

WHO approves 'health for peace' initiative proposed by Oman and Switzerland

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Executive Board approved a proposal presented by the Sultanate of Oman and Switzerland on the health for peace initiative, as part of the 150th session of the WHO Executive Board which concluded in Geneva, Switzerland, on Saturday. **SEE P3**



P10

AL ATIYAH SECURES SEVENTH CAREER VICTORY AT OMAN RALLY



P13

CAPITAL MARKET AUTHORITY MOVES TO REGULATE CRYPTOCURRENCIES



P20

FILM EXPLORES HOW LOCAL FARMERS TURN TO SUGARCANE FOR A LIVING



MUSCAT

SQU TO IMPLEMENT DISTANCE LEARNING

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has decided to implement the distance learning system for the next two weeks for students of all colleges. SQU excluded postgraduate students and clinical courses that require direct application in the training places in the College of Nursing and the third stage in the College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

SEE P5

BEIRUT

AOUN SEES NO REASON TO DELAY POLLS

Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Saturday he saw no reason for a delay to parliamentary elections in May after three-times former prime minister Saad al Hariri announced he was boycotting the vote and stepping away from politics. Hariri has been Lebanon's leading politician since inheriting the mantle of his father, Rafik al Hariri, after his assassination in 2005.

SEE P6

NATIONAL TEAM TO COMPETE IN TOUR OF OMAN



The 11th edition of the Tour of Oman will be held from February 10 to 15, returning to the international calendar after a two-year hiatus. A balanced route with opportunities for fast riders, attackers and climbers, it will see the peloton climb up the iconic Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) for the 10th time in the history of the race. For the first time, the Oman National Team will participate alongside seven WorldTeams, nine ProTeams and one Continental Team. **REPORT ON P3**

Heritage minister to take part in Paris meeting of ALIPH

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Culture, will take part in the 2nd Donors' Conference of the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH), scheduled to be held at the Louvre Museum in Paris on Monday under the patronage of French President Emmanuel Macron. The

conference brings together a number of leaders and officials from regional and international organisations to enable heritage sustainability in areas of armed conflict with the aim of finding joint international cooperation to face the growing challenges through the development of effective initiatives and programmes that would ensure the protection of heritage in the targeted and affected areas. — ONA

READ IN

OPINION

ART THAT UNSPOOLS THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

TAUSIF NOOR

P7



A MILE IN THEIR SHOES

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

P8

INSIDE



BIDEN TO SEND TROOPS TO EASTERN EUROPE

P6



NEW LE PEN FAMILY FEUD LOOMS AHEAD OF ELECTION

P9

More citizens find jobs; Retirees join pvt sector

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Nearly 28,000 Omanis moved from a job in 2021, while another 40,000 found employment for the first time in 2021.

Replying to questions during an interaction on Thursday, Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, the Minister of Labour, said that there were 65,000 job-seekers at the start of 2021, which went up to 90,000 as over 30,000 fresh graduates entered the market, looking for jobs.

On the recent circular that allowed the private sector to employ expatriates aged 60 and above, the minister said that if a company has achieved the Omanisation rate and if there is not enough demand from citizens, it can get the work permit of those employees renewed. He said the private sector has accommodated several employees who retired from the government sector last year.

Sources in the Ministry of Labour told the *Observer* that the private sector would not be stopped from having the right candidate (even if he is an expatriate) provided they stick to their commitments to the national mission of creating jobs and opportunities for citizens.

It may be noted that the government has taken several steps to employ citizens by reserving jobs such as managerial posts at petrol stations, in optical stores, drivers of vehicles transporting fuel, agricultural materials,

The private sector would not be stopped from having the right candidate (even if he is an expatriate) provided they stick to their Omanisation targets

and foodstuff, administrative and financial roles in insurance companies, sales, accounting, management and finance jobs in commercial complexes, and auditor positions in car agencies and companies that sell automobile spare parts.

The government decided to open some professions in supermarkets and hypermarkets for citizens, which has been well received.

