

Farewell to Syrian ambassador

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office on Wednesday Dr Bassam al Khatib, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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IVANKOVIC
HAILS OMAN
SHOW AGAINST
CHINA



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\$1 BN YITI
SUSTAINABLE CITY
SET FOR 2025
COMPLETION



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IS OMAN READY
FOR LUXURY
TRAVELLERS TO
COME BACK?



MUSCAT

HM THANKED
BY SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in reply to His Majesty's congratulations cable on the success of the medical check-up he underwent. In his cable, King Salman expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's heartfelt sentiments and prayers, praying to Allah the Almighty to grant His Majesty continuous good health and happiness. — ONA

READ IN
OPINION



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Oman, UK review historical relations

H M G I V E S A U D I E N C E T O U K O F F I C I A L



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of the United Kingdom (UK).

Cordial talks were exchanged and historical relations of friendship binding the two countries were also reviewed during the audience.

Discussions also explored means of promoting these relations towards broader horizons of bilateral cooperation to serve the interests of the two countries' peoples.

Views on several issues of interest to the two sides were also exchanged in light of the ongoing international developments.

The audience was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sayyid Faisal bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court and Bill Murray, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

DON'T MISS THIRD BOOSTER DOSE

MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, member of the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, has affirmed the significance of two-dose vaccination recipients' going from a third booster dose, which has so far been taken by 160,000 people, of whom a mere 10 per cent are Omani citizens.

The minister pointed out that 96 per cent of patients hospitalised with Covid-19 over the past few months were found to have missed the third booster dose (which means they received two doses or one dose or not vaccinated at all), and this underscores the great need to go for the booster dose.

The minister made the statements on Wednesday during

the 29th press conference of the Covid-19 Supreme Committee, held at the Ministry of Education.

The minister said that the number of booked doses stood at 8,031,006, while the ministry has received 7,544,929 and administered 6,997,913 doses.

He affirmed that the virus is still lurking, though its variants like Omicron are less severe, but more infectious, with some countries reporting alarming uptake prompting new, stricter measures and other countries even endorsing a fourth dose (like the United States) for vulnerable people aged above 50.

The minister noted that research has proved that immunity against Covid-19 for those who took two-dose vaccination dropped by 22 per cent after six months from the second dose.

TURN TO P2

A mere 10%
citizens took
booster dose

Oman booked
8,031,006
vaccine doses

Omicron is less
severe, but more
infectious

97% expats took
first dose,
89% took second

PCR test no longer
must for incoming
travellers

Vaccination for
children by the
beginning of April



IMMUNITY
DROPS
BY 22%
AFTER 6
MONTHS
FROM
SECOND
DOSE

ROYAL DIRECTIVES

76 new schools to come up

MUSCAT: In response to the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik at Bait Bahjat Al Andhar in Suhar last week, the Ministry of Education disclosed details of school projects.

Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Education, stated that 76 schools are coming up in different governorates depending on the students' density as follows: Muscat Governorate (19 schools), North Al Batinah Governorate (17), South Al Batinah Governorate (11), Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (5), South Al Sharqiyah Governorate (9), North Al Sharqiyah Governorate (1), Al Buraimi Governorate (2), Al Dhahirah Governorate (1), Dhofar Governorate (9) and Musandam Governorate (2).

TURN TO P2

Promoting Oman as a destination for film production

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Feature film shot in picturesque locations in a country have become tourism attractions and destinations as have been seen in many cases globally.

One can see more films being shot in the Sultanate of Oman as the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has signed

an agreement with Action Films Production Company and Destinations Rising Company.

The agreement signed with Action Films LLC (a post-production company) and Destinations Rising, the company specialised in promotion of international films and TV production sites globally, is aimed at promoting the country as an attractive destination.

Through this agreement, the OCCI seeks to promote the country's unique terrain as potential locations for film and television industries.

"The agreement is aimed at making the Sultanate of Oman a preferred destination for film production, putting it on the map of countries which attract such industries and compete internationally in this sector," the

statement added.

The campaign to promote the country as an ideal location for film and TV productions is supported by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Ministry of Information and Omran company, as it provides opportunities for investment in this field, especially to SMEs.



WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 29°C Min 25°C SALALAH: Max 33°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 36°C Min 20°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:00 FAJR: 04:45 DHUHR: 12:16 ASR: 15:43 MAGHRIB: 18:27 ISHA: 19:38



Dengue cases on rise, intensive campaign soon

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, on Wednesday, said dengue cases are on the rise in Sultanate of Oman. As of Tuesday, the number of registered cases of dengue fever reached 17 in the Wilayat of Bausher, 7 in the Wilayat of Seeb and two in the Wilayat of Al Amerat.

He was addressing the media during the 29th Supreme Committee press conference on Wednesday.

The Ministry of Health will launch an intensive joint campaign with Muscat Municipality to combat the spread of the Aedes aegypti mosquito.

The campaign, which will continue for several days, will cover Al Hail South in the Wilayat of Seeb, and Al Ghubra, Al Ansab in the Wilayat of Bausher daily between 6 and 11 am.

As the special campaign will be in addition to the measures already taken in several governorates, residents and citizens have been urged to extend their hand of cooperation.



The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hosani, said, “This is not the first time that dengue fever cases have been recorded in the Sultanate of Oman, as cases were recorded in 2019 and 2020 in the governorates of Muscat and Dhofar.

“The disease is not transmitted from one person to another directly, it is transmitted to humans by Aedes aegypti. Muscat Municipality has been monitoring the mosquito breeding places, places with stagnant water around houses. The mosquito control methods implemented by the work teams include preventing leaks from sewage openings.”

Asaad bids farewell to Syrian envoy

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Dr Bassam Al Khatib, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Wednesday to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to him during his tour of duty in the Sultanate of Oman from His Majesty, the government and the



Omani people, which enabled him to carry out his assignments.

He also wished His Majesty continuous good health, happi-

ness and a long life. Al Khatib hoped that the Sultanate of Oman will witness further development and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty.

On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his utmost appreciation to the ambassador for his efforts exerted in serving the relations between the two countries.

He also wished the ambassador success and the people of Syria progress and prosperity.

The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at the office of HH Sayyid Asaad.

— ONA

Royal Office Minister receives UK State Secretary

MUSCAT: Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs of UK, in Muscat on Wednesday. Gen Al Numani welcomed the British guest, who expressed her pride and appreciation for the cooperation and the role played by the Sultanate of Oman in various political and security spheres, particularly the efforts made to release British citizens detained in some countries. She also commended the strong historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. Gen Al Numani thanked the British guest for her



efforts in enhancing the existing relations between the two countries. The meeting was attended by the UK Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. -

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, also received Elizabeth Truss. They reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation, partnership opportunities

and the investment diversity between the two countries.

They also discussed ways of enhancing and exploring more areas of economic, scientific and cultural cooperation. The two sides also touched on exchange of expertise and encouraging inter-trade, as well as military, security and energy cooperation.

This comes within the framework of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to the United Kingdom.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hashel al Musalhi, Head of the Department of the Minister's Office; Bill Murray, UK Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman; and officials. — ONA

Vaccination of kids aged 5 to 11 likely by April

FROM PAGE 1

Thanks to the globally acclaimed expanded immunisation programme in the Sultanate of Oman, the impact of the pandemic on the health sector in the country is not as critical as is the case in some countries, said the minister, adding that vaccination percentages in the country are among the highest in the world.

Among the expatriates, 97 per cent took the first dose, 89 per cent took the second and 39 per cent the third, said the minister.

While no confirmed direct links have been established between Covid-19 vaccines and cardiac diseases, no serious side-effects have been detected among those who received the first or second dose in the Sultanate of Oman, the minister said.

CHRONIC DISEASES

“The manufacturing company took longer time to supply the Covid-19 vaccine for children, and we hope to receive it within the first half of this year. We were able to deliver the drugs and services to 84 per cent of the patients with chronic



disease during the peak of the pandemic, and we still have a strategic stock of life saving medicines,” said Dr Ahmed.

The minister affirmed that the PCR test is no longer a must for incoming travellers for work or tourism and that only civil ID cards are required for passage across the borders with GCC states.

Meanwhile, Dr Adil bin Said al

“
The manufacturing company took longer time to supply the Covid-19 vaccine for children, and we hope to receive it within the first half of this year

DR AHMED AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

Wahaibi, Director of Epidemiological Surveillance Department at the Ministry of Health, said that the ministry has plans to administer Covid-19 vaccines to children aged 5 to 11 years and that 11 such vaccines have been approved.

Speaking about the difference between schools and mosques, he said that the staff at schools can help manage things

more easily than their counterparts in mosques, which are frequented by old people and noted that the chances of transfer of infection is more in mosques.

Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of the Contagious Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health, said that the ministry accessed 90 infection of the target segment (those aged above 12 years) needed to be inoculated with Covid-19 vaccines, which means we cannot claim to have accomplished our 100 infection vaccination goal.

FOURTH DOSE

As for the fourth dose, a team has been tasked by the ministry to study the recommendations and priorities, said Al Rawahi, adding that the ministry is currently embarked on the option of vaccinating children aged 5 to 11, hopefully by the beginning of April.

“The fourth booster dose is recommended, if ever, only for low-immunity segments, depending on the overall communal immunity and the stability of the epidemiological situation, locally and abroad,” said Al Rawahi. — ONA

76 new schools to come up

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that the new schools will lower students' density in classrooms and reduce the number of evening schools as well as replace dilapidated school buildings.

Sulaiman bin Zahir al Ruwaishti, Director-General of Planning and Strategic Development, said that the number of students was estimated to reach 156,000 during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025).

In order to absorb more numbers of students, the ministry expands the capacity of existing schools and constructs new schools. The Ministry of Education has planned to expand 300 existing schools during the current development plan to be able to accommodate 30 per cent of new students.

Also, as part of its Tenth Five-Year Development Plan, the ministry envisions construction of 251 new integrated schools across the Sultanate of Oman that can accommodate the remaining 70 per cent of the additional numbers of students.

SHORT TAKES

MUSCAT

Secretary-General receives US official



Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received Daniel Banaim, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Peninsula Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the US

Department of State, at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday. They discussed several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the US to the Sultanate of Oman.

MUSCAT

Under-Secretary meets US official

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, received Daniel Banaim, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Peninsula Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the US Department of State, in Muscat on Wednesday.

They discussed bilateral relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them in various



fields. They also underscored the importance of promoting these relations to meet the envisaged aspirations.

MUSCAT

Oman Radio's Ramadhan programmes

Radio Sultanate of Oman (Radio FM) announced list of English Ramadhan programmes on Wednesday.

The programmes cover drama, religion, contests and public awareness. One programme is titled Majan Chronicles, which covers short fictional stories written by Ammar al Nu'aimi, an Omani fantasy writer.

‘Being On’ discusses our goals in life and the meaning of life from a religious point of view.



Other programmes include Muscat Candid, Tent True Story, The Spirit of Islam, The Dome, Jump Start, Reflection of the Soul, Economy Hour, Late Night Drive and With Compliments.



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Family awareness key to cover children against cyber crimes

KABEER YOUSUF
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Families should promote awareness among children to ward off cyber attacks and minimise online risks instead of depending on government initiatives, according to an expert at the 2nd Oman Cyber Security Conference on Safe Economy held under the auspices of Saeid bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in Muscat on Wednesday.

Dr Ahmed al Kalbani, Dean at the Advanced Cyber Security Academy, said self awareness and familial awareness are the two key elements needed to ward off any cyber attacks particularly on the children and adults in general.

“There is a deep void in terms of cyber awareness among the families and it should be discussed and inculcated in the children in the familial surroundings. Cyber safety is the



Second Oman Cyber Security Conference on Safe Economy was held under the auspices of Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in Muscat on Wednesday.

responsibility of one and all and not just the government alone,” he said, adding that cyber safety should be part of the school or college curricula. “In a society that is heavily dependent on the virtual world, a segment in the school or college or university curricula should be set aside for cyber safety and security and children should grow with the awareness of the same.” The Sultanate of Oman reported 2,894 local cyber

crimes in 2021 which is nearly 10 per cent of the total crimes committed in the same year. According to experts, this is an alarming rate especially when children are more into online education amid Covid-19. Crimes involving information technology and electronic transactions were next to commercial crimes and this shows how criminals in the cyber world are targeting the vulnerable lot. Proper campaigning

against cyber crimes needs to be in place, according to cyber experts who gathered at the conference.

The Sultanate of Oman reported a 25-per cent rise in cyber crimes in 2020 compared to 2019, with six major crimes, namely bullying, harassment, blackmailing, extortion, data breach and identity theft ranking the top.

Reports suggest that almost all social media platforms are used by the perpetrators to commit fraud or crimes.

“The onus lies with the parents and teachers to safeguard the children from falling prey to such crimes. Educate the children on the risks of using social media inappropriately and not send personal data or pictures to a stranger or an online friend as this might take them to dangers,” Dr Ahmed said.

Abdullah al Shueili, Editor-in-Chief of Oman Daily Observer, moderated the media session on the role of media in tackling cyber crimes.



Al Dakhiliyah honours 235 teachers and staff

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MARCH 30

The General Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate honoured 235 teachers, technical and administrative cadres active in the educational field in the governorate's schools, on the occasion of the Omani Teacher's Day themed “My teachers, because of you we rise.”

The ceremony was held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said, in the presence of officials in Nizwa on Tuesday.

Saif bin Mubarak al Julandani, Director-General, in a speech said: “We are in this directorate, with feelings of gratitude on the occasion of Teacher's Day, the right moment to fete the virtues of the teachers and their efforts. We value their great role in managing the educational process with sincerity and dedication especially during Covid-19 pandemic. The result is evident in the students' achievements, data generated by the educational statistical indicators, and the achievements of the governorate's schools, which make us proud.”

The Director-General concluded his

speech by saying: “This celebration is a message through which we affirm the commitment of this directorate to the governorate's schools. This embodies the vision pursued by the Ministry of Education and its keenness to enhance the teacher's professional skills and development of education in line with Oman Vision 2040.”

Rahma bint Ali al Badawiyah, from Zainab bint Qais School for Basic Education, spoke on behalf of teachers. “Congratulations to you on this day, my colleagues. Education is not just a profession that we practice, it is noble mission. A teacher shapes generations of children and grooms them into dutiful citizens.”

The ceremony included the welcome show (my teacher is my role model and inspiration) presented by Hay Al Saad School for Basic Education. A poem by Saud bin Suleiman al Hinai, a teacher from Ibn Baraka Al Sulaimi School for Basic Education, was recited by Balqis bint Muslim al Harrasiyah, a student from Taimsa School for Basic Education. This was followed by the video presentation “My teachers, because of you we rise” and a group dance by students of Seih Al Rasiyat School for Basic Education.

Ibri quarry mishap toll rises to 10



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The death toll in the Ibri rock collapse incident has gone up to 10 with the recovery of two more bodies on Tuesday and two on Wednesday.

“More bodies have been found following strenuous efforts and using heavy equipment,” the Civil Defence and

Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said in a statement.

Search operations are still going to find the five other people trapped under the debris at a marble quarry worksite in the Al Aridh area of Ibri.

The Inspector-General of Police and Customs and members of the National Council for Emergency Management visited the accident site in Al Dhahirah

Governorate to find out the progress made in search and rescue operations to find and rescue if any more people have been trapped under the rubble.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) earlier said search operations were hampered due to rockslides that continued at the site, where 55 workers were involved in the excavation work.

CBO Board of Governors holds meeting

MUSCAT: The Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) held its meeting on Wednesday. The meeting reviewed the economic, financial and monetary developments in the Sultanate of Oman and worldwide, as well as the developments in the global energy prices. The board commended the improvement of the economic situation, highlighting the need to observe the new developments, especially in the financial and monetary sector.

The board also underscored the keenness of the banking and financial sector to support the national economy. The board highlighted the performance indicators of the banking sector, which indicate that the sector is operating in the framework of a flexible regulatory and supervisory environment that adopts the best international practices, enabling the sector to deal with the recent challenges.

In this regard, the board stressed the need to exert greater efforts in financing productive sectors and encouraging savings. The board also reviewed CBO's financial position report as of February 2022, as well as the financial safety indicators of banks and the reports submitted by CBO's executive management on the prospects and challenges facing financial stability. It also examined the status of CBO's reserves and the performance of its foreign investments.

Apollo Super Specialty Hospital- Al Hail Ready To Serve



Muscat, March 30, 2022: In an august gathering, Mr V T Saisleswaran announced the opening of the First Apollo Super Specialty Hospital in Al Hail, Muscat. The 10000 sq meter facility offers super specialty and subspecialty service with over 25 clinical departments. The Apollo Hospitals Muscat has been serving the Sultanate of Oman for over 18 years and the new hospital is part of the group's focus to skew towards absolute super specialty space.

