fund is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received and reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.

QATAR MARKS NATIONAL DAY



An aerobatics team performs over Qatar’s capital Doha as the Gulf state marks its National Day on Saturday. Qatar marks the anniversary of the unification of the country’s tribes in 1878, also known as its “Founder’s Day”. – AFP

Billionaire businessman
Majid al Futtaim dies

Prominent UAE businessman Majid al Futtaim, who founded retailing and entertainment giant MAF, has died, Dubai’s ruler said on Friday in a Twitter post paying tribute to one of the emirate’s pioneers “who gave back to the nation.”

Al Futtaim, who was born in the 1930s according to local media, in 1992 established Majid al Futtaim (MAF), a conglomerate that develops shopping malls across the Middle East and North Africa.

In 2018, Late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said conferred the Royal Commendation Order (first class) on the businessman Majid Mohammed Majid al Futtaim.

It may be noted that some of the biggest real estate and tourism projects in the Sultanate of Oman over the last decade — Al Mouj, Al Mouj Golf, Muscat City Centre (MCC), Qurum City Centre (QCC), Mall of Oman and the futuristic city of Tilal Madinat al Irfan have been developed by the UAE’s Majid al Futtaim.



He was ranked the third-richest Arab businessman by *Forbes* magazine this year with a family fortune of \$3.6 billion.

“May God have mercy on our brother Majid al Futtaim, a pioneering businessman and one of the most important in Dubai and among its greatest men who gave back to the nation,” Dubai Ruler Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum tweeted.

The company’s presence in the Sultanate of Oman is also through VOX Cinemas with 13 cinema complexes.

The company’s upcoming projects include the Tilal al Irfan, one of the largest integrated lifestyle destinations in Muscat.

— Agencies

12 killed in Iraqi Kurdistan floods

ARBIL: Twelve people including three foreigners died on Friday in flash floods which swept through northern Iraq after torrential rains in Arbil, capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region, an official said.

In a country dealing with severe drought, many were caught by surprise as powerful storm waters started surging into their homes in the city’s eastern suburbs before dawn.

Provincial governor Omid Khoshnaw said a 10-month-old baby, a Turk and two Filipino nationals were among the 12 people killed.

“The floods started at 4 am (0100 GMT) and there were women and children among the victims,” Khoshnaw said.

Four members of the emergency services were injured when their vehicle was swept away.

Emergency services spokesperson Sarkawt Karach said one of the dead had been struck by lightning while the others had been drowned inside their homes.

He said there had been widespread damage and some families had been forced to abandon their homes.



Residents clean a road full of mud after heavy rainfall in Arbil on Friday. – Reuters

In Arbil, an AFP reporter saw torrents of muddy water pouring down roads.

Buses, trucks and tanker trucks were washed away by the storm waters, with some flipped over or turned onto their side.

Khoshnaw called on residents

to stay at home unless necessary, warning that further rain was expected with fears of more floods.

“The security forces are on alert, as are medical and emergency service teams and local councils around the region,” he said.

Iraq has been hit by a succession of extreme weather events.

It has endured blistering temperatures and repeated droughts in recent years, but has also experienced intense floods — made worse when torrential rain falls on sun-baked earth.

Hard ground and vegetation loss means the earth does not absorb water as quickly, and when storms hit they can become flash floods.

Scientists say climate change amplifies extreme weather, including droughts as well as the potential for the increased intensity of rain storms.

Experts have warned that record low rainfall, compounded by climate change, are threatening social and economic disaster in war-scarred Iraq.

The effects of low rainfall have been exacerbated by falling water levels on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers as a result of dam-building in neighbouring Turkey and Iran, Samah Hadid, of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), has said.

The severity of the drought has forced many farming families to leave their land and seek a living in urban areas.

In a study released on Thursday, the NRC said half of the families living in drought-affected areas of Iraq need food aid.

That followed a warning in November from the World Bank which said Iraq could suffer a 20-per cent drop in water resources by 2050 due to climate change.

— AFP

14 Sudanese
soldiers killed
in Yemen

DUBAI: A Yemeni rebel attack near the country’s north-west border with Saudi Arabia has killed 14 Sudanese soldiers, Yemeni military sources said on Friday. Sudan is part of a Saudi-led military coalition that has been supporting Yemen’s internationally recognised government since 2015 in its battle against the Ansar Allah.

The soldiers were killed when the Ansar Allah fighters attacked coalition sites in Haradh, in Hajja province, on Thursday, the sources said.

Sudan, ranked by the United Nations as among the poorest in the world, has sent thousands of soldiers to fight in Yemen, including from the notorious Janjaweed militia that is accused of atrocities in its own Darfur conflict that erupted in 2003. In late 2019, Sudan’s transitional government said the country had reduced its troop strength in Yemen from 15,000 to 5,000.

Dozens of Sudanese protested in Khartoum early last year, alleging their relatives had been recruited by a UAE firm as security guards but were despatched to war zones in Libya and Yemen. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Lebanon crisis exposes 1m children to violence

Lebanon’s spiralling economic crisis is causing abuse against children to soar and is putting one child out of two at risk of violence, the United Nations said on Friday.

“One in two children in Lebanon is at serious risk of physical, emotional, or sexual violence, as families struggle to cope in the country’s deepening crisis,” the UN Children’s Fund said. A new report released by UNICEF showed that the number of cases of child abuse



and exploitation handled by the agency and its partners shot up by 44 per cent over the past year.

Children as young as six are working on farms and families seeking dowries are marrying off young girls.

NICOSIA

Cyprus, Jordan sign bilateral agreements

Jordan’s King Abdullah II paid an official visit to Cyprus on Friday for talks with President Nicos Anastasiades, during which several bilateral accords were signed, officials said.

The agreements covered issues including double taxation and the extradition of fugitives. “President Anastasiades bestowed upon the king of Jordan the highest honour of the Republic of Cyprus... and King Abdullah II bestowed upon the president the highest honour of



Jordan,” the presidency said.

The two leaders discussed bilateral relations and regional developments, as well as climate change and efforts to combat Covid-19.

ISTANBUL

Erdogan pledges 15m Covid vaccines for Africa

Turkey will send 15 million Covid-19 vaccine doses to Africa, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced on Saturday at a major summit of the continent’s leaders, adding that the low vaccination rates there were a blot on humanity.

Ankara has invested heavily in developing trade and diplomatic ties with the world’s poorest continent during Erdogan’s rule as prime minister and then president since 2003.

In opening remarks to dozens



of African leaders and ministers, Erdogan said Turkey would ship 15 million Covid-19 vaccine doses to Africa, where cases are rapidly rising and vaccination rates are low.

In brief

■ SYDNEY



DONATIONS POUR IN AFTER BOUNCY CASTLE TRAGEDY

A memorial to victims of a bouncy castle tragedy that killed five children in Australia continued to grow on Saturday, as an outpouring of support drove donations over a million dollars.

Three 12-year-old boys and two girls, aged 11 and 12, were killed when the large inflatable castle lifted off the ground on Thursday in Devonport, northern Tasmania, police said.

Three more children were in critical condition in hospital in the state capital Hobart, and one was recovering at home. An online fundraiser — initially aiming to raise Aus\$1,000 (\$712) for the victims' families — climbed to over Aus\$1.1 million on Saturday.

■ KABUL



TALIBAN GOVT RESUMES ISSUING AFGHAN PASSPORTS IN KABUL

Afghanistan's Taliban authorities said on Saturday they will resume issuing passports in Kabul, giving hope to citizens who feel threatened living under the Islamists' rule. Thousands of Afghans have applied for new travel documents to escape a growing economic as well as a humanitarian crisis described by the United Nations as an "avalanche of hunger".

Authorities will start issuing the documents from Sunday at Kabul's passport office, Alam Gul Haqqani, the head of the passport department in the interior ministry, told reporters.

The Taliban stopped issuing passports shortly after their August 15 return to power.

■ KARACHI



15 PEOPLE KILLED, 16 INJURED IN GAS BLAST IN PAKISTAN BANK BRANCH

At least 15 people were killed and 11 others injured in an explosion on Saturday at a Karachi bank branch constructed on a sewage drain in the city's industrial area, police said. The cause of the blast, at a branch of Pakistan's largest bank, Habib Bank Limited, could be a gas leak, a senior police officer said. "Our explosives teams are at work trying to ascertain the nature of the blast, but apparently the structure was constructed on drain and gas could be a probable cause," Sarfaraz Nawaz told reporters.

A petrol station located next to the bank, and cars parked nearby, were badly damaged.

Super typhoon Rai death toll passes 30

SURIGAO CITY: More than 30 people were killed in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, official figures showed on Saturday, with a charity reporting "alarming" destruction on islands that bore the brunt of the storm.

Hundreds of thousands fled their homes and beachfront resorts as Typhoon Rai ravaged the southern and central regions of the archipelago, knocking out communications and electricity in many areas, ripping off roofs and toppling concrete power poles.

Rai was a super typhoon when it smashed into the popular tourist island of Siargao on Thursday, packing maximum sustained winds of 195 kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour).

Aerial photos shared by the military showed widespread damage in the town of General Luna, where many surfers and holidaymakers had flocked ahead of Christmas, with buildings stripped of roofs and debris littering the ground.

"Everything was flying, it was as if it was the end of the world," Raphy Repdos, a tour operator visiting the island when the storm hit, told AFP.

"The wind sounded angry and roaring, as if it wanted to demolish



Residents gather next to their destroyed house in Carcar, Philippines' Cebu province on Saturday days after Super Typhoon Rai hit the city. — AFP

the building."

The neighbouring island of Dinagat had been "levelled to the ground" by the storm, Governor Arlene Bag-ao wrote on Facebook, saying houses, boats and fields

were destroyed.

"Walls and roofs were torn and blown off by Odette like paper," Bag-ao said, using the local name for the typhoon.

"We have a dwindling supply

of food and water. Electricity and telecommunications are down."

Rai's wind speeds eased to 150 kmph as it barrelled across the country, dumping torrential rain that flooded villages, uprooting

trees and shattering wooden structures.

It emerged over the South China Sea on Saturday and was headed towards Vietnam, the state weather forecaster said. — AFP

Australia's new Covid cases hit record high

MELBOURNE: Australia reported record high new Covid-19 cases on Saturday for a third day, with outbreaks growing in the two most populous states, however Prime Minister Scott Morrison continued to downplay the risks as the country eases pandemic curbs.

New South Wales state reported 2,482 new cases, Victoria state reported 1,504 new cases and Queensland state reported 31 new cases on Saturday, together topping Australia's previous high of 3,820 cases a day earlier.

Morrison reiterated on Saturday the focus should be on hospitalisations and cases in intensive care and on ventilators rather than actual case numbers as the country learns to live with the virus. So far, he said the rising

case numbers in New South Wales were not translating into pressure on hospitals, with only 26 people in intensive care.

"I wouldn't agree that Australians are complacent about it. We take this incredibly seriously. It's best addressed with a calm head and a clear plan," Morrison said at a media conference in Hobart in the island state of Tasmania.

He said Australia was not in the same situation as the United Kingdom, Europe or North America, where cases are soaring.

In the latest easing of pandemic curbs, fully vaccinated international travellers arriving in Sydney and Melbourne will no longer need to isolate for 72 hours, the governments of New South Wales and Victoria said on



People visit Hyde Park in Sydney. — AFP

Friday. Incoming travellers will still need to get a PCR test within 24 hours of arriving, but only need to isolate until they receive a negative test result.