"Omanis have adjusted well to some professions in supermarkets, especially at cash counters and in money exchanges. This shows that youngsters are ready to work if given opportunities as per their abilities and skills", said Khalid, employed as a supervisor with a popular hypermarket group.

The Ministry of Labour has been signing agreements with the private sector to train job-seekers to meet the requirements of their professions. "The authorities should not just focus on numbers, which is important but should also ensure that the efficiency and productivity of various sectors are maintained at all times", said a senior manager of a head hunting firm.

Population of Oman up 1.04 per cent at 4.52m

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's population has increased by 1.04 per cent to 4,527,446 at the end of 2021 compared to 4,481,042 in 2020, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The NCSI statistics showed that the Omani population made up 61.94 per cent of the total population at 2,804,117 while the expat population accounted for 38.06 per cent at 2,723,329.

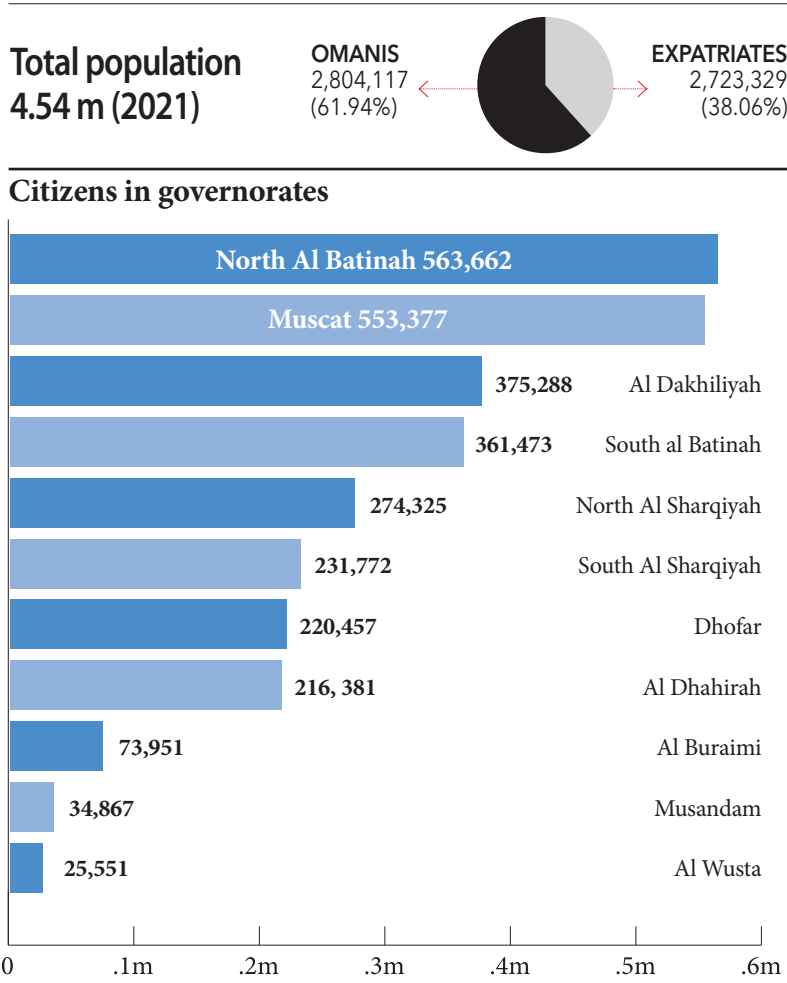
The Muscat Governorate accounted for the largest number of the population (29 per cent) with a total of 1,311,686 including 758,309 expatriates representing 57.8 per cent of its total population.

The number of Omanis in North Al Batinah Governorate reached 563,662 representing 20.1 per cent of the total Omani population, followed by Muscat Governorate with per cent 553,377 representing 19.7 of the Omani population, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate 375,288 (13.38 per cent), while South Al Batinah came in the fourth place with 361,473.