Speaking at the soft launch ceremony, Mr V T Saisleswaran, expressed his profound gratitude to His Majesty, Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq for his leadership and the vision for the people of Oman. He further thanked the authorities of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Manpower for their guidance and support. Mr Saisleswaran explained about the way disease profiles are changing and the need for the healthcare industry to fathom the need for increasing disease burden. He stated that the Apollo Super Specialty will extend an absolutely patient centric care plan and will have the best of multinational clinical acumen to serve the patients. He further remarked that the Apollo Hospitals Muscat family is reiterating its unfailing commitment to the people of Oman by expanding its clinical bandwidth with the underlying objective of reversing the outbound medical travel from the Sultanate.

Dr Waleed Al Zadjali, Medical Director of Apollo Group Muscat stated that we have a combination of a highly specialised clinical team with the best of infrastructure, technology and digital framework. We will benchmark our clinical outcomes with the best of the west and going forward we will publish our clinical scorecards too. We will also diversify in our healthcare journey. You would soon see us straddling across the healthcare spectrum.

The new hospital has 80 rooms and with the soft launch, it will offer services across 25 specialties. The facility has a dedicated preventive health center and has a unique Re-invent, covid recovery clinic. At Apollo, the team consider it as their prime responsibility to provide high quality clinical care to all the patients. Putting the patient at the core of the operations.

Apollo believes in prevention is better than cure and has been one of the pioneers in introducing preventive health check. As part of the soft launch Mohammed al Harthy received the first registration card for preventive health check.

Apollo Hospitals Muscat has remained in the forefront of clinical excellence in Oman's private healthcare space. The group has international affiliations, corporate partnerships and was the first in Oman's private healthcare space to have a dedicated Diabetic care facility - Apollo Sugar Clinic, Ruwi.

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company
Member of Nama Group

Tender Notice

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company invites the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Date of Submission	Tender Fee (RO)
1/2022	Providing Cleaning and Hospitality Services for OWWSC (Water Sector Facilities) Premises AlDakhliyah Governorate for 18 months.	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned.	12/4/2022	26/4/2022	25 Rials (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable

The tender documents can be obtained from Financial Control Section Support Services Department Al Dakhliyah Governorate from the date of publication of this announcement (from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm, Sunday to Thursday) up to the last date of distribution of tender documents stated above.

Tenders should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Chairman of the Sub Tender Committee in Al Dakhliyah Governorate and marked with Tender Number and the subject. No other marks or any reference thereto should be printed outside the envelopes.

All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of bid value along with their offer. Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Sealed bid along with all required documents shall be delivered to the Tender Box, in the Support Service Building in AlDakhliyah Governorate, located at Wilayat of Nizwa not later than 10:00 am on the date specified above.

Preference shall be given to the Companies which comprise the required percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of Omani National Products.

Tenderer should provide Tender Board registration certificate & Visa Card for Payment.

For more information, please contact: 25219968 / 25219904.

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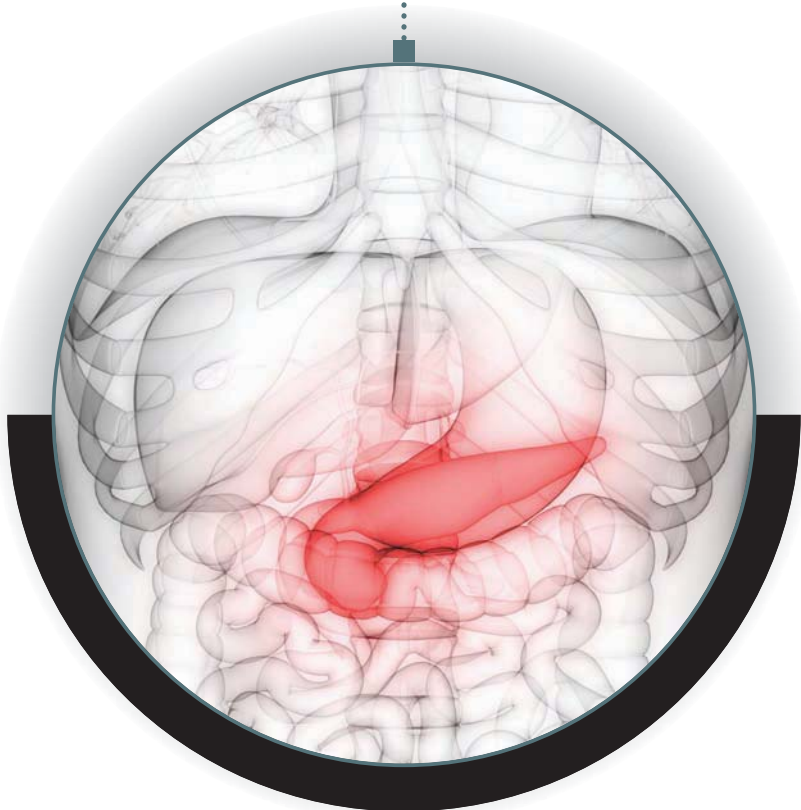
DATES CAN PROTECT PANCREAS FROM CANCER

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Eating dates in moderate quantities can protect the pancreas from several diseases including cancer, according to a study conducted by SQU research team. For centuries dates have been known to enhance brain health, regulate blood pressure and improve metabolism. The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Whoever eats seven Ajwa dates every morning will not be harmed that day by poison or magic.”

The new findings on cancer fighting abilities will spur more research into the dates as a superfood. A research team from Sultan Qaboos University, headed by Dr Yunus Baqi from the College of Sciences of Sultan Qaboos University, found that dates could reduce inflammation and fibrosis of the liver. The benefits of dates are numerous and well-known for centuries. Dr Faten Khorshid, Head of the Cell and Tissue Transplant Unit at King Fahd Center for Medical Research, highlights the role of dates in the treatment of cancer. “Dates are a blessing but do not eat much and eat in odd numbers, not in even numbers so that they do not turn into sugars that feed cancer. The odd number is spent as energy, according to research.”

A NEW SQU
STUDY FINDS
THAT THESE
DRIED FRUITS
PREVENTS
**FIBROSIS AND
INFLAMMATION**



Pancreatic cancer is one of the most aggressive types of cancer and the most difficult to treat. One of the best ways to save from infections is eating dates.

Dates contain a number of powerful antioxidants and a high percentage of polyphenols that help reduce inflammation in the body. Cutting out sugar completely from our diet is not a solution because it leaves healthy cells with low energy. Glucose is the primary source of energy for our cells. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help to protect the body from cancer.

Dates are one of the most nutritional foods that contain essential vitamins and minerals for the human body. They are considered light snacks, free of cholesterol, and very low in fat. Research has proven that dates contain 15 minerals that are important to humans, including selenium, an element believed to help prevent cancer; and 23 types of amino acids that boost immunity

Some of them are not found in the most popular fruits such as oranges, apples and bananas, so eating dates is an ideal food for the body. Eating any type of date in any way helps the body to acquire antioxidants that help prevent cancer.

Dates contain natural sugars which are healthy compared to white or processed sugar in fast food, colas, sweets which could increase risk of cancer and diabetes. Natural sugars in dates help to maintain metabolism and body weight. It also fight cancerous cells

Eating dates in a controlled way won't lead to blood sugar spikes. The fibre in the dates may help the body absorb carbohydrates, which may reduce the risk of blood sugar spikes. Studies recommend pairing dates with a source of protein and fat, such as almonds, may further slow down digestion and help manage blood sugar levels.

Though dates have low glycemic index, diabetics must consult with doctors or dieticians before consuming it.



Khazaen inks pacts worth RO 2m

MUSCAT: Khazaen Economic City on Tuesday signed two agreements with Jana International Company to the tune of RO 2 million.

The first agreement related to establishing a factory to produce consumable and commercial plastic packaging materials, while the second agreement pertained to setting up warehouses. The agreements cover the first phase which will be built on an area of 50,000 square metres.

The agreements were signed by Salim

bin Sulaiman al Thuhli, CEO of Khazaen and Mohammed Hassan, General Manager of Jana International Company.

Al Thuhli said that the inked agreements come within the framework of Khazaen's constant efforts in attracting foreign investments.

These projects in particular, he added, will contribute to supporting supply chains in the region and increasing In-country Value (ICV) by using raw materials produced through converting industries in Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

NEW BATCH GRADUATES JOIN RAO



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Wednesday celebrated the graduation of a new batch of recruits at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) training battalion square under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO. The commander of RAO handed over certificates to outstanding recruits. The graduation ceremony was attended by senior officers, commissioned officers and personnel of the Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Army of Oman. — **ONA**

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
4/2022	SUPPLY, DELIVERY, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING OF (THE SECOND GENERATION OF TERRESTIAL DIGITAL VIDEO BROADCASTING (DVB-T2), 3 TOWERS, AND ELECTROMECHANICAL EQUIPMENTS) FOR SUWAIQ, SOHAR AND BIDYA STATIONS, WITH NMS EXPANSION FOR VARIOUS STATIONS.	International Excellent	21/4/2022	25/5/2022	140/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tenders shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

2. Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to the Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenderers which do not meet the required bond shall not accepted. Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

Note: The original bank guarantee should be submitted to the General Directorate Of Administrative And Financial Affairs, Project Department building at Ministry of Information, if it **Requested**.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

- 1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943093, 24943785, Email id: (projects@part.gov.om)

Ministry of Education hosts virtual forum for supervisors

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 30

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Applied Sciences Supervision in the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, organised the virtual forum for the supervision of applied sciences "Professional Week", earlier this week, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary for Education. The virtual forum came under the slogan: Educational Supervision "Empowerment and Development".



Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary for Education.

The forum kicked off on Sunday in the presence of a number of professors from Sultan Qaboos University and the University of Nizwa, a number of directors of the supervision departments and their assist-

ants, the first supervisors and educational supervisors at the Ministry's general office and the educational directorates in the governorates, and a number of the first teachers from the various schools of the educational directorates in the governorates.

On the first day of the forum, the Under-Secretary for Education, launched the webpage for the Applied Science Supervision Department, through which employees in this department can share files, data, news and resources, with the aim of facilitating work and

managing organised knowledge.

The share point page also aims at facilitating cooperation and communication for team members inside and outside the institution, publishing and educating about the most important events and quick access to links to virtual training programmes and worksheets.

He also launched the electronic magazine: "Supervisory Flashes", which is issued by the media team in the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision (Department of Applied Science Supervision).

In brief

MUSCAT

OMAN FORUM DISCUSSES INNOVATION ECONOMY

Alam Al Iktisaad Wal 'Amal or The World of Economy and Business magazine organised the 10th edition of Oman Forum in Muscat on Wednesday. The opening ceremony of the event was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

TENDER RESULTS ISSUE NO 569 ANNOUNCED

A tender of government treasury bills, issue number 569, worth RO 100.5 million was issued this week. Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

— ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDER



The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) announce to float
Tender No. TANWEER- 06/2022

Reinforcements Works in Existing 11 KV Shuwaer Feeder in Willyat AL Duqm - AL Wusta Governorate

The Conditions:

- 1- Collection of Tender:** Interested Companies with grade "C" and Above which registered with Tanweer, Tender Board and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) for Electrical Works may obtain the tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, Rural Areas Electricity Company at Al Seeb, till the date of **14 April 2022** against a non-refundable amount of RO (50/-) for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824
- 2- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- 3- Offers Submission:**
 - A-** Original bid bond along Cover letters shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Tender soft copy must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - B-** Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Roms , along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - C-** Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Addressed it to the **Chairman of Minor Tender Committee**, Tanweer.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- 4- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the date of **04 May 2022**.
- 5- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- 6- Tanweer** without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information, please call: 80077787
Or visit our Website: www.tanweer.nama.om



Tanweer
PO Box 1166, P.C. 133, Al Seeb, Sultanate of Oman
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info@tanweer.nama.om | www.tanweer.om



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (9/2022)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/008	7/2022/MM/QS-4-Recall-1	RFP for Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) of Oracle E- Business HRMS & Financial System (Re Call) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/04/2022	11/05/2022	Specialist
PRE/21/063	2022/MM/QS-11	Site Preparation for Street Vendor in Wilayat Al Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/04/2022	11/05/2022	Second
PRE/22/023	2022/MM/QS-12	Supply & Installation Information Security Systems (Phase 1) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/04/2022	11/05/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/006	2022/MM/QS-13	Supply of Lighting Materials (E- Tender)	Rial 25	21/04/2022	11/05/2022	Excellent

Tender Conditions :-

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
2. Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
3. For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
4. For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
5. For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).

Coalition announces ceasefire in Yemen

RIYADH: Talks on Yemen's devastating war started in the Saudi capital on Wednesday, but without the Ansar Allah fighters hours after the Riyadh-led coalition announced a ceasefire for Ramadhan.

The week-long discussions in the Saudi capital are hosted by the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council headquartered there and include United Nations envoy Hans Grundberg and Washington's Tim Lenderking.

The talks come after the coalition backing the Yemeni government said it would cease military operations during Ramadhan, which starts when the crescent moon is spotted on Friday or Saturday.

The Ansar Allah -- who rejected joining talks -- days ago also made a surprise offer of a truce and of a prisoner swap. The ceasefire, the first since April 2020 in Yemen, has been respected so far.

The recent flurry of statements brings a glimmer of hope in a brutal war that has killed hundreds of thousands and left millions on the brink of famine in Yemen.

"The success of Yemeni consultations is not an option but a reality that must be reached", said GCC Secretary-General Nayef al Hajraf in opening remarks.

Both the UN and US envoys welcomed the GCC initiative and praised the warring sides' pledges to temporarily cease hostilities.

Lenderking said the US supports UN efforts to advance a "durable, inclusive resolution" and backs its truce proposal "as a first step towards a comprehensive ceasefire and a new, more inclusive, political process". Grundberg said he continues to engage "with the parties with a sense of urgency to reach this truce by the beginning of Ramadhan."

On Tuesday night, the coalition announced a "cessation of military operations in Yemen beginning at 6 am on Wednesday".

This, it said, "coincides with the launch of Yemeni consultations with the aim



Afrah Abdulaziz al Zoba, Yemeni Executive Director of the International Aids Acceleration, Nayef al Hajraf, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen take part in a conference on Yemen war hosted by the GCC in Riyadh. – AFP



US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking speaks during a conference on Yemen war hosted by the six-nation GCC in Riyadh. – AFP

of creating the appropriate conditions for their success and creating a positive environment during the holy month for peace making in Yemen".

The fighters had on Saturday called a three-day truce and offered peace talks, but only on condition the Saudis end their blockade and air strikes and remove coalition forces from Yemen.

A day later they said a prisoner swap was agreed that would free 1,400 of

their fighters in exchange for 823 pro-government personnel -- including 16 Saudis and three Sudanese.

The last prisoner swap in Yemen's war was in October 2020, when 1,056 were released on each side, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Yemen's devastated economy and its complex political situation as well as military matters and humanitarian aid are all on the table at the talks in Riyadh, even

as possible outcomes remain unclear.

"It is not clear where the Riyadh consultations will lead", said Maged al Madhaji, Director of the Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies.

"The meeting's agenda is still very general, and the discussions will be limited to one party and will not include Ansar Allah. "With regard to the peace track, it will not lead to anything because the Ansar Allah are not there." — AFP

Iraq parliament fails again to elect president

BAGHDAD: Iraqi lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a third time to elect a new national president, for lack of a quorum, officials said, prolonging the political paralysis in the war-scarred country.

"The assembly adjourned its session until further notice", the parliament's press service said without giving a new date. A parliamentary source said that only 178 out of 329 lawmakers were present, far short of the two-thirds quorum required for the vote.

Among the 40 candidates for the presidency, two are considered the frontrunners: incumbent Barham Saleh, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Rebar Ahmed of the rival Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Last Saturday, the lack of a quorum -- set at two-thirds of the house's 329 members -- held up the vote for a second time since February, a turbulent month when the Iraqi judiciary intervened.

On February 13, Iraq's supreme court had ruled out a presidential bid by KDP-backed veteran politician Hoshiyar Zebari, after a complaint filed against him over years-old, untried corruption charges.

Iraqi politics were thrown into turmoil following October's election, which was marred by record low turnout, post-vote threats and violence, and a months-long delay before the final results were confirmed.

— AFP

WHO Global Centre for traditional medicine in India

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

India's efforts to set up a proper platform for research and development (R&D) for traditional medicines got a green light with the signing of an agreement between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of India to establish a WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine at Jamnagar in the Indian state of Gujarat.

Traditional medicines have been in use for a long time in some form or other in human history. These medicines took centrestage during the pandemic and forced medicine regulators to think about them and give proper attention to their development, keeping in

The global centre will focus on three areas and build a ground for traditional medicines

mind that a large population of the world is still depending on traditional medicines for health issues.