Australia slammed its borders

shut soon after the pandemic hit in 2020, which kept Covid-19 cases down relative to other rich nations. The country has so far recorded about 239,000 cases and about 2,130 deaths. — AFP

Thai prison set on fire in riot over coronavirus cluster

BANGKOK: Hundreds of prisoners set fire to a Thai jail during a two-day riot over the handling of a coronavirus cluster, with some inmates wounded as officers sought to restore order.

Thai prisons are notoriously overcrowded and have struggled to curb the spread of the virus — more than 87,000 inmates have been infected with 185 recorded deaths, according to the Corrections Department.

Authorities were set to inspect the damage on Saturday after some 400 prisoners in the southern Thai jail went on a rampage starting on Thursday night, demanding that inmates with the coronavirus be removed.

The prison has a population of more than 2,100 and roughly 300 have tested positive.

Inmates set fire to their sleeping quarters on Friday evening, following another fire a day earlier, with 31 people subsequently arrested.

They had been taken to a high security prison, deputy national police spokesman Kissana Phathanacharoen said.

"There are no fatalities, only minor injuries," he added, after local media reported 14 of the inmates were wounded with rubber bullets.

"The situation has been brought under control since last night and prison officials will inspect any damage that occurred," a Krabi government official said.

Almost 93 per cent of Thailand's 281,535 inmates have been fully vaccinated, according to the Corrections Department. — AFP

Nepal turns to eco-friendly prayer flags

KATHMANDU: Nepal's largest stupa, one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in Tibetan Buddhism, was festooned with biodegradable prayer flags on Saturday after devotees replaced the more common synthetic version with a greener alternative.

Colourful prayer flags — which have auspicious symbols and prayers inscribed on them — are an integral part of Buddhist rituals.

At the white-domed Boudhanath stupa, prayer flags stream down in four directions from the finial.

On Saturday, workers swapped out the usual polyester banners and strung up new biodegradable ones.

"It is the centre of Buddhist religious faith so I believe that it will send a good message and spread in other places too," Chandra Man Lama, chair of Boudhanath Area Development Committee, said.

Old prayer flags are usually



A devotee hangs biodegradable prayer flags on Boudhanath stupa on the outskirts of Kathmandu on Saturday. — AFP

burnt when discarded under the belief that the winds will carry the prayers to the gods.

Traditionally, prayer flags were made of natural fibres like cotton and silk but the current market is saturated with versions

constructed of polyester and other synthetic materials, which take decades to decompose and emit toxic gases when burnt.

"The prayers might be answered but it is also causing pollution," said Ang Dolma Sherpa, founder

of Utpala Crafts, which made the biodegradable prayer flags now adorning Boudhanath stupa.

Sherpa uses cotton and prints prayers and symbols on her flags with water-based paint. The ropes are made of natural fibres instead of nylon.

"I am giving an alternative. I hope that people will use them wisely and turn them into compost," she said.

Prayer flags and khadas — Buddhist scarves used as a greeting or offering — are also popular fixtures in mountaineering, with climbers carrying them for good fortune and offering them at the summit.

Mountain guide Dawa Yangzum Sherpa took biodegradable flags on her recent expedition to the 5,630-metre (18,471-foot) Yalung Ri peak in eastern Nepal.

"It is very important for them to be biodegradable," she said. "These prayers flags and khadas have an unseen impact." — AFP

Omicron cases double in 3 days

GENEVA: The Omicron coronavirus variant has been reported in 89 countries and the number of cases is doubling in 1.5 to 3 days in areas with community transmission, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Saturday.

Omicron is spreading rapidly in countries with high levels of population immunity, but it is unclear if this is due to the virus' ability to evade immunity, its inherent increased transmissibility or a combination of both, the WHO said in an update. The agency designated Omicron a variant of concern on November 26, soon after it was first detected, and much is still not known about it, including the severity of the illness it causes.

"There are still limited data on the clinical severity of Omicron," the WHO said. "More data are needed to understand the severity profile and how severity is impacted by vaccination and pre-existing immunity." Cases in the United Kingdom of the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus jumped sharply in the latest daily figures provided by British health authorities on Saturday.

10,000 CASES IN UK
Omicron-variant Covid-19 cases hit 24,968 as of Friday, up



A person in a Santa costume takes a picture with people at the Ajuda vaccination centre as Portugal begins vaccinating 5 to 11 year-olds, in Lisbon, Portugal, on Saturday. – Reuters

by just over 10,000 cases from 24 hours earlier, the UK Health Security Agency said.

SPREADING IN ITALY
The highly contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus is spreading quickly in Italy, with new cases identified in the country's north and south, the national health institute (ISS) said on Saturday. The ISS reported that its network of regional laboratories had so far identified

84 Omicron cases, "a strong acceleration" from 55 early on Friday. Thirty-three of the cases were found in the northern region of Lombardy, around Milan, and a further 20 in the southern region of Campania, centred on Naples.

Italy reported 120 coronavirus-related deaths on Friday against 123 the day before, while the daily tally of new infections rose to 28,632 from 26,109. The Dutch government is expected

to announce new measures on Saturday to brake the spread of the Omicron coronavirus variant after its scientific advisers recommended tighter curbs, local media reported.

According to the media reports, the panel of experts has called for a complete lockdown of businesses, with the exception of essential retailers such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

— Agencies

France pass may speed up vaccination

PARIS: France hopes that a planned new vaccine pass that will be required to enter public places will persuade more people to get inoculated against Covid-19 as the country faces a rapid spread of the Omicron variant, the health minister said on Saturday.

The government does not want to impose new curfews or lockdowns on people who have been vaccinated, but the threat of Omicron means authorities have to increase pressure on those refusing vaccination, Olivier Veran said on France Inter radio.

"We cannot continue to say that the choice of not getting vaccinated is a choice that has no consequences," Veran said.

Prime Minister Jean Castex said on Friday the government will propose a bill in parliament in January to change France's "health pass" into a "vaccine pass", meaning only vaccinated people will be allowed to enter indoor public places such as bars, restaurants and cinemas.

About 90 per cent of eligible French people have been vaccinated, according to the



A medical worker administers a dose of a coronavirus vaccine to a child at a vaccination centre in Les Pavillons-sous-Bois, near Paris, on Saturday. – Reuters

government. Veran said the government would ask MPs to also consider making the vaccine pass a requirement on trains and planes, and to make it mandatory to show a proof of identity along with the pass. "There is too much fraud," he said. Far-right Rassemblement National party

leader Marine Le Pen said the proposed vaccine pass was akin to mandatory vaccination. "French people are losing individual freedoms," she said on BFM.

Veran said that Omicron was currently suspected to account for up to 10 per cent of new coronavirus cases and that could

The government does not want to impose new curfews or lockdowns on people who have been vaccinated, but the threat of Omicron means authorities have to increase pressure on those refusing vaccination

rise to more than 50 per cent early next year.

FIREWORKS CANCELLED
Following a nationwide ban on New Year's Eve fireworks announced on Friday, Paris city hall announced it had cancelled fireworks and festivities on the Champs-Élysées planned for December 31.

— AFP

Swarms of shoppers likely despite surge of Omicron cases in US

NEW YORK/CHICAGO: US retailers opened their doors on Saturday to what they hope will be swarms of shoppers searching for last-minute holiday gifts, despite surging cases of the new, highly-contagious Omicron variant.

The last Saturday before Christmas — dubbed 'Super Saturday' — is typically one of the busiest shopping days of the year, marked by a rush to buy last-minutes gifts to tuck under the Christmas tree.

The risks to shoppers this year, however, are not just that merchandise might be out of stock, but also that in-person shopping could trigger more coronavirus infections — making Super Saturday a super-spreader event.

Toystore owner Katherine Nguyen says she anticipates more people to shop in person at her three Chicago-area locations compared to the last Saturday before Christmas 2020, or even the last Saturday before the pre-pandemic Christmas of 2019.

"It's like the new variant is the new normal — the environment has gotten a little used to that," she said.

Foot-traffic tracking firm Placer.ai said it expects more people to visit stores this weekend than on the same weekend last year. Sensormatic Solutions, a data firm that measures store visits, cited a nearly 48 per cent increase in foot traffic on the Friday after Thanksgiving compared to a year earlier as a sign that

Consumers have been bombarded with messages about the impact of supply shortages on the availability of holiday gifts

DAVID BERSON
economist

people would want to shop in-person.

A supply chain logjam has left many people also feeling nervous about not getting merchandise ordered online in time for the December 25 holiday.

"Consumers have been bombarded with messages about the impact of supply shortages on the availability of holiday gifts," said David Berson, chief economist at Nationwide in Columbus, Ohio.

Nguyen said her three stores never received shipments of merchandise for about 15 per cent of their toy catalog. The toys, she says, are "sitting on a container in Long Beach, California, outside of the water waiting to come in."

FedEx and the US Postal Service set December 15 as the deadline for ground deliveries to reach homes in time for Christmas, which means that shoppers still in search of gifts may have little choice but to shop in stores if they want to avoid fees for expedited shipping.

— Reuters



Shoppers in Pennsylvania. – Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

'Highly unlikely to send troops to Ukraine'

Britain and its allies are "highly unlikely" to send troops to intervene if Russia invades Ukraine, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told the *Spectator* magazine.

Britain and fellow G7 nations this week warned Moscow of "massive consequences" if it invades the former Soviet state but Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday that it would explore "diplomatic and economic" means to counter Russian "aggression".



"It is not a member of Nato so it is highly unlikely that anyone is going to send troops into Ukraine to challenge Russia," Wallace told the magazine in an interview this week.

WASHINGTON

US Senate confirms Emanuel as envoy to Japan

US lawmakers confirmed Rahm Emanuel as the country's next ambassador to Japan on Saturday, after a contentious nomination process in which fellow Democrats opposed the former Chicago mayor over his record on police violence.

Senators confirmed Emanuel 48-21 as part of a marathon series of votes in the early hours of the morning, with three liberal Democrats voting against. Emanuel has come under fire over his handling



of a Chicago officer's killing of Black teenager Laquan McDonald in 2014, with his administration waiting more than a year to release a police video of the incident.

LISBON

Abramovich gets Portuguese citizenship

Billionaire Chelsea Football Club owner Roman Abramovich has become a Portuguese citizen, adding the European Union member country's passport to his Russian and Israeli ones.

A spokesperson for Abramovich confirmed a report by Portuguese newspaper *Publico* on Saturday which cited justice ministry documents as saying the Russian-born businessman had been granted Portuguese citizenship on April 30.

Abramovich's case was based



on a Portuguese law offering naturalisation to descendants of Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Iberian peninsula during the medieval Inquisition, the newspaper said.

Chilean dreams differ ahead of historic vote

NATALIA A. RAMOS MIRANDA

Chilean voters are split on what they want from the future ahead of a landmark presidential election on Sunday between polarised candidates — one offering social change and the other pledging to get tough on law and order.

The election will see ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast and leftist Gabriel Boric go head-to-head after closing their campaigns this week, where they looked to win over middle-ground voters who could make the difference in a tight race.

“What is at stake now in Chile is democracy itself,” said housewife Julia Acevedo, 80, who attended 35-year-old Boric’s closing campaign in the capital. “The country needs change and he, who is young, can make a difference.”

Kast supporters, on the other hand, want stability. They say Boric — who has taken aim at Chile’s market-oriented economic model for stoking inequality — will undo decades of growth and stability and criticise his alliance with the Communist Party.

“I will keep supporting freedom,” said Margarita Noguera, waving a Chilean flag stamped with a picture of 55-year-old Kast. She said she had lived through the “leftist dictatorship” of democratically-elected socialist president Salvador Allende in the 1970s. Angela Marambio, 53, said she had backed a centre-right candidate in the first round in November, but was switching her vote to Kast for the run-off.