Dhofar Governorate has a total population of 420,325 of whom 220,457 are Omanis representing 52.4 per cent while expatriates made up 47.6 per cent (199,867).

Al Buraimi Governorate recorded a population decrease by 1.37 per cent due to a drop in the number of expatriates who accounted for 46,421 or 38.56 per cent while Omanis represented 73,951 (61.44 per cent) of the total population of the governorate which is 120,372.

The total population of Al



Dakhiliyah Governorate increased in December of last year by 1.94 per cent compared to November of the same year to reach 488,659 of whom 475,288 are Omanis and 113,371 are expatriates.

The population of South Al Batinah Governorate increased by 2 per cent to 475,763 of whom 361,473 are Omanis and 114,290 are expatriates.

South Al Sharqiyah Governorate has a total population of 322,306 of whom 231,772 are Omanis and 90,534 are expatri-

ates. Musandam Governorate recorded the least number of population with 49,830 of whom 34,867 are Omanis and 14,963 are expatriates. North Al Sharqiyah Governorate has a total population of 274,325 including 197,347 Omanis and 76,978 expatriates.

Al Dhahirah Governorate has a total population of 216,381 of whom 166,372 are Omanis and 50,009 are expatriates.

Al Wusta Governorate has a total population of 52,967 including 25,551 Omanis and 27,416 expatriates. — ONA



Gulf Security 3 drill ends in Saudi

DHAHRAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Royal Oman Police (ROP), concluded its participation in the exercise Gulf Security 3, held in eastern Saudi Arabia in the presence of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The concluding ceremony was held under the patronage of Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif al Saud, Minister of Interior of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Earlier, the minister of interior and his delegation were received upon arrival at King Abdulaziz Air Base by Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif al Saud and Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the KSA. — ONA



Return airfare 7 times high on some routes

DHAKA - MUSCAT ONE-WAY FARE MORE THAN RO 350

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With fares hovering around seven times higher than the usual average fare, many expatriates planning to come back are in a fix. They call it the most expensive holiday exposure after coming to work in a foreign country.

An average fare from any Bangladesh sector to Muscat is around RO 350 and above, which is far from affordable for the majority, who get less salary and have salary cuts in the wake of the pandemic.

“My family of five has been on vacation in Dhaka for the last three months. Their return back is causing a huge hole in my pocket. I’m clueless when these rates would come down,” lamented Rabiul Islam, an active social worker in the capital area.

Non-season, the fares would go as low as RO 40 or less. The expatriates, who are suffering from high airfares, call the current crisis a tool to cash in on those returning after holidays.

Travel demand is cited as the reason behind the rise in fares. Astonishingly, however, there are fewer takers for return tickets from any of the Asian sectors, it is learnt.



“An average fare from Dhaka or Chittagong to Muscat is about RO 350 and above, and the fare is unchanged despite the low demand these days,” a travel agent has admitted.

The situation with other countries is not any different. Travelling from many Indian sectors is also putting expatriates in a dilemma. An average ticket from a south Indian sector is around RO 170 which is four times higher than the normal.

“I’ve been postponing my travel back to Oman as fares are hovering around RO 170 and with a family of five, I must be selling huge amount to afford the tickets,” says Shamsheer Usman, who runs coffee shops

in the interior villages.

Each year, after the holiday seasons, fares tend to go high. A similar rise was witnessed in July-August 2021 when fares between Oman and South Asian countries went sky-high after airlines started bookings for September.

A one-way Oman Air ticket from Kochi to Muscat rose to a whopping RO 340, while the Thiruvananthapuram-Muscat seat was sold for RO 260 for the first week of September.

Kozhikode-Muscat flight on budget carriers ranged between RO 260 and RO 290.

The fares to Bangladesh capital Dhaka rose around RO 250 on US Bangla and about RO 260 on Biman Bangladesh.

TENDER NOTICE

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

Oman Development Bank SAOC seeks tenders for the following services from reputed insurance companies approved by the Capital Market Authority, Sultanate of Oman.