The Indian centre will come up with \$250m support from the Indian government. Its objective is to build a foundation for evidence and policies to standardise traditional medical practices and products.

The user base of traditional medicines is 80 per cent of the world's population that uses traditional medicines. It has been



stated in some health reports that 170 countries of the 194 WHO members have reported the use of traditional medicines and sought the international health body's support to set up a body to

generate evidence against each of the traditional medicines.

According to the Indian Ministry of Health sources, the new centre will have three areas to focus on and build a ground for

traditional medicines. The areas include evidence and learning, data and analytics; sustainability; equity, innovation and technology.

The WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine will also help countries integrate traditional medicines into their health systems and regulate their quality and safety.

"It is heartening to learn about the signing of the 'Host Country Agreement' for the establishment of the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine. The agreement to establish the WHO-GCTM at Jamnagar, is a commendable initiative. Through various initiatives, our government has been tireless in its endeavour to make preventive and curative healthcare affordable

and accessible to all. May the global centre help provide the best healthcare solutions to the world", said Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Commenting on the agreement, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said: "For many millions of people around the world, traditional medicine is the first port of call to treat many diseases. Ensuring all people have access to safe and effective treatment is an essential part of WHO's mission, and this new centre will help to harness the power of science to strengthen the evidence base for traditional medicine. I'm grateful to the Government of India for its support, and we look forward to making it a success."

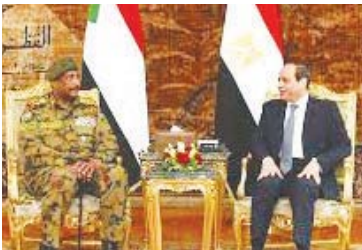
SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Sudan's Burhan in first visit to Egypt

Sudan's de facto leader General Abdel Fattah al Burhan started his first official visit to Egypt since last year's military coup.

Burhan, greeted on arrival by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi in a ceremony broadcast live on state television, was accompanied by the head of general intelligence services, according to Sudan's ruling council. Sudan has been reeling from political turmoil and regular mass protests since army chief Burhan led an October



25 military coup which drew international condemnation and sparked crucial aid cuts.

At least 92 people have been killed in a crackdown on anti-coup protests since October, according to medics. — AFP

ALGIERS

Blinken visits Algeria for talks

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Algeria, a Moscow ally and major gas producer that has faced calls to boost exports to Europe after prices soared following Russia's war on Ukraine. Blinken touched down at Boumediene Airport and headed to meet Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra on his first visit as top US diplomat to the North African country.

He had flown in from Morocco, which in 2020 normalised ties with Israel under



a deal that sparked renewed tensions over the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Relations between Washington and Algiers have soured since the deal struck under then president Donald Trump. — AFP

LAGOS

8 dead after Nigerian train ambush

Eight people died in an armed ambush on a train in the north of Nigeria and a further 26 were injured, the commissioner for the Kaduna State Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs, Samuel Aruwan, said. According to local newspaper 'Leadership', 30 people were kidnapped, including the Director of the Bank of Agriculture Nigeria, Kabir Adamu. Heavily armed attackers ambushed a train with hundreds of passengers, destroying the tracks with



explosives and then shooting at the train when it stopped.

The train had been en route from the capital of Abuja to the north-western city of Kaduna. Train services were temporarily halted on the route. — dpa



A Ukrainian refugee holds a baby as she boards a bus after crossing the Ukrainian border with Poland at the Medyka border crossing, southeastern Poland. – AFP

RUSSIA STRIKES DAMPEN HOPES AFTER TALKS

KYIV: Ukraine on Wednesday accused Russia of shelling a city where it had promised de-escalation, dampening hopes of any resolution to a conflict that has killed thousands and displaced millions.

Ukraine and Western powers had already cast doubt on Russia’s pledge to reduce military activity around Chernigiv and the capital Kyiv, made during face-to-face talks in Istanbul on Tuesday.

“Chernigiv was shelled all night,” regional governor Vyacheslav Chaus wrote on social media. Reporters on Wednesday could also hear frequent explosions coming from the direction of the suburban town of Irpin to the northwest of Kyiv.

Oleksandr Motuzyanyk, a spokesman for the Ukrainian defence ministry, said in a video statement that there had been “a certain partial movement of individual units from the Kyiv direction, as well as from the

Russian soprano condemns war

VIENNA: Star Russian soprano Anna Netrebko on Wednesday condemned Russia’s war of Ukraine and said she would resume performing in May, weeks after withdrawing from concert in the wake of the war.

After controversy had raged over her perceived support for Russian President Vladimir Putin, Netrebko said in a statement posted on her Facebook page: “I expressly condemn the war on Ukraine”, adding: “After taking my announced break, I will resume performing in late May, initially in Europe.” — AFP



Chernigiv direction.”

But he added: “We do not observe the mass removal of Russian troops from these areas.”

Russian officials had pledged to “radically” reduce their attacks because of progress in negotiations on “the neutrality and non-nuclear

was anything too promising or any breakthroughs,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“There is a lot of work to be done,” Peskov said.

Stock markets, which had been buoyed by the more hopeful comments on Tuesday, slid again and oil prices rose back up on supply concerns. The Pentagon said Russia had merely repositioned a “small number” of forces near Kyiv, and could be preparing a “major offensive” elsewhere. The “vast majority” of Russian forces around Kyiv remained in place, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

Still, the talks in Istanbul marked the first sign of progress in discussions to end the conflict, with a Kyiv negotiator saying there were “sufficient” conditions for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

— AFP

Ukrainian ‘princesses’ pine for home in Czech castle

BECOV NAD TEPLOU: Ukrainian seamstress Olga Shandyba had never lived in a castle until she fled war for the Czech Republic. Now she would give anything to leave the fairy-tale lodgings and return home. The 37-year-old is among 22 Ukrainian women and children being housed at a 14th century castle in the western Czech Republic after fleeing the Russian war of their homeland.

“We never expected to live in a castle,” Shandyba said.

“Our children are like princesses. We are like princesses. For them it’s an adventure,” she said. “It is an adventure for us too in a way.”

The Becov nad Teplou castle is home of the St Maurus Reliquary, a cherished 13th-century artifact said to contain the remains of St John the Baptist, among others. It is considered by some the second most valuable artifact in the country after the Czech crown jewels.


Our children are like princesses. We are like princesses. For them it’s an adventure
OLGA SHANDYBA
Ukrainian seamstress

Becov is now also home to a dozen Ukrainian refugee children and 10 mothers of various backgrounds, including a florist, a lawyer and a piano player. “We are very grateful for the quiet, the warmth, the kindness,” said Shandyba, who fled heavy shelling in her hometown of Okhtyrka by train.

Of more than four million Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war, the Czech Republic has welcomed 300,000. The country’s National Heritage Institute has earmarked 110 beds at 17 different heritage



Olga Shandyba in front of the Becov nad Teplou castle complex, Czech Republic. – AFP

sites to provide free shelter as part of the relief effort.

The Institute has so far registered 66 refugees — a third of whom are living in Becov nad Teplou,

UN atomic watchdog chief visits N-plant

KYIV: UN atomic watchdog chief Rafael Grossi visited a nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine on his first trip to the country since Russia’s war raised fears of a nuclear accident. Grossi has repeatedly warned of the dangers of the conflict — the first in a country with a vast nuclear estate.

Russian forces seized control of the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power plant site — where radioactive waste is still stored — on February 24, the first day of the war. They also captured Europe’s largest nuclear plant at Zaporizhzhia on March 4, sparking alarm when shelling caused a fire at a training facility.



Rafael Grossi

Lagarde sees living costs spiral with war

NICOSIA: European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde warned that a prolonged Ukraine conflict will keep energy prices and the cost of living spiralling, blighting a post-Covid recovery. The Russia-Ukraine war has introduced “considerable uncertainty” into the outlook for the EU economy, she said during a visit to Cyprus.

The ECB chief said the war has stunted a quicker-than-expected rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic due to a job-rich recovery.

UN feeding one million people

ROME: The UN is providing emergency food to one million people in Ukraine, it said, though it warned many more were going hungry, with adults skipping meals so children can eat. One month after Russia attacked Ukraine, the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP) said it has managed, despite security issues, to “deliver food supplies to the most vulnerable people across the country”.

2,700 visas granted by UK for refugees

LONDON: Just 2,700 visas have been granted to people wanting to come to Britain under the Homes For Ukraine scheme, despite applications reaching 28,300, latest figures show. Campaigners called the numbers “woeful,” urging the government to “cut the red tape” for refugees seeking sanctuary in Britain.

The scheme started accepting applications on March 18, with the aim of allowing individuals, charities, community groups and businesses to bring Ukrainians — including those with no family ties to Britain — to safety.

However, Britain retains a visa requirement on security grounds while other European countries have waived checks in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the Russian war.

The total number of applications from Ukrainians wanting to come to Britain was 59,500 as of March 29, the Home Office said. This includes 28,300 under the Homes For Ukraine scheme and 31,200 under the separate Ukraine Family Scheme, which allows Ukrainians to join relatives living in Britain. — Agencies

arrived at night and saw a beautiful castle with our flags out of the window. It was really nice,” she said.

Becov had no problem sourcing Ukrainian flags as blue and yellow were the colours of its former owners, the Qwestenberg family, Wizovsky said.

“We had them in store and could fly them almost the instant the decision was taken to show our solidarity,” he said.

The town of Becov nad Teplou, with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, has welcomed more than 60 Ukrainian refugees over the past month.

Housed in hotels, pensions and private homes as well as the castle, the children now attend the local school. The town is also taking care of visas and essentials like linen and towels, as well as jobs which, however, are hard to find.

The refugees received a free tour of the castle with all its gems and the town held a get-together to welcome the newcomers. — AFP

said. Nastya Bidkova, a singing teacher from Ukraine’s Dnipro, said it was “absolutely unexpected” to live in a castle.

“We felt very lucky when we

Earth Hour reflects grass root activism at its best



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

As the Sultanate of Oman, along with the rest of the world, observed Earth Hour by switching off household and institutional lights for an hour, it reminds us that protecting the environment isn't just the task of governments and institutions, but all of us.

It also gives us hope that individuals could contribute, even in small ways to solving the problem of climate change.

An initiative started by the WWF (World Wildlife Fund), Earth Hour was first observed in Sydney in 2007. Ever since, it has become one of the most recognised events in the globe's environmental calendar, observed in the third weekend of March, aligning with the Spring and Autumn equinox. With over 193 countries participating, Earth

Hour shows that 'we can all play a part to shape a safer, fairer and more sustainable future for everyone on our planet, the one home we all share,' according to the WWF.

Turning off the lights for one hour, one day in the year may not sound like a big achievement and it may not be enough to mitigate the ecological disasters we see regularly unfold.

How much energy could we actually save with this symbolic gesture, we cynically ask. How many people are even participating, if it's entirely voluntary?

The results may surprise. While the organisers themselves state that reduction of energy consumption is not the sole goal of this initiative, countries have reported a reduction of 15-30 per cent of energy

EARTH HOUR PROVIDES SPACES FOR THE COMMUNITY TO ENGAGE IN LARGER ISSUES ON HOW BEST TO PROTECT THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT IN WAYS THAT ARE LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE

used in this period.

By itself, that is not anywhere enough, as critics have pointed out that electricity is not even the main culprit in climate change and that candles themselves are made of paraffin, a hydrocarbon.

The significance of events like Earth Hour, however, is in the hope and possibilities of engagement that it provides to a community.

By shifting the responsibility of such macro tasks like environmental protection into the tiny hands of school students, this largely notional moment gets converted into a mission of hope and agency. It provides spaces for the community to engage in larger issues by providing opportunities for conversations on how best to protect the immediate environment in ways that are local and sustainable. This is important to prevent climate 'doomscrolling.'

By now, climate anxiety has become a reality. Associated with helplessness and loss of hope, climate anxiety is an accepted

state of mind which translates into distrust with authorities and "feelings of fear, shame, guilt, anger and frustration," according to the BBC.

Earth Hour provides a much needed catharsis and outlet for the helplessness we may feel.

Scientists have provided many options for those who feel such anxiety: be part of a larger community, remind yourself that every single individual can make a difference, however small, join a movement or help in any other way you can: activism and art are both equally powerful choices.

Observing Earth Hour thus energises us and makes us feel we are part of the solution. That is any day better than being part of the problem.

Sri Lankans sweat and seethe as economy grinds to a halt

SEAN GLEESON AND ARCHANA THIYAGARAJAN

As Sri Lankans faint in day-long queues for fuel and swelter through stifling evening blackouts by candlelight, anger is mounting over the worst economic crisis in living memory. A critical lack of foreign currency has left the island nation unable to pay for vital imports, leading to dire shortages in everything from life-saving medicines to cement.

Long lines for fuel that start forming before dawn are forums for public grievances, where neighbours complain bitterly about government mismanagement and fret over how to feed their families as food prices skyrocket.

"I've been standing here for the past five hours," Sagayarani, a housewife, said in Colombo while waiting for her share of kerosene, used to fire the cooking stoves of the capital's poorer households.

She said she had seen three people faint already and was herself supposed to be in hospital for treatment, but with her husband and son at work she had no choice but to wait under the blistering morning sun.

"I haven't eaten anything, I'm feeling very dizzy and it's very hot, but what can we do? It's a lot of hardship," she said, declining to give her surname. Trucks at the port are unable to cart food and building materials to other urban centres, or bring back tea from plantations dotted around Sri Lanka's verdant inland hills.

Buses that normally transport day labourers across the capital sit idle, some hospitals have suspended routine surgeries, and student exams were postponed this month because schools ran out of paper.

"I've been living in Colombo for 60 years and I've never seen anything like this," Vadivu, a domestic worker, said. "There's nothing to eat, there's nothing to drink," she added. "The politicians are living in luxury and we are begging on the streets."

Many among Sri Lanka's 22 million people are no strangers to privation: throughout the global oil crisis of the 1970s, authorities issued ration books for essentials such as sugar.

But the government concedes the present economic calamity is the worst since the South Asian nation's independence in 1948, and a popular local quip now is that the rationing system at least offered some certainty that goods would be available.

A series of misfortunes have pummelled the country — which emerged from decades of civil war only in 2009 — in recent years.

Farmers were hit by a crippling drought in 2016 and the Easter Sunday bombings three years later, which killed at least 279 people, led to a wave of cancellations from foreign travellers. The coronavirus pandemic then decimated a tourism sector already reeling from the attacks and dried up the flow of remittances from Sri Lankans abroad. — AFP

The war is reshaping how Europe spends



PATRICIA COHEN

The writer is the London-based Global Economics Correspondent for NYT

Nicolae Ciuca spent a lifetime on the battlefield before being voted in as prime minister of Romania four months ago.

Yet even he did not imagine the need to spend millions of dollars for emergency production of iodide pills to help block radiation poisoning in case of a nuclear blast, or to raise military spending 25 per cent in a single year.

"We never thought we'd need to go back to the Cold War and consider potassium iodide again," Ciuca, a retired general, said through a translator at Victoria Palace, the government's headquarters in Bucharest. "We never expected this kind of war in the 21st century."

Across the EU and Britain, Russia's assault on Ukraine is reshaping spending priorities and forcing governments to prepare for threats thought to have been long buried — from a flood of European refugees to the possible use of chemical, biological and even nuclear weapons by a Russian leader who may feel backed into a corner.

The result is a sudden reshuffling of budgets as military spending, essentials like agriculture and energy and humanitarian assistance are shoved to the front of the line, with other pressing needs like education and social services likely to be downgraded.

The most significant shift is in military spending. Germany's turnabout is the most dramatic, with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's promise to raise spending above 2 per cent of the country's economic output, a level not reached in more than three decades.

The pledge included an immediate injection of €100 billion (\$113 billion) into the country's notoriously threadbare armed forces. As Scholz put it in his speech last month, "We need planes that fly, ships that sail and soldiers who are optimally equipped."

The commitment is a watershed moment for a country that has sought to leave behind an aggressive military stance that contributed to two devastating world wars.

A wartime mindset has also spread to sectors aside from defence. With prices soaring for oil, animal feed and fertiliser, Ireland introduced a "wartime tillage" programme last week to amp up grain production and created a National Fodder and Food

Security Committee to manage threats to the food supply.

Farmers will be paid up to €400 for every additional 100-acre block that is planted with a cereal crop like barley, oats or wheat. Planting additional protein crops like peas and beans will earn a €300 subsidy.

"The illegal attack on Ukraine has put our supply chains under enormous pressure," Charlie McConalogue, the agriculture minister, said in announcing the \$13.2 million package.

Russia is the world's largest supplier of wheat and with Ukraine accounts for nearly a quarter of total global exports.