Kast, a lawyer and religious father of nine, has defended the economic legacy of dictator Augusto Pinochet, whose bloody military rule from 1973-1990 overthrew Allende in a coup and established the country’s economic model.

Huge protests erupted in 2019 against that model, which many see as the reason for issues ranging from meager private pensions to expensive healthcare and education.

Cristian Morales, 51, a public official from Punta Arenas in Chile’s southern tip, Boric’s home region, said the leftist candidate could finally change things. Boric, who made his name leading student demonstrations for better quality education, has sought to channel the energy and demand for change sparked by Chile’s 2019 protests.

Kast has done the opposite, with a tough law and order message that has appealed to a significant segment of the country weary of protests.

— Reuters

What is at stake now in Chile is democracy itself

JULIA ACEVEDO housewife



XTMAS TREAT

A man dressed as Santa Claus offers leaves to a giraffe as animals were given special treats for Christmas at the Huachipa Zoo, in Lima, Peru, on Saturday.

— Reuters

‘Most wonderful time of the year’



Ray Petersen
rj.petersen52@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS THEN, IN SONG, IS AS DIVERSE AS OUR CRAZY WORLD, BUT LET’S CHERISH ITS TRUE MESSAGE OF “PEACE AND GOODWILL TO ALL,” AT CHRISTMAS AND ALWAYS

Christmas is just around the corner, and whilst not celebrated by Omanis, there is the gesture towards Christian observance, in line with the long-standing respect of Islam, for those of the other faiths.

For most Christians, especially the very young, it is acknowledged as the ‘Most Wonderful Time of the Year,’ as identified by crooner Andy Williams, back in the day, 1963 to be exact, yet it still evokes the ‘Christmassy feelings’ every year and is played on English language radio, endlessly, throughout December, then put away until the following year. It’s an Eddie Pola and George Wyle song about kids jingle bell-ing, of being of good cheer, of holiday greetings, of happy meetings when friends come to call, of parties for hosting, marshmallows for toasting, and caroling out in the snow. It’s about scary ghost stories, tales of the glories of Christmases long ago, mistletoe-ing, and of glowing hearts when loved one’s are near, because it’s the most wonderful time of the year. It embodies much of the old and the contemporary of the festive season.

Another ‘crooner,’ someone who sings slow tempo songs in a soft, low, tone and voice, is Bing Crosby, whose warbled, whistled, and vocal performance of ‘White Christmas,’ has become iconic as a global Christmas melody. An Irving Berlin composition from the 1942 Grammy

award winning film, ‘Holiday Inn,’ is believed to have sold over 50 million copies of the Crosby version alone, while other artistic renditions would easily double that figure. Interestingly, Berlin said the morning after he finished it, not only was it “the best song I have ever written,” but “the best song anyone has written.” He was so right! The emotive lyrics of dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know, where the tree tops glisten, and children listen to hear sleigh bells in the snow, and pining that with every Christmas card I write may your days be merry and bright, and may all your Christmas’ be white... have ever since nurtured melancholy among those far from home.

One of the oldest, and most-loved, especially by children, is ‘Jingle Bells,’ written 164 years ago by James Pierpoint, and was first recorded twenty years later on an Edison gramophone cylinder. It has barely changed across the years, and still bounces along exactly like a sleigh ride, of... “Dashing through the snow in a one-horse open sleigh, over the fields we go laughing all the way. Bells on bob-tails ring, making spirits bright. What fun it is to ride and sing a sleighing song tonight, ho! It is, in fact a fun sleigh ride of a song. In the same vogue, ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,’ tells the story of Rudolph, a red-

nosed reindeer who always felt left out of festivities because of his bright, shiny, red nose, but on Christmas Eve was needed to light the way for Santa’s sleigh. The first radio recorded version was by cowboy star Gene Autrey, in 1949, and was a number one hit!

Having the Number One Christmas hit song is a big deal today, and over recent years “all I Want for Christmas is You,” helped by a flawless Maria Carey performance has risen from barely raising a ripple in 1995 when it was released, to being today’s most played tune on radio stations everywhere. Michael Bublé has become a Christmas favourite too with a Christmas album of standards that just keeps on giving, with “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas, probably the best. At the other end of the ‘cheery scale,’ Wham’s “Last Christmas,” is a strange success, about a broken heart, but musically enriched by George Michael’s brilliant vocals, while The Pogues and Kirsty Maccoll’s heart-rending, almost despairing narrative is unsettling as the NYPD choir, and their bells, ring out “The Fairytale of New York,” in an angst riven story of love lost, and regret. Christmas then, in song, is as diverse as our crazy world, but let’s cherish its true message of “peace and goodwill to all,” at Christmas and always. Merry Christmas readers.

Are crises pressure points for improvement?



Robert Skidelsky

WHEREAS ENLIGHTENMENT THINKERS HAD FAITH IN THE LINEAR PROGRESS OF THE HUMAN MIND, ATTAINING HIGHER STATES OF THINKING AND BEHAVIOUR MAY IN FACT DEPEND IN PART ON EXTREME EVENTS

In her dystopian 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood describes a pill called *BlyssPluss* that will make everyone happy and eliminate disease. But widespread use of the pill would hit pharmaceutical firms’ profits, so the companies pay *HelthWyzer*, a drug developer, to sicken users by inserting a virus into the pills. *HelthWyzer* can then double its profits by selling the antidote. “The best diseases, from a business point of view,” explains the scientist *Crake*, “would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally — that is, for maximum profit — the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It’s a fine calculation.”

The provocative thought here is deliberately willing the bad

to produce the good. This is akin to the noted development economist Albert O Hirschman’s idea of “optimal” crises — deep enough to trigger progress, but not so deep that they wipe out the means of achieving it. Hirschman himself supported projects he thought likely to fail, in order to create “pressure points” for improvement.

All of this leads one to wonder about the meaning of the extreme events that many predict will occur in the coming century as a result of climate change — and, of course, about the significance of the more traditional plagues and famines likely to afflict us.

The source of this speculation is theological as well as prosaic: Why, if God is omnipotent and perfectly good, did he create

a world with suffering and evil? One answer, according to Stephen Davies in his 2019 book *The Street-Wise Guide to the Devil and His Works*, is that Satan is placed in God’s creation “to test and examine the faith and virtue [...] of humanity.” Another is that “evil is necessary to perfect the good.”

But the ultimate expression of this idea is Goethe’s *Faust*. In the opening “Prologue in Heaven,” God explains his problem to the demon *Mephistopheles*. Humanity, made in God’s image, has the potential for progress but is naturally lazy and incurious: “It’s so easy for men to slump and before long they want to do nothing at all.” God sends *Mephistopheles* to rouse them from their complacency, as

the force that “would do evil evermore, and yet create the good.”

Will this, then, be the point of the extreme climate events that will likely befall us? After all, few now honestly believe either that the world will meet the targets set at the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), or, even if it does, that we will limit overall global warming to 1.5° Celsius above preindustrial levels.

In his recent book *Decarbonomics & the Post-Pandemic World*, the economist Charles Dumas projects a sequence of extreme events associated with rising temperatures. If global warming stabilises at 1.5°C by 2025, we can expect faster desertification

in North America and Africa, the slowing or ceasing of the Gulf Stream by 2100, the disappearance of mountain glaciers and parts of the Arctic, rainforest losses, and unprecedented hurricanes in the South Atlantic, submerging islands.

Such catastrophic events need not be divine judgment to serve as necessary wake-up calls. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers had faith in the linear progress of the human mind, attaining higher states of thinking and behaviour may in fact depend in part on extreme events.

History provides abundant support for this view: World War II, for example, was a necessary precondition for the establishment of the European Union.

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Ahli Sidab to face Sohar in HM’s Cup Final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 18

Ahli Sidab and Sohar advanced to the final of the 51st edition of His Majesty’s Cup Hockey Championship. The top clash of the semifinals between the title holders Ahli Sidab and Salalah heavyweights Al Nasr ended in a 1-1 draw in the regulation time before Sidab

clinch the triumph in 7-6 on penalties. The Northern Batinah team, Sohar, secured spot in the final clash after defeating Seeb 4-2 in the other semifinal’s fixture. Sohar’s presence in the final is the second. Seeb was one of the nominated teams to qualify to the final match but Sohar’s players managed to register the win against Muscat-based team, Seeb, and exist them

in the championship. Sohar delivered a top show and solid performance during the championship and the team deserve a presence in the summit final clash. The Batinah team have top players in the team including Qasim al Shibli, Sameer Halees, Shabeeb al Shibli and many new talented faces. It is expected that Sohar will be tough opponent for

Sidab in the final. **SEMIFINALS** On the other hand, Sidab will look to defend their title after moving successfully into the semifinals against Al Nasr. The match was even from both sides in the regulation time until the penalties which ended in favour of the defending champion. In all ten penalties, the draw was still the

result until the 11th shot which confirmed Sidab’s triumph. In the third and fourth playoff, Seeb and Al Nasr will meet on Sunday to decide the winners for the third place playoff at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The match will start at 7:00 pm. Eight times winner Al Nasr will aim to clinch the bronze medals after exiting from final. Salalah’s representative team

was eyeing on the title but Sidab’s victory ended their hopes. On the other hand, Seeb, who won the title eleven times, will chase for the third place medals and award. Seeb is a well known team in the championship. The first title lifted by them was in 1989 and in the following years the Seeb team managed to win many other coveted cups.

Algeria lift Fifa Arab Cup in stunning fashion



Algeria’s forward Amir Sayoud shoots to score the opening goal during the FIFA Arab Cup 2021 final football match between Tunisia and Algeria at the Al Bayt stadium in the Qatari city of Al Khor on Saturday. – AFP

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, DEC 18

Algeria lifted the 2021 Fifa Arab Cup riding on extra time goals from Amir Sayoub and Yacine Brahimi as they beat Tunisia 2-0 in the final at Doha’s Al Bayt Stadium on Saturday night. After both teams failed to break the deadlock in 90 minutes of regulation time and just when the thought of penalties had come, Sayoub rose to the occasion in the 99th minute with a stunning, looping left-footer that beat Tunisian goalkeeper Mouez Hassen comfortably. Brahimi then scored another in the very last minute of stoppage time as Algerian fans were sent into a state of ecstasy. **TOUGH FIGHT** In the second half, Algeria did their best to thwart the defences of Tunisia. Ilyes Cheti and Abdelkader Badrane kept penetrating the Tunisian defence but goalkeeper Mouez Hassen parried them most

of the time. Tunisia, on the other hand, were taking chances as well with captain Youssef Msakni and Ghaylen Chaaleli asking all the questions to the Algerian defence. Msakni took on defenders through inside midfield and launched some incisive shots that created some mayhem in the Algerian backline but Algerian custodian Rais Mbolhi ensured there was no damage done. It was an engrossing time in the last 10 minutes of the second half. Algeria going hammer and tongs to find the winner but Hassen stood like a rock for Tunisia. When the game rolled over into extra time, it was again anybody’s match. It was then Amir Sayoud’s sensational long-range left-footer that sealed the deal for Algeria in the 99th minute as the Algerian fans went into a delirium and Tunisian fans into shock. Tunisia had an opportunity in the 105th minute when substitute Ali Ben Romdhan’s shot was

brilliantly saved by Mbolhi. In the 111th minute, Ben Arbi’s shot went wide off the near post as Tunisia had another chance to go abegging with time ticking away. **HARD-FOUGHT FIRST HALF** Algeria and Tunisia playing the all-important final played out a goalless first half. The 45 minutes of action saw both teams striving relentlessly to find the elusive opening goal but to no avail. There were a total of five yellow cards in the first half as Algeria and Tunisia went all out in the summit clash. Tunisia’s Mohammed Ben Hmida, skipper Youssef Msakni and Seifeddine Jaziri picked up yellows from the referee Daniel Siebert of Germany. It was a titanic tussle that ensued between the two fighting teams and none gave an inch to the other. For Algeria, Ilyes Cheti and Baghdad Bounedjah were handed out yellow cards for fouls by Siebert.