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
2022/1	1. Medical insurance for bank employees and their families	500 RO Non-Refundable	2022/02/02	2022/02/10
	2. Insurance on the bank assets			
	3. Vehicle insurance			
	4. Housing Loan Insurance			
	5. Fidelity insurance			

- Interested companies may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Human Recourses Department) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry on any working day (Sunday to Wednesday) from 30th of January to 2nd of February between 8 AM and 2 PM. Tender fees are non-refundable.
- The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to HR Manager, Oman Development Bank SAOC, should be submitted to the HR Department at Third Floor by 2.00 PM on or before 10/02/2022.
- Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee’s decision shall be final and binding.
- The tender fees are paid through direct deposit in the Oman Development Bank account shown below, and a copy of the deposit receipt and a copy of the commercial register with the name of the tender is mentioned to receive the tender conditions brochure.

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

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726941 j.yaqoobi@odb.om www.odb.om

1ST ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Unique Publication Opportunity: Partner Journals

Theme: Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses

Date: March 28 - March 30, 2022

Call for papers

Submission Deadline: Feb 21, 2022

Virtual Conference

ORGANIZED BY

MODERN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & SCIENCE, MUSCAT, OMAN

In collaboration with

Centre for research on economic relations, Mid Sweden University, Sweden

Oxford Educational Research and Training (OXERT), United Kingdom

Indian Economic Association, India

Faculty of Commerce, Aligarh Muslim University, India

Amity University - Gwalior, India

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY AIM:

The conference is inspired from the economic and sustainability critical challenges facing the world after Covid pandemic, and therefore the aim of the conference is to share the information and knowledge related to economic transformation and sustainability and various emerging businesses to support world economic growth in a global context.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- To initiate a dialogue and discussion on sustainability and development.
- To explore and explore opportunities to combat the emerging challenges on sustainability and economic front.
- To develop a culture of research and dialogue among the Omani population by attracting global researchers.
- To deliberate on emerging business trends and ideas.

BENEFITS:

- Latest Research Trends
- Global Audience and Speakers
- Best Paper Award for each track
- Opportunity to Publish

TOPICS:

With an exciting theme (Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses) and clearly defined objectives for the upcoming 1st Economic Transformation and Sustainability international conference, the tentative sub-themes/tracks are but not limited to:

Track 1: Sustainable Economic Development

Track 2: Agriculture, Food Management & its impact on Economy

Track 3: Water Management

Track 4: Entrepreneurial interventions and innovation

Track 5: Emerging Business Practices

Track 6: Digital transformation in financial services

Track 7: Digital Media and Communication

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

- Full Paper Submission: Feb 21, 2022
- Paper Acceptance Notification: Mar 07, 2022
- Final Paper Submission: Mar 14, 2022
- Conference Presentation: Mar 28 - Mar 30, 2022

REGISTRATION FEES

- Category 1: USD 55 for all Participants
- Category 2: USD 40 for Students, Staff, members from Collaborating Institutions, life members of IEA and OXERT

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Authors are invited to submit through conference submission system, please check www.etsiconf.com

For more information

Contact us via the following emails:
For General information: info@etsiconf.com
For authors inquires: author@etsiconf.com



Follow us on **facebook**
omanobserver

oman

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

SUNDAY | JANUARY 30 | 2022

3



WHO approves ‘health for peace’ initiative mooted by Oman, Swiss

GENEVA: The World Health Organization's (WHO) Executive Board approved a proposal presented by the Sultanate of Oman and Switzerland on the health for peace initiative, as part of the 150th session of the WHO Executive Board which concluded in Geneva, Switzerland, on Saturday.

The initiative received great support from the member states.

The health for peace initiative seeks to enhance and activate links between health,

social cohesion and peace by focusing on the unique role that can be played by the public health programmes in bringing together different groups and building trust in all components of peace.