THE WAR ON UKRAINE IS RESHAPING SPENDING PRIORITIES AND FORCING GOVERNMENTS TO PREPARE FOR THREATS THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN LONG BURIED

Spain has been running down its supplies of corn, sunflower oil and some other produce that also come from Russia and Ukraine.

"We've got stock available, but

we need to make purchases in third countries," Luis Planas, the agriculture minister, told a parliamentary committee.

Planas has asked the European Commission to ease some rules on Latin American farm imports, like genetically modified corn for animal feed from Argentina, to offset the lack of supply.

Extraordinarily high energy prices have also put intense pressure on governments to cut excise taxes or approve subsidies to ease the burden on families that cannot afford to heat every room in their home or fill their car's gas tank.

Ireland reduced gasoline taxes and approved an energy credit and a lump-sum payment for lower-income households. Germany announced tax breaks and a \$330-per-person energy subsidy, which will end up costing the treasury \$17.5 billion.

In Spain, the government agreed last week to defray the cost of gasoline in response to several days of strikes by truckers and fishermen, which left supermarkets without fresh supplies of some of their most basic items.

And in Britain, a cut in fuel taxes and support for poorer households will cost \$3.2 billion.

The outlook is a change from October, when Rishi Sunak, Britain's chancellor of the Exchequer, announced a budget for what he called an "economy fit for a new age of optimism," with large increases in education, health and job training.

— *The New York Times*



The cost to support Ukrainian refugees may cost governments as much as \$30 billion in the first year.

Achieving the goals of development



Ali Al Matani
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The meetings His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik had with shaikhs and other officials from the North Al Bathinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates is considered highly important.

This is being seen as reaffirmation of the commitments of the blessed Renaissance particularly when the Sultanate of Oman has entered a new phase of its history.

At this moment, His Majesty the Sultan has made everything clear about the future course for the country. By this move, he has given clear indications that he would be directly in touch with all. Businessmen and other segments of the society would come under the umbrella of his support. He has also made it clear that the five-year plan which is formulated in consultations with all is successful and achieving its objectives. He pointed out that all development goals must be achieved.

His Majesty appreciated the economic potential of the North Al Bathinah Governorate and he particularly mentioned the contributions made by Sohar Port in pushing the wheel of the economic

development of the country. He also made a mention of Al Buraimi's contribution to the country. He said that the Al Dhahirah Governorate will enjoy the economic and strategic opportunities which will be realised with the opening of a road between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is now

HIS MAJESTY DIRECTED THAT MORE GOVERNMENT SPENDING SHOULD BE MADE WHICH WILL ULTIMATELY SPEED UP THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRY

for the private sector to show how it avails of such opportunities in the interests of the two neighbouring countries.

His Majesty was of the firm view that the government organisations, municipal councils and members of the Majlis Ashshura will coordinate with each other to address the requirements of the governorates and wilayats. This shows that there will be no centralisation of power.

His Majesty also expressed satisfaction that the oil prices are improving and directed that more government spending should be made which will ultimately speed up the economic development in the country. He made all these comments and remarks during his meetings and consultations with important personalities from the governorates.

This is a clear indication that now there is no gap between the leader and his people. This is the principle introduced by late Sultan Qaboos since the beginning of the blessed Renaissance 50 years ago. He always promoted the spirit of direct consultations and the shura system to listen to the views of the citizens of the country, particularly about developmental projects. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is further strengthening the idea particularly when the country is ushering in a new phase of progress.

These meetings which His Majesty had gave an impetus to all national initiatives. These meetings have generated optimism and confidence that the leader is concerned about them and is watching things minutely. The leader of the country always keeps a keen eye on the details of the efforts being made for development.

The direct meetings which His Majesty had with is an indication that he would never allow anything to go missing from his direct attention, particularly when it is concerned about the interests of the people.



ANNIVERSARY OF LAND DAY

Palestinians lift their national flag as they attend a rally marking the 46th anniversary of Land Day, in Gaza City on Wednesday. Land Day commemorates the events of March 30, 1976, when Israeli troops shot and killed six people among Arab Israeli and Palestinians protesting land confiscations. – AFP

Covid-19's lessons for democracies



Yves Leterme

The writer is a former prime minister of Belgium, is Chair of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies and a member of Club de Madrid

For more than two years, Covid-19 has taken lives, destroyed livelihoods, disrupted daily routines and dominated political discussion around the world. As the acute phase of the pandemic comes to an end, we must evaluate what Covid-19 has revealed about the ability of democratic systems to respond to such emergencies.

There are several lessons to be learned from a crisis that has caused the death of over six million people and produced the deepest recession since World War II. Over the past year, Club de Madrid's Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies brought together former heads of state and government, eminent experts and civil-society leaders from around the world to discuss what Covid-19 has taught us, and how our countries can plan for future crises.

Just as no one ever steps into the same river twice, for it is not the same river and they are not the same person, no country ever experiences the same disaster twice. But learning from one emergency is essential to preparing for the next. Although pandemics are rare, epidemics, natural disasters, financial crises and industrial accidents are regular occurrences. Governments, legislative bodies, judicial institutions, civil society and international organisations must be equipped to promote resilience in the face of crisis.

For starters, governments must elevate the status of emergency preparedness and work with their peers to embrace radical transparency, support responsible journalism and media, promote digital literacy and work with civil-society organisations to debunk disinformation, especially online. They should engage with technology companies to solve problems arising from the digital environment and increase access to digital resources. And, with Covid-19 having revealed serious gaps in social security systems, they also must advocate for better protections for vulnerable minorities, women and young people.

In fact, government leaders should mobilise all available tools of fiscal policy to strengthen democratic resilience and improve equity. This includes not only broadening the tax base combating tax evasion, but also redoubling efforts to fight corruption.

At the same time, legislatures should evaluate their governments' Covid-19 response and recommend measures to improve performance in future emergencies. They should review their country's legal framework to ensure that how emergencies are defined adequately reflects current risks and that

constitutional provisions for declaring a state of emergency provide sufficient safeguards to mitigate the risk of abuse of power.

Legislatures also must ensure that their plans for emergency preparedness are robust enough to allow for effective

WHILE PANDEMICS ARE RARE, NATURAL DISASTERS, FINANCIAL CRISES AND INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS OCCUR ON A REGULAR BASIS. BY ASSESSING THE RESPONSE TO COVID-19, GOVERNMENTS CAN CRAFT MORE FLEXIBLE, EQUITABLE PLANS TO MANAGE FUTURE EMERGENCIES AND STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

oversight during future crises. These plans should include flexible rules of legislative procedure and embrace digital technologies to promote resilience and encourage citizen participation.

Judicial institutions, for their part, must ensure that the rule of law guides democracies' response to future emergencies. When the pandemic ends, courts will be called upon – as some

already have – to scrutinise governments' actions against the criteria of necessity, proportionality, procedural fairness and respect for fundamental rights. Courts must make sure that their emergency-preparedness plans allow for swift judicial oversight during times of crisis.

Civil society and the media bear most of the responsibility in a democracy for preventing the spread of disinformation. They also have the power to bring issues into the spotlight and act as a catalyst for emergency policies that better engage and meet the needs of underrepresented groups. In preparing for future emergencies, civil-society organisations should advocate for more public dialogue about critical risks and preventive action.

Lastly, multilateral organisations have a critical role to play, by coordinating lessons learned from member countries and strengthening shared values. International human-rights monitoring mechanisms can serve as a framework for upholding fundamental rights in countries' emergency response. Regional bodies that have instruments in place to protect democracy and the rule of law among their member states should reflect on how these tools might be used for regional oversight in emergencies. And global institutions like the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, and regional development banks should continue to aid efforts to build resilience through social inclusion.

Every democracy is different, and every emergency is different. But the most important lesson to be learned from the Covid-19 pandemic is that all democratic states have a responsibility, as they prepare for the next crisis, to safeguard their core values.

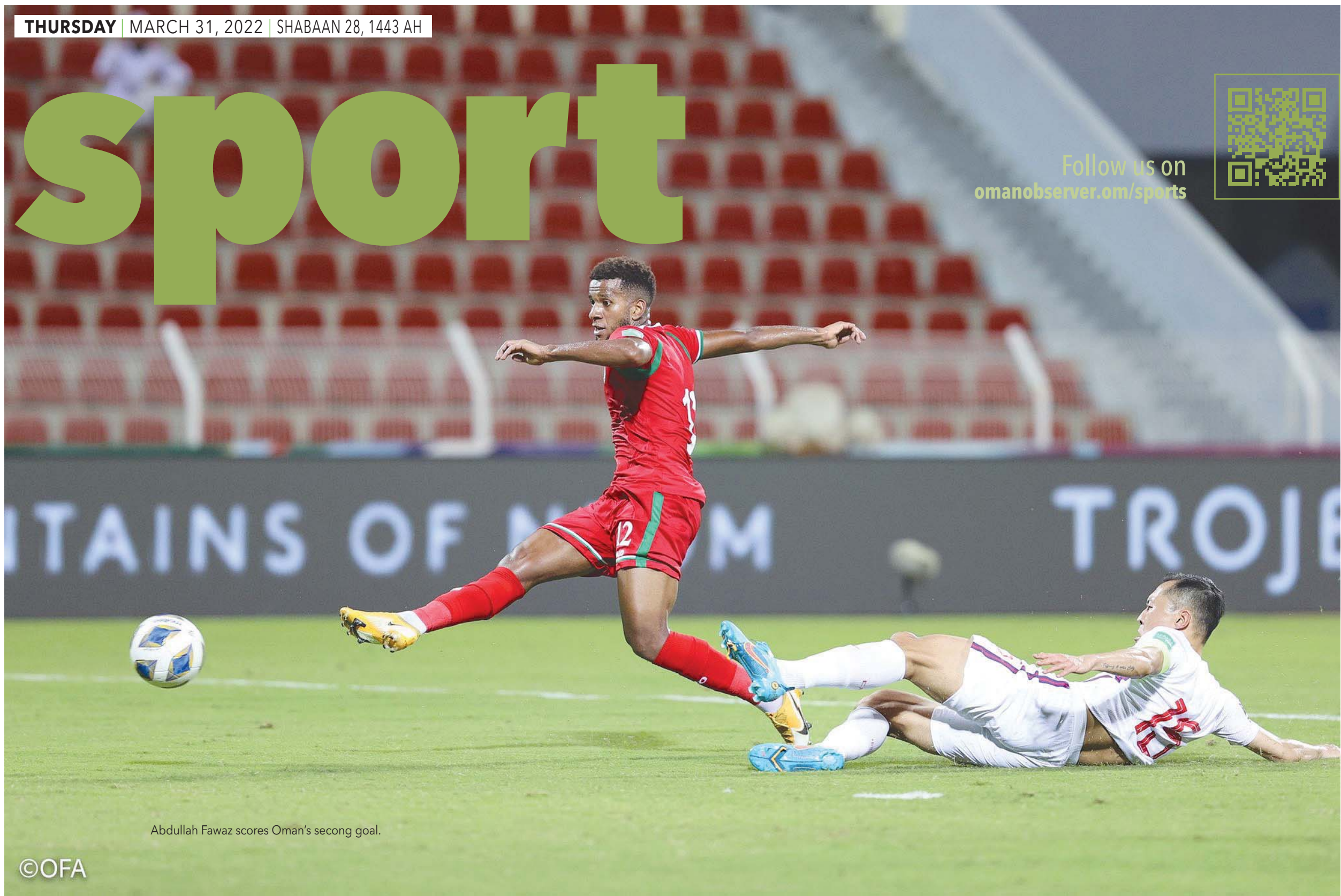
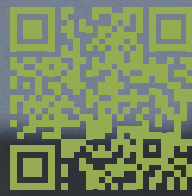
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In this file photo taken a health worker shows a vial of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against Covid-19 at a vaccination centre in Santiago. – AFP

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Abdullah Fawaz scores Oman's second goal.

©OFA

Ivankovic hails Oman show against China

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic congratulated the national team players after their top show during the impressive 2-0 victory over China in the concluding game of group B of the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to Qatar.

Ahead of the match, the 'Red Warriors' had confirmed finishing in the fourth place in the group but the last win against the Chinese raised the credit to 14 points and behind Australia by one point only.

Arshad al Alawi and Abdullah Fawaz's goals confirmed Oman's triumph against the West Asian nation at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Tuesday night.

"I am very proud of my players' performance during all the matches in the qualifiers. The last game in the group was tactically good match. The team managed to earn 14 points in the group and we were not lucky in some fixtures," the Croatian coach added.

Despite both teams lost the chance to compete in the top three places in the group, they showed top fixture and each side were very



committed to win the match.

The 68 years old affirmed that all the team players are in full readiness, and they approve their top capabilities whenever they get any chance to play. "I have young faces in the squad and they have a bright future," he said.

With the completion of the qualifiers, Ivankovic said there will be a preparatory camp in Malta and will play many warm-up games there. At the end of the post press conference, coach Ivankovic was very disappointed on fans attendance in China's

game. "I was looking for our fans to support the game as our players are much needed for this support but I am very upset with the less number of audience. Chinese fans attended in bigger number than us. Oman team is very serious in all the matches and even in all the

training sessions," he concluded.

The second goal owner, Abdullah Fawaz said the team tried their best to qualify from this group but they could not. "This is an important win for the team. We will have some vital assignment in the forthcoming months and will

start gearing up for it," he said.

China head coach Li Xiaopeng said that the hosts showed very well and organised game. "They played modern football. We tried to press and attack but we couldn't. The opponent deserved to win," he said.



OCA to hold first tourney for Omani teams

MUSCAT: The Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) will organise the first tournament for Omani cricket teams, with the participation of seven teams.

Al Seeb, Al Amerat, Muscat, Al Hail First Team, Al Mabela, Ruwi and Al Hail Team B will take part in the tournament from April 4 to 13.

Only Omani cricket players will be allowed to take part.

The tournament matches will be held on the Oman Cricket Academy stadiums in the Wilayat of Al Amerat daily from 8 pm to 11 pm.

The participating teams will be divided into two groups, playing in a league system. Top team from

each group play the final match to determine the champion and runners-up.

The losers play the match for the third and fourth places, while the other three teams play the matches to determine the places from the fifth to the seventh.

All participating teams aspire to compete for the title of this competition, as they are prepared by participating in the league and cup tournaments organised by the Oman Cricket Academy.

The Omani Players Championship is the last tournament for the current season in the Oman Cricket programme for the 2021-22 sports season.





Healy powers Australia into WC final

DOUBLE-CENTURY OPENING STAND SEES AUSSIES PAST WINDIES

WELLINGTON: A double-century opening stand carried tournament favourites Australia to a commanding 157-run win over the West Indies on Wednesday and a place in the Women's World Cup final.

Australia dominated their rain-shortened semi-final in Wellington from the outset, built around a 216-run stand -- the highest of the tournament -- between experienced openers Alyssa Healy and Rachael Haynes.

An imposing score of 305 for three off a reduced 45 overs was never threatened by the West Indies, who succumbed for 148 in the 37th over.

The six-time champions Australia are unbeaten at the 50-over tournament and will face either South Africa or 2017 winners England in the final in Christchurch on Sunday.

Play started nearly two hours late because of misty rain and Healy, in particular, struggled for timing in the early stages after Australia were sent in on a damp Basin Reserve pitch.

She accelerated as the sun

came out, posting 129 off 107 balls to register a fourth one-day international century and fell four runs short of her career-best score.

The wicketkeeper-batter used her feet to excellent effect against the spin-based Caribbean attack, smashing 17 fours and a six.

She didn't hit a boundary until the 12th over but said Haynes had reminded her to remain patient.

"I hope I've learned my lesson by now, that it doesn't necessarily have to happen all at once," Healy said. "I love batting with Rach, she's a calming influence."

Haynes compiled 85 off 100 balls while the late runs came via unbeaten knocks from captain Meg Lanning (26) and Beth Mooney (43).

DROPPED CATCHES

It was a disappointing performance from the sixth-ranked West Indies, who were loose in the field, dropping a handful of chances, and they struggled for momentum with the bat.

Captain Stefanie Taylor was their top scorer with a careful 48, but she lacked support after top-



Australia's Rachael Haynes (L) and Alyssa Healy runs between the wickets during the Women's Cricket World Cup semifinal against the West Indies at the Basin Reserve in Wellington. — AFP

order pair Deandra Dottin and Hayley Matthews both departed for 34.

Their hopes weren't helped by

injuries suffered in the field to bowlers Chinelle Henry and Anisa Mohammed, with neither able to bat, meaning Australia needed to

take only eight wickets.

Taylor said her players felt like they were on the back foot from the outset as Healy and Haynes

established themselves.

"A partnership like that deflates the team and, the pressure they applied, we couldn't get over that," she said.

"When you looked up, they were 100 without loss and all the dropped catches didn't help us."