UGB Barka,
Royal Stars
Barka to clash
in BCL Final

MUSCAT: UGB Barka defeated IAS Engineering by 1 Run in a thrilling Semifinal to enter a summit clash of BCL-1, whereas Royal Stars Barka beat Al Danube comprehensively by 47 Runs. The two finalists will clash against each other & play for the title championship in a mega final which is scheduled to be played on Friday December 31, 2021 at Al Hail Cricket Ground.

SF-1: UGB Barka vs IAS Engineering
In the first semifinal against IAS Engineering, UGB Barka won a thriller holding their nerves to defend 18 runs off the last over. Opting to bat first, UGB rode on the contributions from Hafiz Rana (26) & Abrar Javed (24) to post a fighting total of 110/10 and then restricted the opposition to 109/6 with Hafiz Rana holding his nerve in the final over. Hafiz had to defend 18 runs and he ensured that his side would face Royal Stars Barka in the summit clash.
Brief scores: UGB Barka 110 all out in 16 overs (Hafiz Rana 26, Abrar Javed 24; Haythim Bahar 4-15) beat IAS Engineering 109/6 in 16 overs (Yasir 27, Faris 21; Yasir Ali 3-33).

SF-2: Royal Stars Barka vs Al Danube
In another semifinal, Royal Stars Barka beat comprehensively Al Danube by 47 runs. After losing the toss & putting into bat first, Royal Stars Barka managed to post a competitive 166/5 in 16 overs. Nisar Hasan (59 off 33 balls) & Deepak Ramaswamy's 33 toyed with Al Danube.
Brief scores: Royal Stars Barka 166/5 in 16 overs (Nisar Hasan 59; Deepak 33; Ashok 3-52, Mydeen 1-28) beat Al Danube 116/9 in 16 overs (Mohd. Irfan 21; Nikesha Girish 4-20, Venkatesha 2-30)

STARC, LYON
WRECK
ENGLAND,
AUSTRALIA
SNIFF
VICTORY



The hosts, who had declared their first innings on 473-9, finished the day on 45-1 for an overall lead of

282
and looking primed to go 2-0 up in the five-Test series

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA FIRST INNINGS: 473/9 dec	
England first innings (0/n: 17-2):	
R Burns c Smith b Starc.....	4
H Hameed c Starc b Nesar.....	6
D Malan c Smith b Starc.....	80
J Root c Smith b Green.....	62
B Stokes b Green.....	34
O Pope c Labuschagne b Lyon.....	5
J Buttler c Warner b Starc.....	0
C Woakes b Lyon.....	24
O Robinson lbw Lyon.....	0
S Broad c Head b Starc.....	9
J Anderson (not out).....	5
Extras (LB-6, NB-1).....	7
Total (all out, 84.1 overs).....	236
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-12, 3-150, 4-157, 5-164, 6-169, 7-202, 8-204, 9-220	
Bowling: Starc 16.1-6-37-4, Richardson 19-4-78-0, Nesar 11-0-33-1, Lyon 28-11-58-3, Green 10-3-24-2	
AUSTRALIA SECOND INNINGS	
M Harris (not out).....	21
D Warner (run out).....	13
M Nesar (not out).....	2
Extras (LB-8, NB-1).....	9
Total (For 1 wk, 17 overs).....	45
Fall of wickets: 1-41	
Bowling: Anderson 4-3-2-0, Broad 3-0-9-0, Robinson 4-1-12-0, Woakes 4-2-13-0	

ADELAIDE, Australia: England were spared the ignominy of the follow-on but Australia appeared on course for victory after dominating day three of the day-night second Ashes test at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday.
Spearheading Australia's pace attack, depleted by the absence of Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc combined with spinner Nathan Lyon to bundle out England for 236.
The hosts, who had declared their first innings on 473-9, finished the day on 45-1 for an

overall lead of 282 and looking primed to go 2-0 up in the five-Test series.
Marcus Harris was batting on 21, having featured in a mix-up that resulted in opening partner David Warner's run out for 13.
Debutant Michael Nesar, replacing Cummins who missed out for being a close contact of a positive Covid-19 case, was on two in his nightwatchman's role.
"We didn't bowl how we wanted to in that first session, let it slip on the scoreboard and searched for wickets," Starc said afterwards.
"The way we came out in that

second session, Nath (Lyon) and I took it on ourselves a bit being the two experienced ones in the attack."
The day had begun so brightly for England with Joe Root and Dawid Malan sharing an unbeaten 138 during the wicketless first session but the wheels came off their innings soon after the dinner break.
Cameron Green broke the stand when he had Root, who made 62, caught by Australia stand-in skipper Steve Smith at first slip.
It was a ball Root could have left and the England captain was

furious with himself as he walked off after falling short again of his first century in Australia.
It soon got worse for England as Malan, who scored 80, slashed a Starc (4-37) delivery that he should have left with Smith taking that catch too.
Ollie Pope (five) survived a review but squeezed a Lyon (3-58) delivery to Marnus Labuschagne fielding close in and, moments later, Jos Buttler fell for a duck to Starc.
Lyon also dismissed Chris Woakes and Ollie Robinson as England, cruising at 150-2, lost

their last eight wickets for 86 runs.
Failure to take more than one wicket in the late night session, considered a pace bowler's best time in a pink-ball test, only compounded England's misery after an abject batting display.
"One of Rooty and myself should have gone on to make a big hundred," a dejected Malan said.
"Big hundreds win test matches and me and Rooty didn't do it. Both times we have been found short as a batting unit.
"To get to 80 and get out pretty softly today was disappointing."
— Reuters

England's Malan rues missing out on century again

ADELAIDE: Dawid Malan said he was gutted to again fail to convert a 50 into a century on Saturday and warned England must learn to convert good starts into big scores if they want to win Tests.
The England number three started day three of the second Ashes Test against Australia on one and built a strong partnership with skipper Joe Root.
But it fell apart after the first session when Root fell for 62 and Malan went for 80 in quick succession.
It was the second Test in a row that both men appeared headed for centuries but then threw their wickets away. Root made 89 in the first Test in Brisbane and Malan 82.
"We talk about getting 20 wickets or what have you, but in Australia there's big runs to be had and big hundreds win you Test matches," Malan said after England were dismissed for 236 in their first innings in the Adelaide day-night match.
"In the last match both Rooty and myself were in a position to score hundreds and we didn't do it, and we were in the same position here and both times we've been found short as a batting unit compared to the Australian batting unit.



England's Dawid Malan in action. – Reuters

"So that's something we must do better from this next innings onwards, that if someone gets in, to make sure that we get that big 100."
The 34-year-old South African-born Malan has now scored nine

Test 50s but only converted one into a century.
Malan made his debut against South Africa in 2017 and played 14 Tests in 2017 and 2018, but did not play any more until being recalled against India in August this year.

He said he was "obviously pleased" to get runs in the opening two Tests but "to get to 80 in two innings in a row and get out softly is very disappointing".
"We've only had three innings so far, a couple of the boys have

had some scores, but it's once we're in, it's about making the big scores," he added.
"Marnus (Labuschagne) did it this innings for Australia and Travis Head did it in Brisbane, and that's where the games slipped

away a little and put us under pressure, and that's what we haven't done well enough so far."
Labuschagne smacked 103 in Australia's first innings in Adelaide while Head plundered 152 in Brisbane. — AFP

“In the last match both Rooty and myself were in a position to score hundreds and we didn't do it, and we were in the same position here and both times we've been found short as a batting unit compared to the Australian batting unit. So that's something we must do better from this next innings onwards, that if someone gets in, to make sure that we get that big 100

DAVID MALAN
England batsman



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action. – Reuters

Nadal loses to Murray but both are pleased

ABU DHABI: Rafael Nadal deemed his unofficial return to competition in Abu Dhabi as a “positive start” after he fell to Andy Murray in a high-quality exhibition match on Friday.

In a battle of two former world number ones, the Scot won 6-3, 7-5 in the semifinal of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship.

Nadal, who had played just two matches in six months after a foot injury that ruled him out of Wimbledon and the US Open, was back in action for the first time since August.

“I think I did a lot of things well and other things, of course after a long period of time, I need to recover again, some things that when you’re under competition come automatically,” Nadal said after facing Murray for the first time since 2016.

“Now I have to think more, or you don’t have this extra time to make the right decisions.”

“In general terms it has been a positive match, I even had my chances to win that second set.”

“It’s just a positive start. I played even better than what I thought a few weeks ago.”

The 20-time Grand Slam champion says he only started playing practice sets two days ago. “In Mallorca for the last five months, I played zero of these matches. I just did exercises and something more under control to try and make the normal evolution for the foot,” explained Nadal.

On Wednesday in Abu Dhabi, Nadal trained with world No 14 Denis Shapovalov, who was impressed.

“He killed me on the court yesterday so I think he’s feeling pretty good,” said the 22-year-old Canadian.

Another intense session came against world No 5 Andrey Rublev, who said their two-and-a-half-hour hit left him “destroyed”.

Meanwhile, Murray was pleased with his two wins in the Abu Dhabi exhibition so far, having beaten fellow Briton Daniel Evans on Thursday before disposing of Nadal. — AFP

Oman Sail wraps up season with spectacular Youth Worlds and new world record

MUSCAT: Oman Sail’s 2021 sailing season came to a close with the successful hosting of the Youth World Sailing Championships, the Oman Sailing Festival and a new world record set at the beach clean-up event at Barceló Resort Mussanah. A fleet of 433 sailors from more than 60 nations competed in 11 events with blue skies and winds of 8–10 knots rounded off five days of world-class competition.

Away from the competition, Oman Sail has set a Guinness World Records title for the Most Nationalities Collecting Litter. Participants at the Youth Sailing World Championships, including sailors, Oman Sail officials, staff at Barceló Mussanah Resort and members from the OMRAN Group broke a new record with 73 nationalities collecting over 344kg of litter at Mussanah public beach on 15 December.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, “This has been an excellent end to a momentous season for sailing in the Sultanate of Oman. The successful delivery of a series of World and Asian Championships held in Mussanah, the return of Sailing Arabia – The Tour, and the nationwide Sailing Festival, has seen some of the very best sailors in the world compete on these shores and inspire communities and future sailors across the country. Setting a new world record for our commitment to the environment underlines Oman Sail’s dedication to sustainability and preserving our beautiful coastline for generations to come. We hope that the impact will be felt in increased



environmental awareness and sporting prowess in the future.”

He added, “We would like to thank the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information and the support from Oman TV and Oman TV Sport, the Royal Navy of Oman, the Royal Oman Police, OMRAN, the technical delegates, race management and officials, and boat manufacturers, as well as all of our strategic partners. Oman Sail is certainly proud to host a spectacular event and welcome more than 1,000 to mark the 50th edition of this prestigious sailing championships, the first to be held in Middle East.”

This season has seen the eyes of the global sailing community turn towards the Sultanate of Oman as

Oman Sail hosted the 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, Mussanah Race Week, the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 Asian Championships and the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships from 16-21 November. Sailing Arabia – The Tour 2021, set entirely within the Sultanate of Oman, returned this year while the 2021 ICLA Radial World Championships ran concurrently in Mussanah, from 29 November to 6 December, 2021.