Lanning was relaxed that her team weren't pushed to the limit.

"I've been involved in some very stressful semifinals in the past and we came in expecting a very difficult game," she said.

"The West Indies bowled well at the front and put us under pressure but it was a good game plan we had, to build a good base."

The second semifinal pits defending champions England against second-ranked South Africa in Christchurch on Thursday, a repeat of the 2017 last-four thriller that was decided in the final over. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 305-3 in 45 overs (A Healy 129, R Haynes 85, B Mooney 43 not out; C Henry 2-51) beat West Indies 148 all out in 37 overs (S Taylor 48, D Dottin 34, H Matthews 34; J Jonassen 2-14)

OC chief interacts with IISM students



MUSCAT: Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket and Vice-President of the Asian Cricket Council, was invited to the International Institute of Sports Management (IISM) on March 7 to interact with the University's Bachelors and Masters students.

IISM was the first establishment of its kind in India and has maintained its reputation as one of the finest Sports Management centres in Asia for the entirety of its existence. Based in Mumbai, its expertise in producing a long-line of professionals who are adept at adapting to the ever-changing needs of the sporting landscape is well-known.

The stream of Sports Management too has increased in value over the past decade. Whether it is a nuanced understanding of sporting law, the science of sponsorship negotiation or the know-how needed to market a brand or product, its curriculum promises to equip all undertakers with the knowledge needed to successfully deal with real-world challenges in the sporting sphere.

In a 150-minute session with the students of IISM, Pankaj Khimji provided some invaluable insight into the world of sports administration along with some

of his personal anecdotes and experiences from working to increase the shine of the global spotlight on Oman Cricket over the past decade.

Oman Cricket's highlights in the recent past include gaining official T20 and ODI statuses from the ICC, qualifying to participate in the 2016 T20 World Cup in India and becoming the only associate nation to host and take part in one in 2021.

The qualification round for the 2022 T20 WC was also held in the country — a testament to the facilities, hospitality and professionalism on offer, and further evidence of the sport's holistic development in the Sultanate. Pankaj Khimji's role in all of these achievements cannot be overstated.

Speaking on the overall IISM experience, he said, "It was brilliant. Both my father and I caught the cricketing bug while completing our education in Mumbai, so the city has a special place in my heart."

"Speaking of IISM, I have always admired their work and track record of success. I remember back in the day, there was no definitive curriculum dedicated to sports management. The fact that it exists today, and that such a reputed institute is helping propel the entire field forward is wonderful to see."

Samson leads Royals to big win over Hyderabad

PUNE, India: Sanju Samson led from the front with a blistering 55 as Rajasthan Royals opened their season campaign in the IPL with an emphatic 61-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Tuesday.

The captain, playing his 100th match for Royals who won the inaugural Indian Premier League edition under late Australian star Shane Warne in 2008, guided his team to 210 for six in Pune.

Royals' bowlers led by Prasidh Krishna, who rattled the top-order including dismissing skipper Kane Williamson for two, restricted Hyderabad to 149-7 despite an unbeaten 57 by Aiden Markram. "I think every season we come with great dreams, it's a franchise that takes good care of us," man of the match Samson said of his side that finished in the bottom two among eight teams in the last three editions. "Our

owners trust us, give us space. One game at a time."

Leg spinner Yuzvendra Chahal claimed three wickets to reach 250 scalps in T20 matches and pace bowler Trent bowler took two wickets.

Samson, a wicketkeeper-batter, remained the hero after he smashed three fours and five sixes in his 27-ball blitz and put on a key stand of 73 with Devdutt Padikkal, who made 41.

West Indies left-hand batter Shimron Hetmyer hit 32 off 13 balls and recorded two sixes to take the Royals' total past 200 after being out into bat first.

'RAW PACE'

Hyderabad's Umran Malik clocked speeds of over 148 kmph (92 mph) and claimed two wickets including English opener Jos Buttler, who survived a few

reprieves including being caught behind on a no-ball in the opening over, for 35. "Incredibly exciting, he's got that raw pace, hopefully he continues to evolve as a cricketer," Williamson said of the 22-year-old express bowler from Indian-administered Kashmir.

"He's young, got some experience last year which was really valuable and I'm sure he'll just continue to get better."

Williamson's dismissal though raised eyebrows after he was ruled out, caught at first slip when the ball seemed to touch the grass before it went into the hands off a diving Devdutt Padikkal who took a rebound off Samson's gloves.

The TV umpire ruled in the bowlers favour but Hyderabad coach Tom Moody said "we were very surprised that he was given out, particularly when we saw the replay." — AFP



Bank Muscat supports shooting event

MUSCAT: In line with its strong commitment to promoting Omani heritage and culture and extending strong support to various sporting, cultural and social events, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, participated in the successful organisation of Al Ahad Al Mashreq Shooting Championship recently.

The competition for traditional Omani weaponry was held at the shooting range in Nakhl in the Governorate of South Al Batinah from March 22-26, and saw an excellent turnout of over 1,440 shooters representing the Sultanate of Oman's different governorates.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, was the chief guest at the event. He handed



over prizes to the winners in the presence of a number of Their Excellencies, Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Muscat, a number of shaikhs as well as large numbers of fans of traditional sports.

Bank Muscat is always at the forefront of participating and supporting various activities and events, which further promote

and preserve Oman's traditional heritage and culture. Bank Muscat seeks to utilise opportunities in reaching out to people and familiarising them with the country's heritage and traditions. Over the course of the last four decades, Bank Muscat has been keenly providing and launching new cutting-edge financial products and services for the

The competition featuring traditional Omani weapons was held recently in the Wilayat of Nakhl

benefit of the people.

Bank Muscat focuses on a long-term strategy which aims to provide benefits to the community and the nation. The Bank is particularly committed to developmental and social responsibilities within the framework of partnership and support to all segments of society and actively seeks to set an example in Public-Private Partnership.

As part of this commitment, Bank Muscat has contributed to the success of various sporting events including the annual Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament.

PORTUGAL, POLAND GRAB WC FINALS SPOTS

PARIS: Portugal beat North Macedonia 2-0 and Poland saw off Sweden by the same score in play-off finals on Tuesday to book their places in the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Bruno Fernandes scored both goals for Portugal to overcome the Balkan nation that had knocked out European champions Italy in a stunning result last week.

Italy's shock exit had North Macedonia dreaming of their first ever appearance at a World Cup finals but Portugal proved a step too far in Porto.

Fernandes set Portugal on their way at the Estadio do Dragao by finishing off Cristiano Ronaldo's pass in the first half and then put the victory beyond doubt in the second, connecting with a sublime cross from Diogo Jota.

The victory means Portugal extend their run of qualifying for all six of the World Cups since the turn of the century while Manchester United forward Ronaldo is on course for his fifth, aged 37.

Ronaldo's best previous result was reaching the semifinals in 2006, when Portugal were beaten by Germany.

Portugal coach Fernando Santos said: "I would like to congratulate the players for their attitude and their quality. We controlled the match in a very clear way.

"Now, having already won the Euro and the Nations League we have a dream of bringing enormous joy to Portugal."

LEWANDOWSKI INSPIRES POLAND

Robert Lewandowski stroked home a second-half penalty as Poland booked their berth in front of a fervent home crowd in Chorzow.

After the Poland captain converted a spot kick, Piotr Zielinski completed the scoring with a superb second goal for the hosts.

Poland go into Friday's draw for the group stages of the World Cup finals, from November 21 to



Portugal's midfielder Bruno Fernandes (L) celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the World Cup 2022 qualifying match against North Macedonia at the Dragao stadium in Porto. – AFP

December 18, after dominating the second half.

The Poles were awarded the crucial penalty just after half-time when midfielder Sebastian Szymanski rolled the ball to substitute Grzegorz Krychowiak, who was fouled by Jesper Karlstrom.

The referee pointed straight to the spot and Lewandowski casually arced his run, waited for Robin Olsen to move and then slotted the ball to the left of the Swedish goalkeeper.

It was his 75th goal for Poland and arguably one of his most important.

"It was really tough. I mean, this pressure!" Lewandowski said. "Even though I have taken many penalties in my career, this was one difficult. I knew this moment would have so much significance.



Poland's Robert Lewandowski celebrates after shooting from the penalty spot to score his team's opening goal against Sweden in Chorzow, Poland. – AFP

Even though I have taken many penalties in my career, this was one difficult. I knew this moment would have so much significance

ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI
Poland forward

"We suffered, but now we can celebrate. I am proud and happy." Zielinski put the result beyond doubt when he capitalised on a slip by Sweden defender Marcus Danielson and sprinted clear.

WORLD CUP: QUALIFIED TEAMS	
ASIA ZONE	
Iran	South Korea
Japan	Saudi Arabia
Qatar - Host country	
EUROPE ZONE	
Belgium	Netherlands
Croatia	Poland
Denmark	Portugal
England	Serbia
France	Spain
Germany	Switzerland
SOUTH AMERICA ZONE	
Argentina	Ecuador
Brazil	Uruguay
NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA ZONE	
Canada	
AFRICA ZONE	
Cameroon	Senegal
Ghana	Tunisia
Morocco	

He slotted his shot past Olsen with 18 minutes left to spark wild celebrations from the home crowd.

Only a superb save from Olsen denied Lewandowski a second goal when the Poland striker was allowed a rare late chance in the area by the Swedish defence.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic came on for the final 10 minutes, but the 40-year-old Sweden striker was unable to influence the course of the match and will miss out on a third appearance at a World Cup finals.

Twelve European sides have now clinched a place at the World Cup.

Gareth Bales' Wales will take part in the other play-off final but that is on hold until at least June because the war in Ukraine led to the postponement of the Ukrainians' semifinal away to Scotland. — AFP

Mane sinks Egypt again, Partey sends Ghana to Qatar

DIAMNIADIO, Senegal: Liverpool star Sadio Mane converted a shoot-out penalty on Tuesday to take African champions Senegal to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar at the expense of Egypt.

Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Tunisia also booked their places in the finals on a frantic night of play-off action.

Senegal won the second leg of the African play-off 1-0 in Diamniadio thanks to a fourth-minute goal from Boulaye Dia and the teams finished level at 1-1 on aggregate after extra time.

As was the case in the Africa Cup of Nations final last month, Mane was entrusted with taking the crucial fifth Senegal kick and once again he made no mistake to give his side a 3-1 shoot-out victory.

Among the three Egyptians who failed to score in the shoot-out was Sane's Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah, who uncharacteristically blazed his kick over the crossbar.

Only four of the nine penalty takers were successful with captain Kalidou Koulibaly and Salio Ciss missing for Senegal and Salah, 'Zizo' and Mostafa Mohamed for Egypt.

As Senegal celebrated a second



Senegal's Sadio Mane (C) controls the ball during the World Cup 2022 qualifying match against Egypt at the Me Abdoulaye Wade Stadium in Diamniadio. – AFP

straight qualification for the World Cup, Egypt were left to lament another dramatic loss to Senegal this year.

"It was important to get off to a good start, something we had not

done in Cairo," said Senegal coach Aliou Cisse.

"This team is better equipped (than the one which qualified for the 2018 finals). We (should have been) able to qualify in regular

time given the chances we missed."

Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz said: "There is not much to say — just nice words for the players for the game they played. Congratulations to Senegal."

The drama in Diamniadio came soon after Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey scored the goal that took Ghana to the World Cup as they forced a 1-1 draw in Nigeria to win the play-off on away goals.

Partey struck after 10 minutes in Abuja and although another Premier League star, William Troost-Ekong, levelled from a 22nd-minute penalty, Nigeria failed to score again. The first leg ended goalless.

GOALKEEPING HOWLER

But the home team fell behind early on when Partey's shot from outside the box slipped between the hands of goalkeeper Francis Uzoho and into the net.

Troost-Ekong was the calmest person in the cauldron of noise midway through the opening half as he sent Ghana goalkeeper Jojo Wollacott the wrong way from the penalty spot to equalise.

Karl Toko Ekambi scored in the fourth minute of added time at the end of extra time to gave Cameroon a dramatic 2-1 win over Algeria in Blida and qualification on away goals.

Azzedine Ounahi scored twice as Morocco trounced the Democratic Republic of Congo 4-1 in Casablanca to reach the finals for a sixth time.

Tunisia secured their place in Qatar despite being held 0-0 at home by Mali in the second leg of a play-off.

— AFP

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\$1 bn Yiti Sustainable City set for 2025 completion

New landmark: The project will feature 1,657 eco-friendly and energy-efficient residential units including 300 villas

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) celebrated on Wednesday the launch of “The Sustainable City – Yiti” in partnership with Diamond Developers – the leading company in developing sustainable communities.

With an investment value of nearly \$1 billion, the fully integrated, urban, mixed-use master project reflects the group’s goals towards driving the social and economic development through sustainable tourism projects that attract FDI in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the National Tourism Strategy.

Spread over an area of 1 million square metres, “The Sustainable City – Yiti” – will be developed within the phase 1 of the Yiti Integrated Tourism Development Masterplan - is the first project in the Sultanate of Oman that meets the global green practices



and is in adherence to the highest sustainability standards.

Commenting on the inauguration, Eng Mohammed bin Salim al Busaidy, Chairman of OMRAN Group, said, “Our partnership with Diamond Developers to launch “The Sustainable City – Yiti” is a unique milestone in our journey as we continue to invest, develop and maximise the limitless potential of Oman’s tourism sector.

As its being developed

within one of the largest urban developments in the Middle East, it will open avenues for numerous lucrative investment opportunities for both local and international investors in line with the directions of Oman Investment Authority.

Mirroring the Sultanate of Oman’s goal of driving transformational change to attain a green, circular economy and emissions reduction, the city embraces the highest standards

of sustainability and attests to our vision of creating an eco-conscious community that is harmoniously aligned with the distinct geography of the region.”

Eng Faris Saeed, Chairman of Diamond Developers said, “The Sustainable City – Yiti is not only a benchmark for sustainable urban development, it is a working model for future cities.

It is a thriving community made up of thousands of residents, visitors, students, researchers and



entrepreneurs” he added. “The project is expected to be one of the region’s most sustainable cities and by adopting the latest solutions in energy production, vertical farming, humidity harvesting and autonomous transportation, we aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040, in line with Oman Vision 2040.”

Slated for completion by 2025, the project will feature 1,657 eco-friendly and energy-efficient residential units including 300 villas. Designed for comfort, practicality and contemporary style, the spacious 3 and 4 bedroom villas will also offer significant savings on utility bills.

While being completely energy independent with solar panels and biogas meeting 100 per cent of its energy requirements, self-sustenance is also an integral

element of the project through the incorporation of productive farming areas and greenhouses. Private farming slots will be allocated for residents to encourage them to grow their own produce.

The city is also designed to recycle 100 per cent of its waste and water. Aligning itself to the country’s goals to eliminate carbon footprints, the project is geared to reduce carbon emissions by adopting clean mobility solutions like autonomous shuttles and electric cars and by deploying EV charging stations around the project. A four-star neighbourhood

hotel with 197 rooms, a five-star resort with 170 rooms and a range of restaurants, leisure facilities, 132 luxury serviced apartments, offering sophisticated services and various tourism experiences.

First integrated service station opens on Al Batinah Expressway



MUSCAT: Motorists can now enjoy the variety of Shell Oman’s offerings in Shell Liwa service station that was recently inaugurated as the first integrated service station on the Al Batinah Expressway.

The opening of Shell Liwa service station is in line with Shell Oman’s continuous efforts to power the nation’s progress and its commitment to develop key national projects. This station is the first among four mega integrated service stations that are slated to open on the Al Batinah Expressway in 2022, in alignment with an earlier agreement signed between Shell Oman and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

“Spanning over an area of

15,000 square metres, not only is the Shell Liwa service station the biggest service station by Shell Oman, but also the first fully integrated Shell service station on the Al Batinah Expressway. This is a major milestone for us and serves as an integral part of the company’s expansion plan.

The station will offer our customers Shell’s premium fuel Shell V-Power along with Shell Mogas 95, Shell Mogas 91, Shell diesel and Shell Recharge for Electrical Vehicles. The service station will also feature a dedicated lane for truck to ensure a smooth and time-efficient experience”, stated Khalid al Uwaisi – Mobility Country Manager, Shell Oman Marketing Company.

Oman’s energy group OQ posts hefty RO 701 million profit in 2021

Key trends: Buoyant prices of energy, commodities boost revenue

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, posted a profit of \$701.664 million for the year ended December 31, 2021 after recording a loss RO 1,716.944 million during the previous year. The company – wholly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – announced its full-year results for 2021, which have now been published on its website.

A consolidated financial statement of the parent company OQ and its subsidiaries reveals that total revenue surged to RO 8.768 billion in 2021, up from RO 5.393 billion in 2020 – a year characterised by global economic turmoil compounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

Operating profit climbed to RO 958.791 million



versus an operating loss of RO 1.575 billion in 2020. OQ Group, with assets totalling \$27.6 billion as of June 30, 2021, owns and operates businesses across the Oil & Gas value chain.

Included in its vast portfolio are equity interests in a sizable number of operated and non-operated oil and gas fields in the Sultanate of Oman and abroad, refining and petrochemicals plants, specialty chemical projects overseas and the

country’s gas transportation network.

The group’s footprint encompasses, besides the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, India, Pakistan, Korea, China, Hungary, Portugal, Spain, Chile, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Brazil, Japan, Germany, United States of America and Kazakhstan.

During the year ended December 31, 2021, OQ Group completed the commissioning

of OQ LPG (SFC) LLC, a major LPG plant in Salalah, and OQ Plastic LLC plants located in Sohar Industrial Port.

In May 2021, OQ announced the successful execution of its inaugural bond issuance which helped raise \$750 million from international debt capital markets. Its bond issuance attracted the participation of investors and financial institutions from around the world. It has been listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Scratch and win Kia Seltos SUV this holy month of Ramadhan

MUSCAT: Buy you favourite Kia Seltos SUV and get a rewarding opportunity to scratch and win 2 Kia at one time. Additional scratch & win prizes include, win your purchased Kia back, win all-new Sportage, win up to 20 per cent on display price, win periodic service up to 100,000 kms and VAT is on us. The campaign is valid until May 1, 2022. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)

The Seltos combines forward-looking technical features, class-leading space and a suite of world-class safety features and is powered by a highly-efficient Smartstream petrol engine. It offers distinctive exterior design details, such as its long hood, a strong, character line on the front bumper, and sharp lines pressed into the bodywork. It also sports a wide 'tiger nose grille', making the car instantly recognisable as a Kia, but with a difference.

Seltos is equipped with intricate and sharply designed full LED headlights and taillights, providing the car with a commanding and confident presence on the road. For daytime driving, the car also has LED daytime running lights and rear lamps, and 3D multi-layer indicators to make it clear exactly



where the Seltos is heading. For driving in foggy conditions, the car is also equipped with LED fog lights.

The interior of the Seltos is impressive. The cabin is characterised by broad, sweeping shapes and highly technical details and is equipped with a range of technologies to maximise convenience, connectivity and ease of use.

Powering the Seltos is a 1.6-litre gasoline engine producing 121 HP paired to a six-speed automatic transmission (6AT). To further elevate the driving experience, the Seltos is equipped with a

Drive Mode Select system that lets drivers adapt the car to their preferred style or the road conditions. Drivers can choose from 'Normal', 'Eco' and 'Sport' mode.

The Eco mode is tuned to maximise vehicle range by using fuel-saving measures, while Sport mode increases responses from the steering and electric motor to maximise the dynamic driving feel of the car.

Normal mode provides a careful balance between the two.

The Seltos is a technologically advanced and refined compact SUV equipped with a range of

advanced features. They include a Smart Key with Button Start, Auto Cruise Control, Terrain Mode System (Snow, Mud, Sand) & Electronic Stability Program (ESP). The Seltos is fitted with dual airbags, as well as a suite of electronic vehicle safety systems.

These include Kia's Vehicle Stability Management system as standard, incorporating traction control and electronic stability program. It also includes Anti-lock Braking System, a Traction Control System as well as front and rear parking sensors, for assistance when parking. 17"

Alloy Wheels are standard. Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia 'Distributor of Distinction' award.

Majan College wins awards at GHEDEX



MUSCAT: Majan University College (MUC) excelled at the annual GHEDEX event, which took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on March 27-29, under the auspices of HH

Sayyid Fahar bin Fatik al Said. MUC claimed four awards: Three in the specific areas of advanced technology, student support and best exhibitor, plus a fourth in the 'best of the best' category.

Majan's well-designed and strikingly colourful stand attracted the eyes of large numbers of attendees, many of whom were also aware of the College's reputation and achievements since it was founded in 1995.

A wide range of MUC staff attended GHEDEX, mingling

with prospective students and colleagues from other institutions so as to promote the College's attractive portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and the bespoke training opportunities it can offer.

MUC also took a prominent part in GHEDEX's International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, under the auspices of Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, on March 28.

The College's Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs, Nabila al Macki, and the Head of the Faculty of Business Management, Dr Ammar al Balushi, both gave well-received presentations that stimulated interest and provoked debate.

Huawei Reports USD 99.9 billion revenue in 2021, plans to increase investment in R&D



The global tech giant Huawei released its 2021 Annual Report, reporting USD 99.9 billion in revenue in 2021, and USD 17.8 billion in net profits, an increase of 75.9% year-on-year. Despite challenging circumstances, the company has maintained solid operations in 2021.

Speaking at its global press conference, Guo Ping, Huawei's Rotating Chairman, stated, "Overall, our performance was in line with forecast. Our carrier business remained stable, our enterprise business experienced steady growth, and our consumer business quickly expanded into new domains. In addition, we embarked on a fast track of ecosystem development."

Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's CFO, also spoke at the event, "Despite a revenue decline in 2021, our ability to make a profit and generate cash flows is increasing, and we are more capable of dealing with uncertainty." Thanks to the enhanced profitability of its major businesses, the company's cash flow from operating activities dramatically increased in 2021, amounting to USD 9.3 billion. Its liability ratio also dropped to 57.8%, and its overall financial structure has become more resilient and flexible.

The company's R&D expenditure reached about USD 22.38 billion in 2021, representing 22.4% of its total revenue, and bringing its total R&D expenditure over the past 10 years to over USD 132.5 billion. Moving forward, the company also plans to continuously increase investment in R&D.

During a Middle East roundtable, Karl Song, VP of Global Communications, Huawei, explained, "Both our R&D expenses and R&D expense ratio reached a 10-year high in 2021, and Huawei ranked second in the 2021 EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard (Google, HW, Microsoft, Samsung, Apple and Facebook) Our total R&D investment over the past decade is more than 132.5 billion dollars."

Huawei has one of the largest patent portfolios in the world. By the end of 2021, Huawei held more than 110,000 active patents, across over 45,000 families. Huawei had about 107,000 R&D employees, representing about 54.8% of our total workforce.

In 2021, Huawei's carrier business generated USD44.1 billion in revenue and helped carriers around the world deploy leading 5G networks. By working with carriers and partners,

Huawei has signed more than 3,000 commercial contracts for industrial 5G applications. These kinds of 5G applications are currently seeing large-scale commercial use in sectors like manufacturing, mines, iron & steel plants, ports, and hospitals. Thanks to continuing digital transformation trends, Huawei's enterprise business also grew rapidly, generating USD 16.06 billion in revenue during 2021. In the past year, Huawei launched 11 scenario-based solutions for key sectors such as government, transportation, finance, energy, and manufacturing. Over 700 cities and 267 Fortune Global 500 companies have chosen Huawei as their digital transformation partner and Huawei now works with more than 6,000 service and operation partners around the world.

Huawei's consumer business zeroed in on consumer wants and needs, further building out the global ecosystem for a smart, all-connected era, as part of the company's Seamless AI Life strategy for consumers around the world. This business generated USD 38.17 billion in revenue in 2021 and continued to see steady sales growth in smart wearables, smart screens, true wireless stereo (TWS) earbuds, and Huawei Mobile Services (HMS). In particular, the smart wearable and smart screen segments both saw 30%+ year-on-year growth. In total, HarmonyOS was used in over 220 million Huawei devices as of 2021, becoming the world's fastest growing mobile device operating system.

During the past year, Huawei also focused on building out its openEuler, MindSpore, and HarmonyOS ecosystems based on the principles of open collaboration and shared growth. Over eight million developers are currently using Huawei's open platforms, open-source software, and development tools to explore new business scenarios and business models.

Concluding his keynote at the Middle East media roundtable, Song said, "This year, it has felt like we are a bamboo stalk that manages to stand tall and proud despite the harsh wind coming from all directions. Moving forward, we know Huawei will continue facing an ever more challenging and severe external environment, but we are confident in our ability to keep growing steadily. We will continue pursuing open collaboration with global partners to create value for customers, industries, and society as a whole, so that we can survive, and survive sustainably."

NBO posts 66.8 per cent increase in net profit



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on March 30, 2022 at the bank's headquarters in Al Athaiba. Presided over by Amal Suhail Bahwan, Chairperson of NBO, the meeting was attended by the board members, senior management and shareholders.

During the meeting, NBO's shareholders approved the payout of 3.7% cash dividend for 2021 at the rate of 3.7 baiza per share.

Shareholders also approved the appointment of the members of the Sharia Supervisory Committee of Muzn, NBO's Islamic window, in addition to the appointment of the external auditors and an independent consultant to evaluate the performance of the Board of Directors for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2022.

The Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) saw the approval of capital raising plans which may take the form of a new issue of Additional Tier 1 capital for a benchmark size in the region of up to \$300 million.

Such instruments may be listed locally on the MSX, internationally on a foreign

exchange and/or issued on a private placement basis.

"Overall, we have been pleased with the bank's performance during 2021. Our core business remains strong and we have further diversified revenue streams and maintained a strong balance sheet. We believe it is a sign of our agility on the one hand and our growing global reputation as a safe investment, on the other", said Amal Suhail Bahwan, Chairperson of NBO.

She added, "As we embark on our 2022 objectives, NBO is resolved to identify further opportunities of growth and take critical steps towards protecting the legacy we have built in the market as a future-ready and world-class bank that continues to create value for our customers, employees and the wider community."

In 2021, NBO achieved a net profit of RO 30.3 million, an increase of 66.8% compared to the previous year.

Net Interest Income for the year 2021 is RO 91.6 million, showing an increase of 0.7% over last year.

Fee Income for the year 2021 is RO 31.8 million, compared to RO 26.1 million last year,

a strong growth of 21.9% due to robust performance across various fee lines.

Operating expenses for the year 2021 was RO 63.5 million, compared to RO 63.8 million for the last year, a decrease of 0.5%, despite the continuing investments made for growth. The reduction year on year is due to various efficiency initiatives undertaken across the bank.

Operating Profit, as a result, grew strongly 12.6%, year on year. Net Impairment for the year 2021 was RO 24.0 million, compared to RO 31.3 million for the last year, a decrease of 23.4%. The reduction is on account of the conservative provisioning approach undertaken at the time of the pandemic.

Gross Loans and Advances as at December 31, 2021 are at RO 3.2 billion, with a growth of 6.4% over last year, as the bank continued to support the borrowing needs of its customers. Customer deposits correspondingly are at RO 2.9 billion, showing a growth of 15.5% over last year.

The bank's core equity and total capital Adequacy Ratio as of December 2021 stands at 11.8% and 15.8% respectively.



Corporate purpose the direct route to success?

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Corporate culture is one critical item that should be on every Omani business leader's radar post-Covid-19. This is the key message that emerged from Wednesday evening's Tejarah Talks held at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in association with Oman Business Forum and supported by HSBC and SOHAR Port & Freezone on Wednesday's Tejarah Talks was

moderated by His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm and joining His Highness on stage were Sir Charles Shaw, CEO, Bondoni; Shatha al Maskiry, MD, Protiviti Oman; Dr Ghalib al Hosni, Chief People Officer, Omantel; and Saif al Manji, Managing Consultant, Quintal Ventures.

Thanking HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said and the panellists for their valuable contributions to the success of the evening, Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP Director and Tejarah Talks organiser said: "We knew corporate culture would be an important topic for discussion



Shatha al Maskiry, MD, Protiviti

at Tejarah Talks, given the shift we have seen in people's expectations over the past two years of the organisations they work for, buy from and invest in.

Employees, consumers and shareholders right across Oman are on the look out for businesses that are grounded in purpose and committed to delivering long-term value for their communities. At the end of the day, people want to be associated with businesses that are a force for good."

HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said was in agreement with Al Adawi noting: "In today's environment, to keep staff engaged and attract

values-driven Omani consumers, company actions must be led by purpose." "Purpose", he went on to say "is the galvanizing force - something bigger than a company's commercial offering. I like to think of it as an employee's North Star - this idea of having a sense of direction, intention and understanding that the contribution you are making is going somewhere. I thought the questions raised by the audience tonight around whether Omani companies are giving brand purpose and values enough attention were valid and important."

In agreement with HH Sayyid Dr Adham was panellist Shatha al Maskiry who pointed out that stakeholders will only believe in a company when its employees are true believers and who behave on brand at every turn.

"To rise to this challenge, Omani management needs to build a purpose-driven corporate culture - specifically, one that is energized by a compelling purpose for good. At the end of the day, leaders have to understand that their role is create a work environment where people enjoy what they do because when they enjoy what they do, they will do it better."

Data2cloud appoints new CEO



MUSCAT: A trusted partner in Oman's progression towards a digital society, data2cloud, an Ooredoo subsidiary, has appointed Asaad bin Humaid bin Ali al Saadi as its new Chief Executive Officer. A senior commercial, marketing and sales professional, he brings more than 15 years of experience across different business units within Ooredoo.

Al Saadi holds a BS in Operation Management from Sultan Qaboos University and a Diploma in Management and Leadership from the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

An expert in strategy, business planning, brand development and new business, he had previously held the position of Head of Commercial at data2cloud since September 2021.

He will bring a strong track record of excellent decision-making, creative, analytical and problem solving skills to the role and is a well-respected team player. Data2cloud offers cutting-edge cloud computing services across Oman, managed from Ooredoo's brand new, award-winning data centre accredited by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Bank Nizwa reports strong performance in 2021

MUSCAT: As a leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has reported robust growth across all parameters in its latest financial results for the year ended December 31, 2021.

Expanding its reach of innovative Sharia-compliant products and services to customers across the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has successfully achieved a positive performance in 2021, whilst drawing the long-term strategic roadmap till the year 2025.

The bank's 5-year business plan has been drawn keeping in mind the next phase of growth and expansion, aligned to the overall objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and promising increased returns for the shareholders. Not only has the bank demonstrated utmost resilience during the pandemic, but has also attested to it with steady financial performance, surpassing the market expectations.

It has recorded a net profit of RO 12.52 million, indicating a 13 per cent growth after tax for the period ended December 31, 2021, compared to RO 11.067 million in the same period in 2020. The bank's total assets also grew by 16 per cent to reach RO 1,404.173 million compared

to RO 1,206.259 million in the preceding year.

Upholding its commitment to expanding its customer base, the bank's customer deposit portfolio increased by 20 per cent to RO 1,109.383 million against RO 924.208 million on a year-on-year basis, whereas the bank's financing to customers rose by 13 per cent to RO 1,146.497 million for the year ending December 31, 2021 compared to RO 1,014.605 million in 2020.

During the Annual General Ordinary Meeting of Bank Muscat, the proposal of distributing cash dividends to shareholders at a rate of 3.5% of the issued capital of the bank (at a rate of 3.44 baisas per share) was approved.

In addition, the new board members have been elected, including Shaikh Khalid al Khalili, Musabah bin Saif al Mutaury, Sayyid Amjad al Busaidy, Shaikh Saif al Maawali, Shaikh Majid al Maamari, Hussain al Shalwani, Ishaq al Maawali, Atif al Siyabi, Saleem al Raisi.

Post to the Annual Ordinary General Meeting, the new elected board of directors had met and elected Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalili as a Chairman and Musabah

bin Saif al Mutaury as Vice-Chairman and appointed Tariq Mohammed Othman as the Board Secretary.

Commenting on the bank's extraordinary performance, Shaikh Khalid al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa said, "Our financial results for the year 2021 demonstrated the underlying strengths and resilience of our business. We are proud of the momentous year as Bank Nizwa reached key milestones despite the economic challenges and competitive banking environment.

Without the support of our shareholders and the loyalty of our customers, the bank would not have been far-reaching in contributing to the growth of Islamic banking sector in Oman.

This exceptional financial performance of the bank during 2021 reflects the bank's strong position and future plans that focus on implementing innovative strategies, investing in the latest technological advancements, as well as leveraging its growing presence in communities across the country."

The Islamic Banking in the Sultanate of Oman's witnessed a remarkable growth and progress, becoming significant in a short span of time.



Multiply your money with ahlibank's new account 'Wafra plus'



MUSCAT: Amplifying its mission to create unrivalled avenues that meet customer needs, ahlibank has introduced the 'Daily Multiplier Account', called Wafra plus, which will provide its new and existing customers an exclusive opportunity to multiply their money - everyday.

With 24X7 cash management via digital channels or branch network, customers will not only enjoy unlimited transactions, but also supplement their savings with the addition of competitive benefits that is compounded and paid each day. Accordingly, benefits will be made available as withdrawal or compounded benefits in customers' accounts. "The new account has been devised as a platform to secure and build our customers' savings accounts. Simply put, it will multiply their money on a daily basis, allowing them to earn bonus benefits.