The latest stop in the Oman Sailing Festival was also at the Barceló Mussanah during the Youth World Sailing Championships, where more than 160 visitors of all ages took the opportunity to try sailing and windsurfing for free. The festival also featured a market showcasing local products

designed and made by Omani entrepreneurs. To date, the Oman Sailing Festival has introduced over 2,000 people to the sport, with many returning to take lessons at Oman Sail’s Sailing Schools in Sur, Marina Bandar Al Rowdha and Al Mouj Muscat.

The Oman Sailing Festival continues in January with two more stops. Hawana Salalah from 6-8 January, 2022 and Duqm from 11-15 January, 2022. The festival is proudly supported by platinum sponsor OQ, gold sponsors Oman Air and Salsabeel, and environmental partners be’ah and the Environment Society of Oman. To pre-register for Oman Sailing Festival events, please visit www.omansail.com/sailing-festival-activities or search #SailWithUs on social media.

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Madayn outlines investment opportunities linked to four industrial cities

STRONG GROWTH: Ten investment complexes planned in key locations

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has announced the launch of the ‘Madayn Investment Complexes’ initiative, which offers opportunities for local and foreign companies to invest in the manufacturing and related sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

“These companies shall develop specialised investment complexes through real estate plans, and the designs shall get approved by Madayn,” said Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO — Madayn.

“The developing companies will then promote the industrial and investment units with the facilities for the local and foreign companies to buy or rent these units for immediate operation, following the installation of production lines of the tenant or owner. Opportunities will be announced shortly with regard to 10 investment complexes planned in Suhar, Al Buraimi, Samayil, and Sur industrial cities across a number of services and sectors, according to the CEO. These include multi industries, food, plastics, and logistics sectors.

“These investment complexes shall support the industrial integration between small and large factories, and contribute to encouraging local and foreign investments towards the complementary industries.

This project shall also offer an opportunity for the SMEs to enter the industrial sector through these investment complexes. The SMEs will be able to buy or lease real estate units with small areas that are compatible with their operational and production capacity,” Al Hasani stated.

NEW INDUSTRIAL CITIES

Madayn is also making headway in the development of a number of new industrial cities. The infrastructure design of Thamrait Industrial City is being finalised while Madayn is currently identifying available investment opportunities for the private sector.

An environmental study was also conducted by a specialised environmental consultant and



“These investment complexes shall support the industrial integration between small and large factories, and contribute to encouraging local and foreign investments towards the complementary industries

HILAL BIN HAMAD AL HASANI
CEO, Madayn

the environmental approval has been obtained from the relevant body.

Located about 9 km away from Thamrait Air Base en route to Marmul, the 4 million sqm area of Thamrait Industrial City will focus on mining industries such as gypsum and limestone industries, in addition to light industries related to building materials like cement products.

Thamrait Industrial City will also be home to several support services such as vehicle



maintenance workshops, cold and dry storage facilities, a fuel station and truck weigh station. Space has also been allocated for commercial projects such as car showrooms, cafes, rest houses, and workforce accommodation, which will be developed through partnership with the private sector as investment opportunities. In Al Dhahirah Governorate, Madayn is currently working on the infrastructure works of phase 1 of Ibri Industrial

City at a cost of approximately RO 9 million with the goal of developing an area of about 3 million sqm.

This includes asphalt roads with a length of more than 18 km, lighting, water and electricity networks, sewage networks, and communication network. The project is in the preparation stage, and a notice of commencement has been issued last October as the infrastructure project has to be delivered in its final form by



mid-2023.

Madayn is also in the process of floating a tender for a one-stop shop in Ibri Industrial City, which will comprise a fuel station, hotel, public amenities, restaurants, and auto care services.

The tender document is in the review stage and is expected to be floated before the end of this year.

With regard to Mahas Industrial City, Al Hasani said the project has begun with its

administrative work in the Wilayat of Khasab in Musandam Governorate in early October this year to offer services to the factories that are localised in the industrial city, investors and businessmen.

“Located on an area of 1,548,821 sqm, Mahas Industrial City presents competitive incentives to support the economic and social development in the governorate, attract local and regional investments, create job opportunities, and enhance the in-country value of the governorate’s natural resources,” Al Hasani said.

Meanwhile, a tender is due to be awarded for the construction of a road and other infrastructure to support the development of a 1 million sqm area within Mahas Industrial City at a cost of approximately RO 6 million.

Madayn has also floated a consultancy services tender for Al Mudhaibi Industrial City, which includes detailed design for a 14 million sqm.

It also includes planning of a number of warehouses and identifying 15 viable investment opportunities that depend on the governorate’s natural resources.

The tender also covers a study of opportunities related to logistics, industrial, commercial, food, tourism and construction sectors.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

In 2019, Madayn commenced its public-private partnership programme by transferring the management of Al Rusayl Industrial City — Oman’s first industrial city — to Oman Investment and Development Holding Company (Mubadrah).

Mubadrah is currently implementing Phase (2A) in Al Rusayl Industrial City at a cost of more than RO 32 million.

Moreover, the redevelopment and rehabilitation project of the entrances to Al Rusayl Industrial City and the introduction of new entrances have been completed to solve the difficulties faced by the investors and visitors during their entrance to and exit from Al Rusayl Industrial City.

In addition, the development of logistics project has been completed in Al Rusayl Industrial City at a cost touching RO 1.5 million, where the area has been fully leased and investments are being pumped by the investors to develop the leased lands.

SEE ALSO PAGE 15

Bank Muscat rewards 61 winners with RO 415,000 at special Al Mazyona draw

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat continues to bring joy and happiness to its customers by holding its Al Mazyona monthly draw. The draw for November 2021 was held at a grand event at the Radisson Blu Hotel Sohar recently in the presence of Dr Saif bin Mohanna bin Saif al Hinai, Wali of Suhar, and Taya Bait Sabeea, Assistant General Manager, Branches Interior Regions, Bank Muscat.

The event focused on Al Mazyona customers from the Governorate of North Al Batinah. Draws were also conducted in the Asalah Priority Banking, Al Jawhar Privilege Banking and monthly Mega draw categories, with a total of RO 415,000 being given away in prizes to 61 lucky winners.

A total of 30 winners won prizes of RO 500 each in the monthly draws for the Governorate of North Al Batinah, while one lucky winner won the monthly mega prize of RO 50,000.

All customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO 100 were automatically entered into the monthly draws for governorates while the winner of the mega draw was chosen from amongst customers maintaining



a minimum balance of RO 1,000.

Also, 10 Asalah customers won RO 25,000 each and 20 Al Jawhar customers won RO 5,000 each in the other draws. It must be noted that all Asalah customers who maintained a minimum balance of RO 30,000 and Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 10,000 were automatically entered into these monthly draws.

Taya Bait Sabeea, Assistant General Manager, Branches

Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, congratulated all the winners of the monthly prize draws and said that the prizes would enable them to realise their dreams.

He stressed that all bank customers have the opportunity to win valuable and exciting prizes by regularly saving. He added that the November prize draws are a forerunner to the highly-anticipated End-of-Year Al Mazyona special draw that features over RO 1.5 million in

prize money.

He encouraged all customers to continue a healthy and regular savings habit and save more so as to get more chances to win in the End-of-Year draw.

All customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the draws to select the winners of the two RO 250,000 mega prizes in the Al Mazyona End-of-Year draw.

High savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 will be entered into the special draws for 10 prizes of RO 50,000 each with a total of RO 500,000 reserved in prizes for them.

Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 10,000 will be eligible to win one of the 10 prizes of RO 20,000 each, which adds up to a total of RO 200,000.

Also, 70 winners will be chosen from among customers across the Sultanate of Oman having a minimum balance of RO 1,000. Each winner will get RO 5,000 in the prize draw, which will give away a total of RO 350,000 in prizes to customers from different governorates.

In total, more than RO 1.5 million have been reserved for the bank's customers from over 140 personal banking branches. With RO 11 million to be given away in 2021, the country's biggest savings scheme is all set to create further excitement in the coming weeks as the year draws to a close. This year's programme is giving away a record 7,470 prizes compared to 6,677 last year, a 12-per cent increase in the number of winners.

Spider-Man: No Way Home premieres at Cinépolis Cinemas



MUSCAT: The latest instalment of Marvel's *Spider-Man: No Way Home* was premiered by Cinépolis Cinemas, flagship in Oman Avenues Mall, Muscat, on Wednesday.

Directed by Jon Watts, the third instalment of the Marvel franchise includes an all-star cast from Tom Holland, Zendaya, Willem Dafoe and Jamie Foxx. The story continues with Spider-Man's identity revealed and the difficulties he faced separating his normal life from being a superhero.

"We've been looking forward to the release of '*Spider-Man: No Way Home*' as it is one of the most anticipated movies of the year," says Alejandro Aguilera, CEO of Cinépolis Cinemas.

"There is no better way than to watch and live the Marvel Universe unfold their unique plot twists and characters than on the big screen in any of Cinépolis Cinemas' unique formats, whether it's the massive Macro XE, fully immersive 4D or the Luxury auditoriums."

The event which showcased the movie for the first time in the MENA region boasted key personnel and influencers from across the Sultanate of Oman. Guests were welcomed by a majestic setup in-line with the movie and served the unique food offerings from Cinépolis Cinemas.

MSX ends week marginally higher

MUSCAT: The MSX30 index ended the week higher by 0.56 per cent. All sub-indices ended lower except for financial index. Industrial and service index closed lower by 1.00 per cent and 1.30 per cent, respectively while financial index closed higher by 1.05 per cent. MSX Shariah index closed lower by 0.18 per cent.

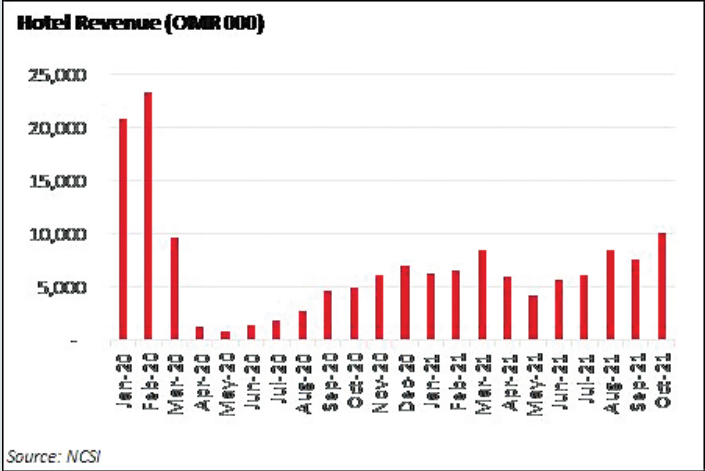
The Omani government is planning to increase total public spending to RO 12.1 billion in the fiscal year 2022 as public revenues are expected to rise by six per cent.

The estimated total public spending will be two per cent higher in 2022 over what is expected to be spent by the end of this year, the Ministry of Finance announced on Sunday. Total spending in Budget 2022 is over 11 per cent higher compared to the RO 10.8 billion spending estimated in budget for 2021.

The Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) said last week that more than 110 investment projects are being implemented in 2021 and 2022 and the volume of actual investments in 2021 stood at RO 2.6 billion.

In 2022, the volume of spending will be RO 2.9 billion through the expansion of current projects and setting up new ones.

In 2022, the volume of investments in the tourism sector is expected to be RO 193 million, RO 57 million in the mining sector, RO 116 million in the logistics sector, and RO 156 million in communications and information technology.



This is in addition to RO 99 million in the food sector, RO 54 million in fisheries, RO 1.41 billion in the energy sector, RO 803 million in the general services sector and RO 52 million in other sectors.

Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has instructed commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman to end the longstanding practice of offering prizes against savings deposit schemes with effect from January 1, 2022.

The measure came in a circular issued by CBO Executive President Tahir bin Salim al Amri.

Circular 1811 dated on December 9, 2021, directs licensed banks to scrap prize schemes while taking steps to enhance interest rates on deposits, among other measures to boost deposit mobilisation.

"The Central Bank of Oman, after careful consideration and keeping in view, amongst others, the overall interests of the banking system, and ensure enhanced effectiveness of the monetary policies, has decided to withdraw the

'Prize Scheme Linked Saving Deposits Schemes' with effect from January 1, 2022."

Omantel disclosed that Zain Jordan, one of Zain Group (Omantel's subsidiary) has signed an agreement for the sale and leaseback of passive tower structures and supporting facilities such as power generators, fuel tanks and protection kiosks ("towers") in Jordan with TASC Towers company (In which Zain Group owns 25 per cent). Under this agreement, the company will sell 2,607 towers at a value of \$88m. This agreement will have a positive impact on the company's operations in Jordan and Zain Group.

The accounting gain of this transaction before Tax is expected to be approximately \$50 million and it will be recognised once realised.

Sohar International has acted as the financial adviser to the popular on-demand delivery service major, Akeed, on raising its equity capital from investors.

Reiterating its strong market position, investor confidence and as part of its ongoing efforts to extend

The Central Bank of Oman, after careful consideration and keeping in view, amongst others, the overall interests of the banking system, and ensure enhanced effectiveness of the monetary policies, has decided to withdraw the 'Prize Scheme Linked Saving Deposits Schemes' with effect from January 1, 2022

support to local start-ups and promote In-Country Value (ICV) within the Sultanate of Oman, this strategic initiative reflects Sohar International's strong internal capabilities through a well-experienced team as well as a strong network and reaches to market such investment opportunities to existing and potential investors whether locally, regionally, or internationally.

The total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3- to 5-star category in the country increased 37.9 per cent to 834,255 in 9M-2021, compared to 604,940 guests for the same period of 2020.

The occupancy rate increased to 35.0 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) compared to 27.3 per cent last year.

Total revenues of these hotels fell by 11.7 per cent to RO 59.27 million in 9M-2021, compared to RO 67.2 million during the same period of the previous year.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Oman Housing Bank names new CEO



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Board of Directors of Oman Housing Bank SAOC has announced the appointment of Moosa al Jadidi (pictured) as the Chief Executive Officer of the Bank.

Al Jadidi is a seasoned banker with more than two decades of experience in the banking and financial industry across the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC.

As an award winning banker, he is renowned for having expert knowledge of both conventional and Islamic Banking, notably Retail banking, Corporate Credit, Wealth Management and Private Banking Investments coupled with his focus on continuous improvement and exemplary performance.

He is also an expert in Digital Customer Experience and Strategic Operational Management and Planning.

Prior to joining Oman Housing Bank, Moosa al Jadidi was the Chief Operating Officer of Alizz Islamic Bank. Al Jadidi has extensive international and regional banking experience as he previously worked for the Royal Bank of Canada, the European Financial Group Bank as Vice-President – Global Private Banking, Dubai Bank as Vice-President – International Business Development and several local banks such as Bank Muscat and National Bank of Oman (NBO).

Speaking on this announcement, Salaam bin Said al Shaksy, Chairman of the Board of Oman Housing Bank, said: "On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Housing Bank and members of the executive management, I am pleased to welcome Moosa al Jadidi as CEO of Oman Housing Bank and wish him the best of luck and success in his new position and look forward to seeing the enhancements that he will bring to the organisation."

"I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Adnan Haider Darwish, the former CEO of Oman Housing Bank, for his hard work and the great effort that he put towards the bank's objectives in the past years."



CMA moves to regulate independent financial services consultants

ADVISORY SERVICES:

By regulating and professionalising the services of individual financial advisers, authorities hope that they will play an important role in advising and encouraging small investors to consider investment opportunities offered via the country's securities market

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

The proliferation of private individuals offering financial advisory services to investors on an informal basis is sought to be regulated by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) of the Sultanate of Oman.

Draft regulations, titled



'Rules for Independent Financial Planners (IFPs), were published by the Authority last week with the goal of eliciting feedback from market stakeholders and members of the general public.

The goal, say officials, is to create a regulatory framework to support the growth of a cadre of qualified private professionals

offering financial advisory services outside of the scope of well-established and regulated corporate service providers.

Furthermore, by regulating and professionalising such individual financial advisers, it is hoped that they will play an important role in advising and encouraging small investors

to consider investment opportunities offered via the country's securities market.

The CMA defines Independent Financial Planners (IFP) as any individual who, for a consideration, is engaged in the business of providing financial advice to individual clients or a group of individuals.

Such advisers may include those who provide financial analysis, help clients plan their financial goals, and recommend strategies for investment in different asset classes, investment funds and other portfolios.

Once approved and enacted, the new guidelines require Independent Financial Planners to obtain a licence from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to practise financial advisory consultancy services. Exempt from this requirement are banks and finance companies licensed by the Central Bank of Oman,

authorised staffers or agents of service providers licensed by the CMA, and those of brokerage or investment or portfolio management firms already authorised by the Authority.

Importantly, candidates seeking a licence from the Authority should be suitably qualified and must also clear an examination prescribed by the CMA for the purposes. However, ineligible for the licence are board members of any public joint stock company or employees of a business operating in the field of securities.

Further, to ensure transparency and accountability in their dealings with investors, IFPs are mandated to explain in writing the risks related to any investments recommended by them, and to obtain in writing confirmation that the investor concerned has understood those risks.

Fitch downgrades Sri Lanka as default fears mount

COLOMBO: International ratings agency Fitch downgraded cash-strapped Sri Lanka on Saturday due to mounting fears of a sovereign default on its \$26 billion foreign debt, but Colombo insisted it will meet its obligations.

The downgrade by one notch from "CCC" to "CC" came a day after Sri Lanka reported a 1.5 per cent contraction in the third quarter of this year as a foreign exchange crisis wrecked its recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Fitch said the downgrade reflected its view of an "increased probability of a default event in coming months" as Sri Lanka's foreign reserves slumped to \$1.58 billion at the end of November.

"We believe it will be difficult for the government to meet its external debt obligations in 2022 and 2023 in the absence of new external financing sources," the agency said in a statement. — **AFP**

MEDRC announces winners of Omani Water Researchers Award and Eco School Prize

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 18

MEDRC has announced the winners of the 'Omani Young Water Researchers Award 2021' and the 'Eco School Prize' at an official ceremony held under the auspices of Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman.

Established by MEDRC and sponsored by the Omar Zawawi Establishment LLC and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Omani Young Water Researchers Award highlights the exceptional work of young water researchers at

undergraduate and postgraduate level in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking at the award ceremony, MEDRC Center Director, Ciarán Ó Cuinn said: "Supporting the talents of young Omani's researchers and the researchers of tomorrow is such an honour for us at MEDRC. The academic excellence and commitment to environmental sustainability on show is simply fantastic."

Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman said: "There is a recurring essence that flows through the history of Oman and the Netherlands binding its people together: water. Both nations continue to face

challenges when it comes to water and water management.

Therefore It is important for us to share our knowledge with each other and this is why Netherlands promotes its research in the field of water to continuously improve water efficiency and protection from water, thereby contributing to SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation)."

The winners announced this year are as follows:

Postgraduate Category:

1st Place — Amira bint Sulaiman al Gareebi, Sultan Qaboos University;

2nd Place — Alya bint Abdulla al Busaidy, Sultan Qaboos University

Undergraduate Category:

1st Place — Abdulrahman bin Mohammed al Musalami, International Maritime College Oman; 2nd Place — Fatema bint Faham al Muqbali and Amal al Balushi, International Maritime College Oman.

The Eco School Prize ceremony was held jointly on the same day, where Alajjah school was announced as the overall winner of the prize.

Sponsored by Oman LNG Development foundation and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and supported by The Ministry of Education and Sultan Qaboos University's College of Engineering.

Oil prices post weekly loss on uncertainty

NEW YORK: Oil prices fell on Friday and were also down on the week as surging cases of the Omicron coronavirus variant raised fears that new restrictions may hit fuel demand.

"There are concerns about Covid that won't go away, and the perception that could weigh on demand is putting pressure on the market," said Bob Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizuho in New York.

Brent crude futures settled down \$1.50, or 2%, at \$73.52 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude dropped \$1.52, or 2.1%, to settle at \$70.86 a barrel.

"Messages of caution and



warnings of a worsening Covid wave are starting to ring louder with the approach of the year-end holiday season, dampening market sentiment," said Vandana Hari, energy analyst at Vanda Insights.

"Crude may remain in a holding pattern, albeit with plenty of price volatility around the mean, in holiday-thinned trading for next week." — **Reuters**

Madayn initiates steps to boost existing industrial cities

KEY INFRASTRUCTURE:
Multipurpose international port planned in Sur Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has initiated a number of steps to boost the investment appeal of its industrial cities. At Sur Industrial City, work is under way in implementing infrastructure improvements totalling RO12 million in value.

These projects, due for completion in Q3 2022, include the construction of a 17 km length of water network, 14 km of sewage network, 10.6 km of road network, 6.8 km of water drainage channels, two wastewater storage tanks with total capacity of 1,230 m3, and water tanks.

Importantly, there are plans



to establish a multi-purpose international port in Sur Industrial City and accommodate new expansions as well.

Accordingly, Madayn has floated a tender for pre-

qualification of consulting companies to master-plan the expansion.

The updated masterplan will identify suitable locations for heavy industries, service paths,

and locations for infrastructure facilities, conduct hydrological studies for wadi courses, drainage and protection schemes, and create additional leasable areas.

In Nizwa Industrial City,

Phases 3 and 4 are being added as well on an additional 2 million sqm of land.

Work is also in progress to prepare tender documents for the commercial and residential areas at Nizwa Industrial City, which aim at providing essential services and facilities to the companies and workers in the industrial city such as commercial stores, auto care services, health services, and suitable housing complexes. Samayil Industrial City will be officially inaugurated at the beginning of 2022.

"Madayn is currently executing the design and implementation of infrastructure complementary project in Samayil Industrial City. The project features a dual-lane road spanning 1.4 km from the roundabout at the main entrance of Samayil Industrial City to the roundabout near Al Sharqiyah expressway.

The project also includes designing and executing sewage pipe linking phase 3 with phase

1 of Samayil Industrial City. This project, which is valued at RO 2 million, aims at enhancing and developing the infrastructure of Samayil Industrial City," said Hilal al Hasani, CEO — Madayn.

Madayn is also completing the development of Al Buraimi Industrial City with the establishment of a sewage network and plant, rehabilitating roads and rain drainage channels, in addition to developing an area of 300,000 sqm allocated for SMEs.

Moreover, Madayn is currently conducting a feasibility study for fruit and vegetable market to be established in the Wilayat of Mahdha.

The study will be completed by the end of the current year. As part of the Phase 7 development of Suhar Industrial City, new roads and water lines are being added.

At Mazunah Free Zone, a facility building is currently being constructed on an area of 11,000 sqm with a total value of more than RO 3 million.

Airlines fly close to downwards debt spiral

Airlines are close to breaking the corporate credit card. Since 2019, the top six network carriers in the United States and Europe have loaded up with an additional \$44 billion of net debt, more than their pre-pandemic EBITDA. Even with a return to normal in 2022 — an increasingly unlikely scenario — paying that off will take years.