This is a significant landmark in our strong growth trajectory, and it reflects our commitment to create and implement products and services that are truly relevant to our customers. We believe in engaging with our customers across various platforms to assess

their changing requirements and, accordingly, incentivise our products to match their pulse and financial attitudes", said Muneer al Balushi, AGM - Head of Retail Distribution.

The 'Daily Multiplier Account, Wafra plus', launched under ahlibank's popular brand name 'Wafra', will allow ahlibank customers to earn benefits, on daily basis. Designed as a convenient and easy to maintain service, it will enhance customers' financial strengths with not just the provision of unlimited withdrawals, but the inherent savings culture it promotes.

The prefix of 'Daily' on the product reflects the bank's intent to integrate the concept of financial competency among its customers, who now stand to earn more on a daily basis.

Highlighting ahlibank's quest to constantly upgrade its products and services, Muneer al Balushi added, "Our cadre of responsive managers and professionals are attuned to the market trends and rely on constructive feedback from our customers to conceptualise and implement innovative products that reflect the changing environment."

Saudi firm Dussur announces 5 new investment deals

HAMMAM AL BADI

MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Saudi Arabian Industrial Investments Company (Dussur), owned by PIF, Aramco and Sabic, announced the successful signing of five new shareholder agreements governing four joint ventures and a global acquisition.

In addition, there is an agreement with the Local Content Authority and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Human Resources Development Fund

"Hadaf".

The first JV agreement was signed with Korea's SeAH Changwon Integrated Specialty Steel Co Ltd (SeAH) to establish the first local seamless stainless steel pipe production plant in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in (SPARK). The total investment for the establishment of the joint venture is estimated at \$270 million.

SeAH and Dussur will invest up to \$140 million with a percentage share of 51 per cent and 49 per



cent respectively. The remaining financing for the joint venture will be provided by the Saudi Industrial Development Fund.

The second joint venture agreement was signed between

Dussur, Tatweer Educational Transportation Services Company and CHTC KINWIN Automobile Co to establish the first state-of-the-art buses manufacturing facility in Saudi Arabia with an

annual production capacity of 3,000 buses.

The third JV agreement was between Dussur and 3D Systems to establish the Center for Innovation and Additive Manufacturing in the Kingdom.

The joint venture will provide on-demand printing and application engineering solutions for key industries such as energy, aerospace, defence and healthcare.

The fourth joint venture agreement was signed between Dussur and the US company

Baker Hughes to build a blending and chemical reaction facility with a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes to produce demulsifiers, scale inhibitors, corrosion inhibitors, biocides, etc.

Dussur also announced the successful completion of an acquisition agreement with the international private equity consortium BroadPeak Global LP (Broad Peak Global) and Asia Green Fund (AGF) to acquire the Clean Technologies business of DuPont de Nemours, Inc.

Gold reserves
buy Putin a few
options

Russia's gold stash has some value for Moscow. Though Western sanctions have frozen a chunk of the country's foreign exchange reserves following its war on Ukraine, Vladimir Putin's regime has about \$140 billion of the yellow metal that is beyond the direct reach of sanctions. Using it can require complicated and risky schemes. But that also makes it difficult to track.

Putin has been shoring up his defences against economic restrictions for years. Russia's gold holdings have tripled since it annexed Crimea in 2014, triggering US sanctions.

A senior White House official last week estimated bullion makes up about 20% of the country's central bank's overall reserves.

To make use of the hoard, Russia would likely have to physically move gold beyond its borders.

To make use of the hoard, Russia would likely have to physically move gold beyond its borders.

That's why the United States and its allies last week moved to close that loophole.

The Treasury Department said any transactions involving gold held by the Russian central bank is subject to existing sanctions, which means anyone who helps convert the precious metal into US dollars could face penalties.

Despite those risks, some supportive or opportunistic countries may be willing to help Putin. Russia could also turn to nefarious actors. The usually complex schemes can take years to prosecute. US courts are still examining some aspects of an alleged plot that started in 2010 and involved several Turkish entities that helped Iran evade sanctions, including turning gold into cash. The plan involved money servicers, front companies, fake humanitarian food shipments and businesses located in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Hong Kong.

The Russian rouble has fallen by more than 20% against the dollar this year, while the country is becoming economically isolated from the West. Illiquid gold could be one of Putin's few remaining economic silver linings. — Reuters



TRADITIONAL FISHING

Fishermen take part in the traditional Poutine fishing in Cagnes-sur-Mer, southeastern France. Poutine are minute baby sardines which are exclusively fished between Antibes and Menton on the French riviera for only 45 days each year at the end of winter and fetch around 50€ per kilo at market. — AFP

Is the Ukraine crisis impacting
global food prices?



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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

There is no country in the world whose population does not gripe about the high cost of foodstuff and essential commodities – an issue that has worsened since the Russian war on Ukraine.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, recently addressed this issue by affirming that his Ministry and the other agencies concerned are closely monitoring the prices of foodstuff and essential commodities in the markets.

He stressed that there are no fears of an impending shortage of wheat in the country, in light of the substantial stockpiles of the grain in key locations around the country. This provides assurance that grain prices will remain unchanged. The minister also cautioned importers against increasing the

prices of wheat and other essentials ahead of the blessed month of Ramadhan.

On the other hand, we see that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has indicated that the global prices of food and animal feed are likely to rise between 8 to 20 per cent due to the ongoing war, as both Ukraine and Russia are important producers and exporters of wheat in large commercial quantities.

The FAO also believes that any price rise will also lead to human suffering and increase the number of malnourished people around the world.

This war may bring a lot of trouble to most Arab countries as well to others, and it may also adversely impact the ability of countries to import their requirements of wheat. International wheat prices have not witnessed an increase of the kind that we witnessed in 2008.

Recently, many Arab countries

announced that they have taken some measures to ensure adequate coverage of local markets and provide for the needs of their populations for the coming months. In all cases, they are working to take urgent measures in order to provide sufficient stocks of wheat to avert any food shortage and in light of their failure to achieve food security for their peoples.

Consumers, on their part, and with the approach of the blessed month of Ramadhan, do not hide their anxiety about possible disruptions in the availability of basic commodities amid the Ukrainian conflict.

Most Arab countries import between 80 to 90 per cent of their food requirements, including wheat. This has prompted the authorities to raid merchants' stores to crack down on hoarding of essential staples and monitor the market for any price manipulations.

Replace Russian oil & gas with renewables



HELEN CLARK

The author, a former prime minister of New Zealand (1999-2008) and administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, is a commissioner of the Global Commission on Drug Policy

Russia's war on Ukraine has shaken many long-held Western assumptions about the foundations of peace in Europe. Among other things, it has renewed policymakers' focus on energy dependence as a key strategic issue.

The United States (US) recently announced an immediate ban on imports of Russian oil and gas, while the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) pledged to curb them more gradually.

The rationale is clear: Punish Russia, reduce its leverage and restore peace to Ukraine. But wrong choices now – specifically, continuing to favour fossil fuels over renewable energy – could lock in a far less peaceful future.

Some Western countries have let themselves become overly reliant on Russian oil and gas in recent years, so the decision to cut back was not easy. But the bigger, tougher decision facing Western governments is how to reduce their overall dependence on fossil fuels. Simply replacing one dirty energy source with another would leave

the growing dangers of climate change to be dealt with later – if at all.

Given the pressure of the current Ukraine crisis, such short-sightedness would be understandable. Western governments must close the energy gap created by stopping Russian fossil-fuel imports, while minimising the damage to national economies.

For now, they have the public with them. But if energy costs rise too high, or shortages become too disruptive, the resulting economic havoc could erode public support.

Any alternative energy sources must therefore come onstream quickly and provide affordable, reliable supplies. And they should not create new geopolitical entanglements that might cause problems later.

But with climate change fast becoming a leading driver of insecurity worldwide, doubling down on fossil fuels would be a tragic mistake – a choice that could make the world a more violent place in the coming decades.

The 2021 Production Gap Report highlighted the disconnect

between current fossil-fuel production plans and climate pledges. Under current policies, global warming is on track to reach a catastrophic 2.7 degrees Celsius this century. We need to be rapidly closing down wells and mines and shrinking production, not adding more capacity.

Climate change is already making the world more dangerous and less stable. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – dubbed “an atlas of human suffering” by United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres – offered a stark assessment of the huge economic and human costs of even the early effects of climate change that we are experiencing now. It paints a picture of a future that we must avoid.

A survey of headlines over the past 12 months reveals record floods, storms, wildfires, heat waves and droughts. All of these weather events are becoming more frequent, extreme, and deadly as a result of climate change and all of them can increase the likelihood of conflict and instability.

Today, 80 per cent of UN peacekeepers are deployed in countries regarded as most exposed to climate change.

Likewise, a recent study found that a one-degree Celsius increase in temperature was associated with a 54 per cent increase in the frequency of conflicts in parts of Africa where nomadic herders and sedentary farmers compete for dwindling supplies of water and fertile land.

As the IPCC report rightly points out, the consequences of climate change most quickly destabilise places where tensions are already high and government structures are already weakened or corrupt.

As research for the forthcoming Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Environment of Peace report shows, armed extremist groups have thrived in regions that are suffering the worst effects of climate change.

They find recruits and supporters among people whose lives and livelihoods have become increasingly precarious because of floods and droughts.

In our globalised, networked world, the repercussions of local climate impacts can quickly spread, through supply-chain shocks, spill-over conflicts and mass migrations.

And, as Russia's war on Ukraine has demonstrated, the rules-based order is alarmingly fragile, leaving ordinary people to face the terrible consequences.

The West's rejection of Russian oil and gas creates an opportunity to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. Energy efficiencies and other demand reductions can do part of the job.

As for the rest, renewable alternatives like solar and wind power make economic sense. They are far quicker and safer to install than nuclear plants or most of the fossil-fuel alternatives being discussed. And they don't expose people to the spikes and dips of global fuel markets.

The logic points in only one direction. The world will achieve true energy security – and have a chance of building a more peaceful, liveable and affordable future – only if we leave fossil fuels behind.

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features



By Yeru Ebuena

For four days, about 20 guests, all working in the luxury travel and hospitality industry across, went on an in-depth exploration of Sultanate of Oman. They were taken across Sultanate of Oman's sprawling cities, towards rugged mountains and deeper into the heart of Sultanate of Oman's wadis and deserts to see what the country is all about.

They were made to experience culture – from the traditional dances seen over the weekend showcased at the Nizwa Fort Festival and the Gulf Ceramics Festival at the Jibreen Castle – to some of the most beautiful historic destinations which include Al Hamra, Misfat Al Abriyeen and Bahla and had an opportunity to interact not only with the women of the museum at Bait al Safah but including the usually aloft Bedus of Al Sharqiyah.

The participants, many of them admitting they hadn't been to Sultanate of Oman at all, were curious how Sultanate of Oman can be packaged as a luxury destination and had closely inspected not just hotel facilities but on-ground services provided by travel operators.

The whole event is part of the Global Travel Week Middle East powered by Connections Luxury and organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in collaboration with serial entrepreneur Clive Jacobs who is the chairman of Connection and is currently under the helm of Gregory Reeves, its managing director.

The four-day tour was eventually followed by a series of talks, soirees and networking hosted by some of Sultanate of Oman's luxury hotels including Shangri-La Barr al Jissah and Al Husein, W Muscat and Al Bustan Palace.

Regarding how Sultanate of Oman was selected, Clive Jacobs, who also owns Jacobs Media and Connecting Travel, shared that "We look for the right type of host. There has to be a need. Sultanate of Oman is better suited for this type of event as Sultanate of Oman hasn't reached peak tourism yet. There is a need and a synergy. We have a proven model which works [and bring the right travellers to hosting countries]."

Jacobs also revealed that Connections which manages the Global Travel Week Middle East will also be held in Sultanate of Oman for two more years guaranteeing that the country will also benefit from the insight of the group as well as the



partners who can sell the property to luxury-seeking travellers all over the world.

Meanwhile, Greg explained, "Sultanate of Oman bringing this event to the country is a commitment to its tourism efforts, a desire to educate the private sector and themselves on the expectations luxury travel trade. Luxury travellers have very demanding needs so bringing this event here is actually bringing valuable insights on how to handle these expectations better."

He added, "This [Sultanate of Oman] adventure destination is a rugged destination and that's part of the charm. Of course, there's room for refinement but that's why we are here to help everyone better improve and better serve the clients."

Reeves went on, "When running an initiative, you have to look at the return of investment but you also have the tangible and intangible ROI. Tangible ROI is the money but it was actually the ministry [of Heritage and Tourism] who said that you also have to look at the intangible ROI. There needs a huge education piece that needs to happen in the country and it's good to see this because not all destinations think this way."

The travel week event wrapped on March 29 with many of the participants sharing that they found

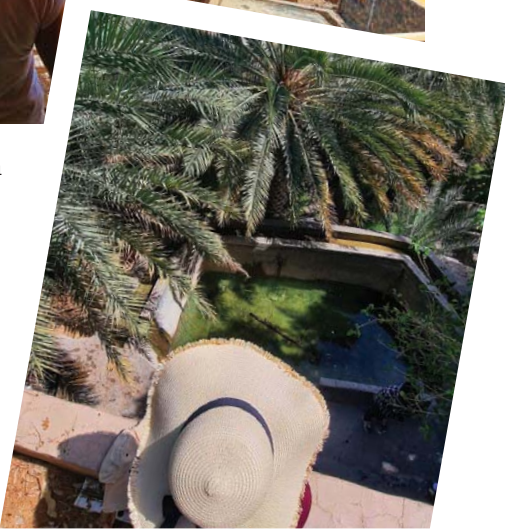


Sultanate of Oman a revelation as a destination and definitely worth checking out.

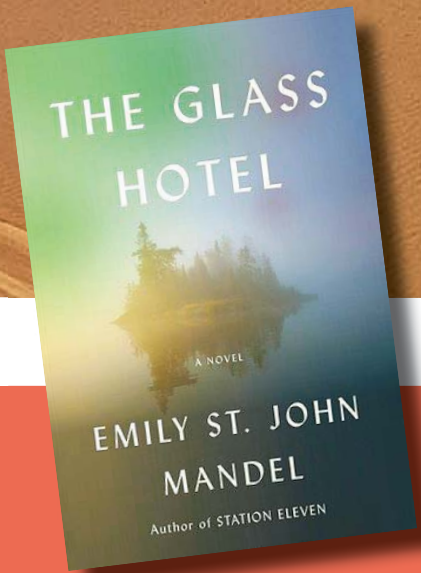
Jeroen Adriaenssens who owns Masters in Travel based in Belgium said that he enjoyed nearly all of the activities but what stood out to him the most is not just the desert adventure where they were hosted by the Thousand Nights Camp but also the more intimate experiences like the women of Bait al Safah showcasing how coffee and Omani bread is made.

His key takeaway however is that the wadis were astounding and will definitely be a great selling point to his clients who are also big in outdoor tourism.

Is Sultanate of Oman ready for luxury travel tourism to come back? With nearly 200 luxury travel specialists leaving Sultanate of Oman happy with their experiences and with the renewed interest in this side of the Middle East, surely the country will soon see a flow of visitors just wanting to #ExperienceOman.



READ



"THE GLASS HOTEL"
BY EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL

'The Glass Hotel' opens with the disappearance of a woman from a container ship. It leads into a story focusing on the fallout from the collapse of a Ponzi scheme, mirroring the Bernie Madoff scandal from 2008.

A carnival of colours and creativity

KIDS FROM A cross-spectrum of backgrounds joined hands together with their skills and knack for creativity, gastronomic delights, arts and cultural activities at the Carnival of colours and creativity.

In the end, these tiny tots were taking part in the charity fundraiser for the needy in the local society, thus inculcating the habit of sharing and caring for society.

The event took place on March 24 at the Injaz school premises where half of the usual basketball courts and football pitches were used for the students VS teachers' and parents' tournaments, and the other half was magically transformed into a plethora of food stalls, horse rides, henna, face painting, jumping castle, photo booth and some creative artefacts from the students of the special needs section.

"Celebrating motherhood through this carnival and creating an opportunity for students to have a hands-on experience of management and business establishment, Al Injaz celebrates the Carnival as its annual event, said Amita Sharma, Director of the School.

The Carnival was a huge success as people from all over Muscat visited the premises and experienced for themselves how creative and fun Al Injaz Private School can be. The organisers assured that it's going to be even better and bigger, lighting up more happy faces enjoying the time spent with the carnival.

Every now and then, we all need to have a break from our everyday lives, and the best way to do it is by having fun activities with the ones we care about the most. And when we add a noble cause such as collecting funds and resources for the needy, the Carnival organised by the School was marvellous to both eyes and hearts", said a parent of a special child.