Alongside flogging planes, laying off staff and asking shareholders for money, airline bosses have borrowed vast sums from banks and capital markets. Taxpayers have also chipped in, with the US Congress approving, somewhat controversially, \$54 billion read more to cover salaries of grounded staff for 18 months.

To a large extent, the survival techniques have worked. Only Air France-KLM is close to nationalisation, with the French and Dutch governments holding 29 per cent and 9 per cent stakes respectively.

That said, the industry's debt levels are unsustainable.

Since 2019, the three big US carriers Delta Air Lines, American Airlines and United Airlines, and their European counterparts Air France-KLM, Germany's Lufthansa and British Airways-owner IAG have increased net debt by 63 per cent to \$112 billion.

That equates to a whopping 4.7 times next year's EBITDA. In 2019, the year before the pandemic started, the absolute figure was \$69 billion, just 1.7 times that year's EBITDA.

Getting back to 2019-style amounts of leverage will involve years of pain for shareholders. Government support packages in the United States and Europe preclude the payment of any dividends until state loans are repaid.

The Omicron variant may yet wreak havoc on forecasts for 2022, and even airlines executives questions whether business travellers will ever fully return.

Another solution is to pass the hat around to shareholders once again. The additional net debt taken on board in the last two years amounts to two-thirds the six's current market value, which itself could be inflated. Even when the viral storm clouds eventually pass, the outlook for airline shareholders looks bleak. — Reuters

Government support packages in the United States and Europe preclude the payment of any dividends until state loans are repaid



LIGHTING A TREE

A woman uses a cell phone to light a maple tree to find previous bores at the Belfontaine Holstein farm in Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu, Quebec, Canada.

Strong demand for maple syrup after a poor Canadian harvest has created supply-side woes, but Quebec province is tapping its strategic reserves to keep the world awash in the sweet, sticky stuff.

Experts are warning the supply-side woes could be further compounded by climate change, which is already being blamed for last spring's shorter and warmer sugaring season.

— AFP

3 SaaS models to re-imagine



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

The columnist is a member of the International Press Association

THERE IS A MASSIVE NEED FOR RE-IMAGINATION, AND INVESTORS CAN RELATE TO EXISTING IDEAS MUCH BETTER THAN TO ABSTRACT ONES

Last week we begun a journey that brought us to explore how for tech innovators — at this stage in history — there is probably not so much the need to come up with something absolutely revolutionary, but rather re-imagining those products that are not really working efficiently anymore.

In the first part we talked about how CRM software was designed and imagined for a pre-Covid era, when being in office was a must.

Now, many software are in urgent need of modern revamp. Today we look at other two categories that have followed a similar pattern. They have either grown too big, or they were acquired by a giant that turned their innovation in a deep sleep.

Marketing Automation

The second category that I think is completely ripe for re-imagination is Marketing Automation. Marketo was a phenomenal tool, which Adobe bought for \$4.75 billion. So was Eloqua, bought by Oracle and HubSpot.

While Eloqua went under the radar, the latest Marketo reviews I have read point to the excessive complicated dynamics. And HubSpot, instead of fine tuning the

core strengths, became a complex array of tools, heavily leaning towards a CRM, thus creating a CDP (Customer Database Platform) with the same old Marketing Automation.

In my opinion, this has left a vacuum for a pure Marketing Automation Software as a Service to shine. We need a tool able to re-imagine how to capture leads, and nurture people.

Even larger is the opportunity in B2B, where no tech giant seems to have cracked the nut of business-to-business challenges.

Customer Support

The third category, ripe for re-imagination is the overall Customer Support, to include ticketing, and help desk systems.

There is one de-facto market leader, Zendesk, a publicly listed company. So, some reader might be thinking: "How in the right mind can a new start-up consider to compete with such a giant?"

I understand, but follow me for a moment. Customer experience is more important than ever. There are more channels through which customers want to talk to their brands.

There is chat, there is Messenger, there is WhatsApp, there is phone, and so many more touch points, like a company's website.

Costumers Support tech providers seems to have designed tools with corporate in mind, not the user.

They have been working towards centralising the control centres, instead of de-centralising the access points.

So re-imagining the help desk experience means more broadly to re-imagine how support works, and how teams can provide faster, and more targeted help to customers. Succeeding at this task could mean not only building an exceptional new start-up, but also providing immense value to companies through happier clients.

In conclusion, if you are an entrepreneur and you are constantly thinking of new ideas, I would suggest that for once you stop your creative mind, and look at what is already out there. There is a massive need for re-imagination, and investors can relate to existing ideas much better than to abstract ones.

Imagine your next start-up not to solve a problem that has not yet been discovered, but rather address the shortfalls that large players have created room for. There are investors out there that are just waiting for someone like you.

(This is the second part of a two-part article on the above topic)

Why China continues to rise



ZHANG JUN

The author is Dean of the School of Economics at Fudan University, is Director of the China Center for Economic Studies, a Shanghai-based think tank.

In just four decades, China's economy has achieved an unprecedented level of wealth and development, and, until recently, its upward trajectory of economic growth and prosperity seemed set to continue.

But as political pressures and the coronavirus push many countries — particularly the United States — to embrace more nationalist policies, the heyday of globalisation soon could be replaced by a post-pandemic era shaped by national-security concerns and border controls.

This is not good news for China, which would prefer that the world maintain the economic openness it achieved in recent decades.

For that reason, China had been working hard to align its economic and trade activities with international rules and norms. But now it seems that China must prepare for a future characterised by higher trade barriers and restrictions.

To this end, China's 14th Five-Year Plan makes clear that the country will seek to reduce its dependence on external demand.

The "dual-circulation strategy" announced in the plan instead emphasises reliance on the country's huge population.

China also plans to invest heavily in cutting-edge sectors, such as artificial intelligence and semiconductors, and work to achieve self-sufficiency in core technologies.

China is unlikely to return to a state-controlled economy or enact isolationist policies.

Instead, the increased role of the state in the economy and a shift towards self-reliance should be interpreted as a response to a changing — and, at times, hostile — external environment.

This shift likely would have happened even if Sino-American relations had not deteriorated as they have, owing to China's enormous population.

Recognising the potential of

its own massive internal market, China's leaders have long sought to increase domestic demand as a hedge against external changes.

As for technological progress, a larger population implies more talent and higher returns for innovation.

But, amid the retreat from globalisation, China's advantage may be even greater.

In a 2018 paper, Klaus Desmet, Dávid Krisztián Nagy and Esteban Rossi-Hansberg showed that in a world of restricted cross-country trade and migration, countries with large populations can provide more opportunities to increase economic output through internal trade and specialisation.

The most populous countries are not necessarily the richest today, the authors note, largely because of migration.

But if barriers to migration grow high enough, populous countries will outpace smaller countries in innovation, even if the latter are richer.

Because long-run growth is driven by improvements in technology, this translates into a major economic advantage for countries with larger populations.

This outcome highlights just how self-defeating America's turn inward is: it's clear that America's success is thanks to migration and globalisation.

To be sure, China is facing strong demographic headwinds: its birth rate dropped to a record low in 2020. But the effects of this decline will take a few decades to have an impact.

China's demographics today give the country a significant advantage over the US in terms of human capital for at least the next 20 years.

Projections of China's future growth suggest that if China makes the most of this advantage — as it seems poised to do — the US will find it all but impossible to hamper China's economic progress.

Rather than thwarting China's

ambitions, America's policies will encourage China to continue hedging its bets, including by rethinking its national-security strategy and shifting more resources to its science and technology sectors.

In the worst decoupling scenario, the world's two largest economies will end up dominating their own technology-supply systems, each with its own rules and standards.

This is a distinct possibility. But visionary politicians should appreciate how much more could be achieved on both sides if the countries instead worked together.

It's clear that China has much to gain from a more open global economic system. China's leaders have emphasised that they are not abandoning the path of market-led development and returning to a closed economic model — and there is no reason to believe otherwise.

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Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 142 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Oman Shipping Company (SAOC)**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1723154, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 346,646,012.000 to 130,218,607.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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features



The Youth4Climate event held in Milan was a first of its kind event in the history of the UN climate negotiations to target and include the voices of the youth on the roadmap to COP26. Turki al Risi and Noor al Hamdan, who represented the Sultanate of Oman, share their experiences about their visit and how decision making allowed them to voice their inputs on the climate change agenda with focus on energy efficiency and sustainable energy... **P20**

MUSIC

READ

THE COMPLETE COOKBOOK FOR YOUNG CHEFS

BY AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN KIDS

Over 100 kid-tested recipes from America's Test Kitchen.

Afghan orchestra finds hope in Portugal as music dies in homeland

WHEN THE TALIBAN seized power, Afghan musicians knew their futures were in jeopardy. Conductor Shogufa Safi, 18, escaped. Now in Portugal, her new home, she feels safe but her dream is to return one day and bring music back to her country's streets.

"I haven't had peace in my life yet," an emotional but hopeful Safi said after she landed in Portugal's capital Lisbon on Monday along with 272 other members of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), including students,

staff and relatives.

"My huge dream is to go back to Afghanistan... It's a huge dream," she said. "I believe that I'll go back... and teach the younger generation."

Safi is one of the musicians in Afghanistan's renowned all-female orchestra Zohra, part of ANIM. They have played at some of the world's major concert venues, from New York's Carnegie Hall to the Sultanate of Oman's Royal Opera House.

Portugal has granted asylum to all ANIM's members and their

immediate family, making it the largest rescue operation of a self-contained Afghan community since August's takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, the music institute said.

Under the Taliban's repressive 1996-2001 regime, music was banned. Although the hardline militants have yet to formally reinstate the ban this time around, the Taliban have ordered radio stations to stop playing music in parts of Afghanistan.

As soon as Taliban insurgents took control, ANIM's director and founder, Ahmad Sarmast, knew he had to get his students out of the country. They escaped to Qatar with the help of various donors, before making their way to Portugal.

"I'm very happy to be in Portugal because I see all my friends smiling," said another young conductor, Marzia Anwari. "They are the future of Afghanistan."

Some of the young musicians stepped out of the commercial



charter flight clutching new instruments, from drums to violins. Their old instruments stayed behind at ANIM's campus in Kabul, which is now a Taliban command centre.

The future for music may look bleak in their homeland, but Sarmast is confident that now his students are safe they will be able

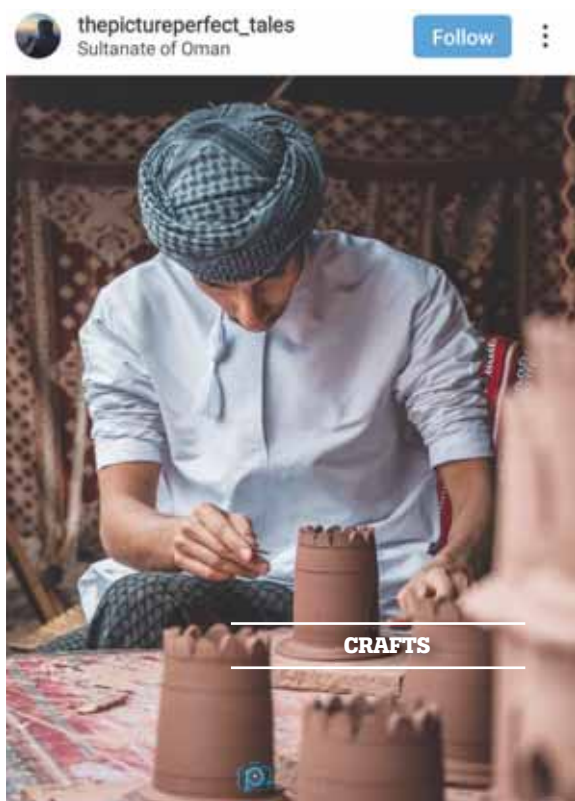
to not only pursue their artistic dreams, but also keep Afghanistan's rich musical heritage alive.