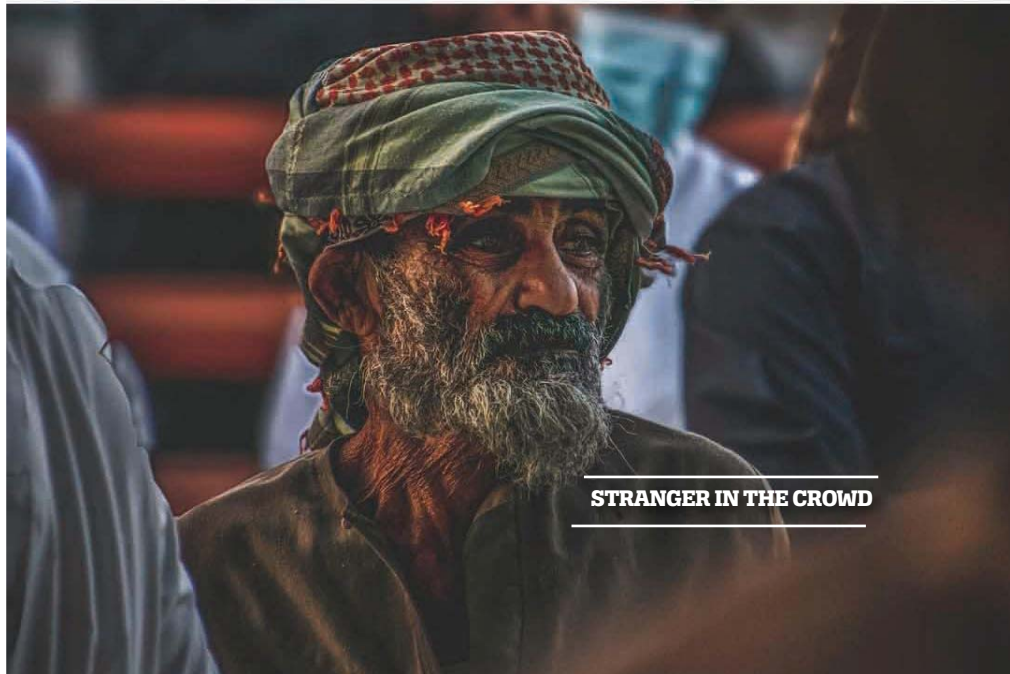


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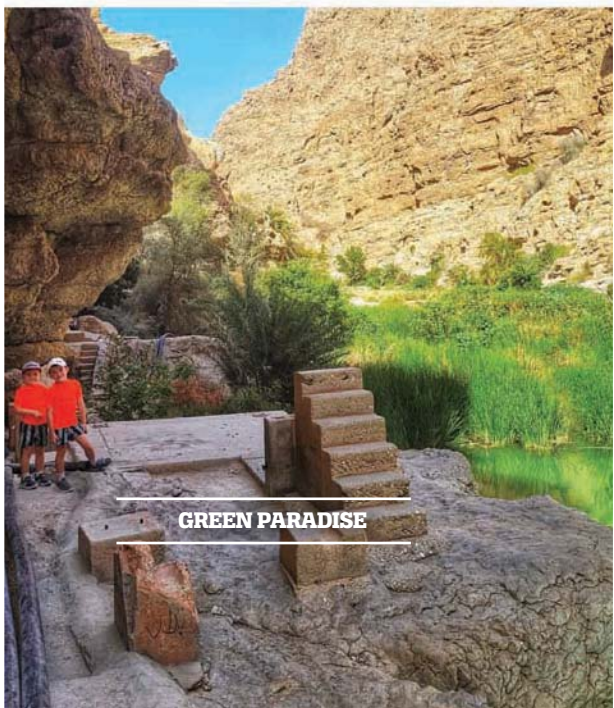
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Disney makes Oscars magic once again with 'Encanto'



WITH A SPRINKLE of magical realism and catchy tunes by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Disney again claimed Oscars gold for best animated film Sunday with "Encanto", a colourful celebration of Colombian culture and the importance of family.

The film defeated a diverse field -- Afghan refugee documentary "Flee", Pixar's Italy-set coming-of-age tale "Luca", futuristic family comedy "The Mitchells vs. the Machines" and Disney's fantasy adventure "Raya and the Last Dragon".

"I am so proud to be a part of a film that puts beautiful, diverse characters in front and centre, and that people everywhere are seeing themselves in the film", producer Yvett Merino told the audience at the Dolby Theatre.

The movie tells the story of Mirabel, an ordinary teenager born into the charmed Madrigal clan, living in a secluded paradise of lush gardens and towering mountains. Every family member has a special superpower -- except for Mirabel.

To the rhythm of Colombian folk music styles like vallenato and bambuco, and with coffee and arepas on the stove, the Madrigals use their gifts to help their fellow villagers with whatever they need.

But the magic -- generated by a supernatural candle -- suddenly starts to fade, requiring the family to unite to save their home and their community.

The film was also nominated for best original score and best original song for "Dos Oruguitas".

The tender ballad recounts the love story of the family matriarch Abuela Alma, and how the enchanted candle came to her when her husband Pedro was killed by invaders who forced the family off their land. The scene recalls the decades-long conflict in Colombia pitting the government against armed rebels, anchoring the film in the country's tortuous history.

WE DON'T TALK ABOUT BRUNO

Mirabel, who is Alma's granddaughter, feels as though she has let the family down, and that its fading magic is her fault. Alma does not exactly dissuade the teen of this notion.

Another key element of the story is the reemergence of the family's black sheep, Bruno (played by John Leguizamo), who went into self-exile after a disturbing vision of the future involving Mirabel.

"We knew he was someone people would gravitate towards", one of the film's co-directors Jared Bush told 'Variety'.

"John was so spectacular: Funny, lovable and weird -- and in not a lot of screen time!"

One of the film's lasting legacies will be the runaway success of "We Don't Talk About Bruno", a catchy mix of hip-hop and Cuban rhythms written by Miranda that topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart for weeks.

"Every family has an outcast or someone who feels like an outcast. I think it's one of the reasons the character has taken off. A lot of people feel like a black sheep", co-director Charise Castro Smith told 'Variety'. The story ultimately is an ode to inclusivity, and how every member of a family can contribute, with or without special gifts.

"Encanto" is a triumph of representation on the big screen -- Disney is well-known for its perfect princesses with long hair and ball gowns, but Mirabel has unruly curls, wears glasses and traditional clothes and doesn't have a superpower.

The cast is made up almost entirely of Hispanic actors and opens with a line in Spanish: "Abre los ojos", or "Open your eyes." The spectacular animation includes painstaking details in the traditional clothing worn by the characters. -- **AFP**

CULTURE

Are You 'Mask Fishing'?



"WHEN YOU HAVE a mask on, you only get to see the forehead, the eyes and when you're only seeing that, you just kind of have an image in your head of what someone's supposed to look like", she said. "So when you take that mask off, it's like a new person you're looking at. It's always going to be something you don't expect."

Throughout the pandemic, face masks had become reliable shields for Sundaram and her classmates in New York City. In addition to protecting against the spread of Covid-19, they had obscured all kinds of transformations teenagers may feel inclined to hide: Braces, pimples, acne scars, the first growths of facial hair.

Now that the city has ended its mask mandate for public schools, students are dealing with old anxieties about appearance and the pressure to fit in. And as they get a closer look at each other's faces, they're finding out who among them has been mask fishing -- in other words, using facial coverings to cover up what they really look like.

The term is a play on "cat-fishing", the slang for misrepresenting one's identity online. For a generation that has grown up with

smartphones and Instagram, it's an apt reference.

"Some of these people really haven't seen my face outside of social media and things like that", Damia Whyte, 17, said. "What I post on social media is a little bit different than what I look like on a day-to-day basis."

"Me on social media, I feel like I'm a little bit more done up", she added.

"The only people I really know that I've seen without their mask on are people I see outside of school and people I see either when they're eating", said Jasper, 15, whose father requested that he be identified by only his first name. "So the majority of the people in my classes that I don't see outside of school or stuff like that, I don't know what they look like without their mask."

"I never really thought about it up until people would bring it up when I would take off my mask to take a sip of water", said Nuzhat Ahmed, 16. "They'd be like, 'Oh, this is not what I imagine you to look like.' And then it would come to me like, 'Oh, am I mask fishing?'"

The slang term, one of many that emerged during the pandemic to describe new social dynamics, took off on TikTok last year. Of the

nearly 40 New York City public school students interviewed for this article, several expressed doubt that it was more than an Internet gag.

"Some of my peers believe a lot of people are trying to mask fish and hide their face with their mask, but I don't think that's really a very common thing", Marc Duggan, 18, said. "I feel like the vast majority of people wear masks because they feel they're supposed to or because they want to take precautions from Covid."

"Some people just have gotten so used to it that I guess they don't want to show their face", Russell Silverman, 18, said. "And some people still think Covid is a big problem in the school and they're just taking the necessary precautions."

Clementine Elorriaga, 17, said that neither she nor her friends are worried about mask fishing; their priority is Covid safety. She herself has become known around school for embracing the mask as a fashion accessory.

"I colour-coordinate my outfits with my masks", Elorriaga said. "So with the K95, I have the blue one, I have dark light blue, dark blue, a pink, a red and then I also have the black" -- NYT

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

How do we live a life with happiness?

EVERY HUMAN being all over the planet is running through the world looking for happiness. Who, after all, doesn't want a happy life right?

Sometimes we even think of happiness as something that happens to us. We look at happiness as something which we have no control over and whenever we see other people finding their joy, we usually go through a series of self-reflections often saying to ourselves: If only things were different, I'd be happy!

Is this really how happiness really works, or does it depend on the condition of the person?

In fact, part of happiness depends on personality. Do we not sometimes see that there are individuals whose nature and character bring happiness, while at other times you see people born with an angry character, who see the faults in people and situations instead of the good and you are surprised by their gloomy mood rather than joy. However, I find that they can change if they wish to be happier and yes; there is no doubt there is hope to get there.

What I mean honestly here is that happiness is up to us! It depends on things that are actually under our control. Surely a big part of how happy we are depends on our mindset, the habits we practice and the way we live every day... isn't that a reality?

On other hand, we should always stick to positive emotions in our lives, such as joy, humour, empathy, thanks and love, as they do good things for our brains and bodies, especially since they also reduce stress hormones and help relieve anxiety and depression. But at

the same time, I think that we must learn how to also manage our negative emotions because they are in one way or another the key to happiness and here when we are aware of all this, we will definitely make the difference.

However, it is true that our lives as human beings are busy with daily activities and responsibilities, but slowing down to pay attention to what we do sometimes is important to feel happy, especially since those moments may not be repeated. Therefore, it is good for the individual to pay attention to the effects of his actions and notice the ways in which they occur That's the difference. Off course, he doesn't forget to live his life, on the basis of the values that interest him.

Thus, when our lives are rich in positive emotions, wonderful relationships and a sense of purpose, for instance, we are ready to get things done and thus we are happy.

In the end, you can possibly learn how to be happier by managing your mind, calming your mind, using your strengths and doing the things you enjoy. But on the other hand - if I can say - remember that there are a lot of things to think about! You cannot process them all at once. Instead, it is nice to start with habits that fit your day for example, without thinking about them too much. Perhaps, in the end, you may end up achieving specific goals, even if they are small, but certainly can create your happiness.

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.



Oman resident launches song on ZEE Music; becomes instant hit

By Kabeer Yousuf

An Oman resident from the Indian state of Delhi has launched her music on Zee Music which has since been the talk of the town with more than 35k views in the first five hours and still counting.

Pratibha Sharma, a trained classical singer, who launched her second single 'Glass Khaali' with Zee Music with Shefali Zariwali and Ankit Siwach in the video has the credit of five albums in her singing career.

I have done 4 cover songs before. But I have always aimed for singing my own song. My decision became firmer than any time before in the last few months and I made up my mind to execute the idea.

Pratibha hit the headlines for her first single Pasand Aaya, a romantic song that has been watched by more than a million since last year is now coming with a hardcore party number and this peppy, high-energy and fun track out on Zee Music is climbing the charts quickly.

"I am happy with the response to the song. This is my second song, it's a peppy number and I am sure people will like it. I have always wanted to sing my own songs, make my own identity. Romantic songs are my forte, but this time I played with my voice and sang a dance number. It's a very

special song and super close to me," Pratibha, whose role model ever is Late Lata Mangeshkar, shared her excitement about the song.

About the theme of the song, Pratibha said, "Well,

It has been a long journey for Pratibha. For her, singing has been her passion since her childhood and started getting trained at an early age. Since studies took precedent over singing, she has

my first song did very well and now my second song is out. I have a long way to go but I am determined," her voice was affirmative.

Like many others, Pratibha Sharma also draws inspiration from Legend Lata Mangeshkar. She added, "I have been and will always be a religious follower of Lata ji. I believe she is an ace singer and has been my inspiration since I was a kid."

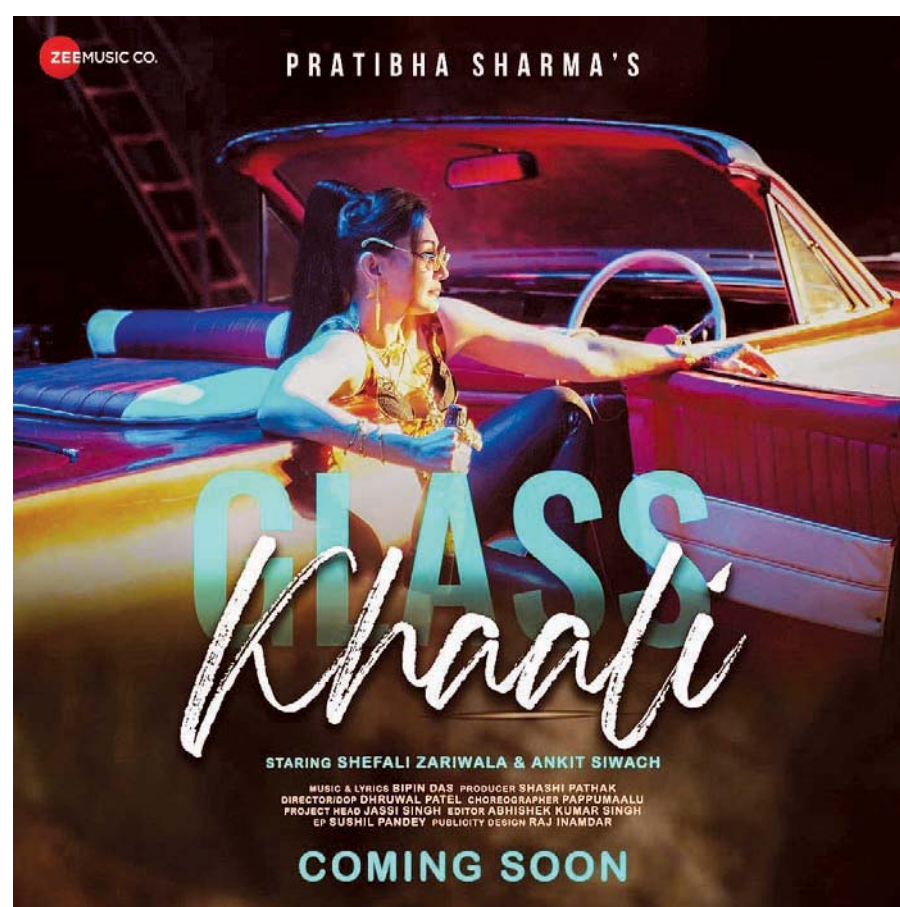
A singer whose voice is said to best suit Deepika Padukone is an aspiring playback singer in Hollywood.

"I aim high and strive to reach the destination with full zeal and diligence. I aspire to become a playback singer and work with some renowned names in the industry. I would also want to try the Punjabi songs as I feel there is tremendous scope in Punjabi cinema for singers and I have that ardour while I sing that can bring life to a song. I am also open to connecting to the audience and so willing to accept offers for stage performances.

Now her dream is to work with legends of music such as AR Rahman, Pritam da, Amit Trivedi and Shankar Mahadevan.

She has her hopes pinned on the Oman audience which has a group of sound Bollywood lovers.

"I would love to promote this song in Oman too and I know people here will love this dance number," she adds.



when life gives you a lemon, you make lemonade and go for bottoms-up. The Glass Khaali is about dancing through your day-to-day problems."

Before crooning original songs, Pratibha Sharma broke the Internet with back to back hit cover songs.

to educate herself. After completing her Master's in English honours, she moved to Dubai with her husband.

"But I always wanted to sing, with little effort, I got back in the groove and started singing cover songs. I moved back to Mumbai recently to pursue my dream,