ANIM will reopen in Lisbon next year, and the group will return to big stages once they settle in. "It will be impossible for the Taliban to silence the people of Afghanistan," Sarmast said. — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

UNESCO honours Congolese rumba as cultural treasure



THE HEADY BEATS of Congolese rumba were hailed by UNESCO on Tuesday as it added the central African music and dance to its list of global cultural treasures.

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo Republic had sub-

addition to its list of assets of intangible cultural value to humanity.

Rumba is an essential and representative part of the identity of Congolese people and their diaspora, it said.

"The President of the Republic welcomes with joy



mitted a joint bid for their rumba to receive heritage status for its unique sound that melds the drumming of enslaved Africans with the melodies of Spanish colonisers.

"The rumba is used for celebration and mourning, in private, public and religious spaces," UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural and scientific agency, said in its citation for the music's

and pride the addition of Congolese rumba to the list," the office of Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi tweeted.

The many customs enshrined on UNESCO's list of cultural treasures include the hawker food of Singapore, sauna culture in Finland and traditional irrigation systems in the United Arab Emirates. — **Reuters**

HOME IMPROVEMENT

Cleaning hacks to ease your hectic holiday



IF YOU'VE TAKEN one for the team this year by hosting Christmas dinner, you might be dreading the thought of cleaning up the mess from your delicious dinner.

You might decide to leave the cleanup mission until Boxing Day morning, but why make life more difficult? Luckily, the team at Essential Living have revealed five everyday, household items you can use to keep on top of the mess that comes with hosting Christmas dinner.

From lemons to toothbrushes, cleaning up after your Christmas party will be a breeze, even with a slightly sore head!

DISHWASHER TABLETS

Your crispy roasties and parsnips were the star of the show, but all of that goose fat and herbs means your oven tray will be full of grease and burnt-on sage. And the longer you leave it, the harder it will be to scrub off.

Save yourself time with this one simple hack. Place a dishwasher tablet in your tray and fill it with boiling hot water and leave to soak for a few hours and the grease should wipe away with ease.

You'll be pleased to know that you can also use this method to clean your shelves and grill pan too. Remove the racks and place in a large plastic container. Add a couple of dishwasher tablets, and cover the racks with hot water.

Leave everything to soak together overnight and in the morning, wipe them down with a soft cloth, rinse and dry. It's like Christmas never happened!

USED TEABAGS

Whilst you would normally stock up with teabags for your guests' after-dinner brew, they can also be used to clean your dishes!

To keep pots and pans rust-free, simply rub a damp, used tea bag around the surface after you've washed your kitchenware. The tannins in the tea will form a protective layer that prevents rust.

Top tip: Simply pop a couple of used teabags in a wide-mouthed spray bottle and top up with water. Use sparingly on glass surfaces and follow with a dry microfibre cloth to remove those stubborn greasy fingerprints.



LEMON

If you can cook a Christmas dinner without staining your apron, or even worse, your party clothes, you have done extremely well.

Whether it be a tough, greasy stain like gravy or even a splash of red wine on your sofa, this simple trick will help your clothes and furniture survive the festive period. Simply squeeze a few drops of lemon directly onto the stain and leave it to absorb for around 15-20 minutes.

Lemon is a great choice for stain removal as it's a completely natural acid with a light whitening action. This makes lemon juice a good alternative to harsh chemicals like bleach, which can ruin delicate fab-

rics. For best results, place some greaseproof paper over the top as the lemon soaks as this will enhance absorption.

Top tip: If you aren't sure whether the fabric you are cleaning may react with the lemon, test on a hidden area to ensure no discolouration or damage will occur.

USED TINFOIL

Before you throw away any used tin foil, why not reuse it to scrub your oven dishes and stainless steel pans instead-but avoid using this hack on your non-stick pans as they are prone to scratch and ruin the pan.

Scrunch your tinfoil into a ball, then wet it and gently rub it into any stubborn spots. If the foil dries out, dip it back in the water or grab a fresh piece. The aluminium in the foil has the ability to tackle tougher grease as opposed to cloth.

Top tip: Sprinkle your pans with a thick layer of salt and lemon which will help remove dirt even more as it breaks down the grease with its acidity.

TOOTHBRUSH

You may think cleaning with a toothbrush is some sort of joke, but it actually is one of the best tools for really targeting stains!

If one of your guests seems to be a little drowsy after their dinner and drops their pud on your sofa, do not worry. Here, you can really let the toothbrush do the hard work by going over the stained area, allowing the fine bristles to tackle any marks left by misplaced dessert.

With a white cloth, dab warm water or washing-up liquid onto the stain and use your toothbrush to scrub.

Top tip: Scrub outwards not inwards and always pat dry gently.

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
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Alexander, The Great: The Death of a God

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with Alexander the Great history was exactly twenty years back, reading Valerio Massimo Manfredi's trilogy: Alexander the Great. Manfredi's depiction of Alexander was dreamlike: a humble king, a brilliant leader and a caring human.

Over the years, I became obsessed with this historical figure that I accumulated numerous books varying from novels to non-fiction work (even murder mysteries set on his military camps. Don't ask!). This phase lasted the whole of my twenties which turned me into some sort of an expert in ancient Greek and Roman histories (I was the only spectator coming out of the movie *300* seething about the historical inaccuracy of the story and the misrepresentation of Xerxes — the great Persian king — who looked like a drag queen. Needless to say, my grumbling continued on our way home — which my unsympathetic brother found extremely funny!).

Now twenty years later, while browsing the shelves for something to read, I came across a book called *Alexander the Great: The Death of a God* by Paul Doherty (2003). Unlike Manfredi's Alexander, Doherty's one is anything but a demigod. As the title indicates, Doherty's main focus is answering the centuries-old mystery: what or who killed the thirty-three-year-old king? He scrutinises many historical resources that were either written by Alexander's scribes or by Roman historians almost three hundred years after the conqueror's death, comparing and contrasting information that not only helps in setting the historical context of his period but also in understanding Alexander's darker side: the opportunist and ruthless warlord. The book is divided into eight parts that cover the political atmosphere during the time of Alexander's birth in Pella in 356 BC, his youth being tutored by Aristotle and coming to power at the age of sixteen after the assassination of his father King Philip. Also, his military invasions, influential people in his life until his sudden death in Babylon in 323 BC. But what could've ended the life of the young king? Doherty researches many theories surrounding his death including the most famous ones of excessive drinking and Arsenic poisoning. This leads to another question: if Alexander was murdered, what could be the reason behind it? Many factors are mentioned such as the dissatisfaction felt by the army marching for eleven years without a break. Not to mention the loss of tens of thousands of soldiers in Alexander's mad endeavours such as crossing the Gedrosian desert in Baluchistan. Moreover, imposing the new Persian culture in the form of new Persian army recruits, Persian clothing and forced marriages to Persian wives, which outraged the soldiers even further. Besides, wiping out entire cities such as Thebes and Tyre could've deepened the grudges against him and hence the attempt on his life.

Alexander could've caused his own death by getting rid of whoever he considered a direct threat to his reign including his father's old generals and their household; an imprudent decision with unfavourable outcomes. His volatile personality stemmed from his belief of being a demigod and his obsession with omens and seers could've influenced his state of mind and hence hastened his death, another theory suggested by Doherty.

The book addresses other important issues such as what happened during and after Alexander's death, how was his vast kingdom divided between his companions and the whereabouts of the conqueror's final resting place. Doherty's depiction of Alexander is real and convincing; unlike many western writers he's objective and the arguments he presents are convincing and powerful. The book is written in a language that's both clear and engaging. A page-turner highly recommended for ancient history fans.

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Young Omani climate activists lead way to global action

By Liju Cherian

The Sultanate of Oman honourably represented by two young Omanis, Turki al Risi and Noor al Hamdan, at the Youth4Climate in Milan, Italy.

The event convened 400 youth climate leaders from 186 countries, two each from nearly every signatory to the Paris Agreement.

The primary objective was to adopt a collective declaration to be presented to ministers attending Pre-COP26 in Milan and delivered by Italy to COP26.

Both Noor and Turki were selected from around 8,700 applicants after an intensive application screening process. This was followed by about nine months of remote collaboration to develop a zero draft document with recommendations across four thematic areas of climate action.

Their applications focused on the demonstrated ability of the applicants towards critical thinking and problem solving on topics related to climate change and sustainable development, and innovative initiatives to spread awareness on climate change.

The delegates met with over 50 ministers to lobby and convey ambitions for urgent action rooted in social justice ahead of COP26.

Turki al Risi is in the construction industry as a Quantity Surveyor while Noor al Hamdan is an Energy Recovery Specialist at Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah).

Turki was selected to work on Energy Transition and Green Jobs under the theme of Sustainable Recovery after a thorough process and received training from UNDP prior to the event. Several capacity building sessions were held before in order to enrich the knowledge and involvement level of the participants, as well as familiarise them with the four main working groups and help them provide their inputs early on towards drafting the zero draft document.

Pre-COP26 gave both of the youngsters an opportunity to be included in the climate change negotiation with policymakers.

Energy transition means the future according to Turki. He says "We are witnessing many projects around the Sultanate of Oman sustaining this sector, talking of large wind and solar farms and green hydrogen. I feel we need to educate the public more about green hydrogen and how it works. Raising awareness is the main reason behind my interest in sustainability and climate change."

His greatest takeaway from the summit besides developing the manifesto which was used in the negotiation of COP26 was

Turki summarises their work towards energy transition and green jobs working group. They call for an urgent, holistic, diversified and inclusive energy transition by 2030 that prioritises energy efficiency and sustainable energy, keeping +1.5 goal within reach to ensure a transition with decent jobs, providing adequate support for affected and vulnerable communities

meeting many like-minded young individuals and learning from their thoughts along with his ideas. As many climate justice activists from all over the world like Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg were present as well as many youngsters from the Arab and Middle Eastern regions.

He is still in touch with and collaborating on existing projects that are going to see the light soon. He also had the chance to understand the foreign process of such a summit as well as meet with high-level negotiators on the event.

Noor al Hamdan was hoping

she could make it to Glasgow which was the result of the COP26 negotiations which made important progress in many aspects.

She says "fossil fuel companies were heavily represented as well as many countries where they tried to slow down the progress of achieving the net-zero targets by 2030. Although loss and damage were some of the main topics discussed at COP26, it was not covered enough as developed countries were training to push back this topic to the background instead of supporting affected countries. The Middle East will be the focus at the upcoming COP27 and CCP28 to be hosted by Egypt and UAE respectively."

She explains further that energy transition is a must, putting strategies and early or balanced investment on clean energy at the front of the world as the demand for clean energy increases each day.

"It is also important to put people and community at the core of these strategies. I hope we see more collaboration between our countries to achieve greater goals serving the whole area," she adds.

Representing the Sultanate of Oman, what is the sustainability message to the youth and how do they prefer to make a difference?

Turki summarises their work towards energy transition and green jobs working group. They call for an urgent, holistic, diversified and inclusive energy transition by 2030 that prioritises energy efficiency and sustainable energy, keeping +1.5 goal within reach to ensure a transition with decent jobs, providing adequate support for affected and vulnerable communities.

While Noor is currently organising youth delegates from the MENA region to create their own unified movement towards climate change and working towards setting up goals and holding weekly meetings. She also is in contact with Turki about the next steps needed to spread the word from the Y4C event and looking out for more climate activists who can join them.