The initiative supports principles related to the success of health programmes and the pursuit to realise the benefits of peace through equity, inclusion, participation and leadership.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Dr Ahmed bin

Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

On its closing day, the session discussed several topics including global health sector strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted diseases and reviewed ways of strengthening WHO's efficiency in providing countries with better support.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi said that the health for peace initiative is in line with the policies of the Sultanate of Oman which strives for the good and in

the interests of the whole mankind, noting that preparations for this initiative began in 2019 at sideline meetings with Switzerland.

The minister of health stressed the importance of health as a bridge to peace as the initiative was approved by all member states of the WHO Executive Board who voiced their commendation for this initiative and its objectives. He noted that this initiative is a new addition to the Sultanate of Oman's record of positive initiatives. — ONA

Hopes of Omicron wave's slowdown

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Health authorities and the people must be hoping that the Omicron wave in the country has peaked, with chances of a slowdown in the number of daily cases.

It may be noted that the decision announced by the Supreme Committee was for two weeks, starting January 23, to be reviewed if needed.

Last week, the Sultanate of Oman reported 12,495 cases, including nine deaths, despite reports that the Omicron is less lethal for those vaccinated.

As of Thursday, another worrying factor was that hospitals had 213 inpatients, including 30 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

Health experts have warned it is not yet time to keep guard down as the patients are still being admitted to hospitals and even getting critical.

With several countries in the European Union having eased restrictions assuming that the worst is over, the World Health Organization (WHO)

warned that Omicron can pose some threats to the elderly with chronic illness and those who are not vaccinated.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has been urging the target groups to get boosters, especially those at risk.

Booster doses are provided free to citizens at MoH health centres, while residents get at the Old Muscat Airport building or dedicated centres in different governorates.

Around 90 per cent of the Covid deaths are currently among unvaccinated people, according to the MoH.

Around 94 per cent of the total target population in the Sultanate of Oman, from the age of 12 years and above, have received at least one dose of vaccine.

The percentage of those who received two doses is 87 per cent.

Around 90 per cent of the deaths were among unvaccinated people, while the death rate among vaccinated people was very low — 7.5 per cent of those who received one dose and 2.5 per cent of those who received two doses.

Tour of Oman returns for 2022 edition

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 29

The 11th edition of the Tour of Oman will be held from February 10 to 15, returning to the international calendar after a two-year hiatus.

A balanced route with opportunities for fast riders, attackers, and climbers, it will see the peloton climb up the iconic Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) for the 10th time in the history of the race.

For the first time, the Oman National Team will participate alongside seven WorldTeams, nine ProTeams, and one Continental Team.

Once again, Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) rises up on the horizon of professional cycling. In 2022, the Tour of Oman and its iconic roads return to the international calendar with the 11th edition of the race, featuring six stages from February 10 to 15. The Sultanate of Oman and its unique landscape have offered spectacular racing since cycling icon Fabian Cancellara became the first overall winner in 2010. Tour de France winners Christopher Froome and Vincenzo Nibali also feature in a star-studded list of winners, and the Kazakh star Alexey Lutsenko took the last two editions.

Organised in conjunction with Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO), the race

is part of the UCI ProSeries of events. For its much-anticipated return following two years of cancellation, 18 teams from four continents will be heading to the shores of the Gulf of Oman including seven WorldTeams, nine ProTeams, and one Continental Team. Also, for the first time in the history of the race, the Oman National Team will participate, granting a select team of local riders the opportunity to race against some of the strongest squads in the world.

The 891 km route highlights the diversity of terrain and landscapes that define the easternmost country on the Arabian Peninsula. The first stage will start from the inlands, in front of the Al Rustaq Fort, and head to Muscat with a finish at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre. Riders will then pass through the port of Suhar, in the North of the country (stage 2), and iconic venues such as the Sultan Qaboos University (stage 3), the Royal Opera House Muscat (stage 4), Samayil (stage 5) and Al Mouj Muscat (stage 6). Sprinters will have three clear opportunities and the stages leading to Qurayat (with a finish atop a 2.8km climb at 6.5%), the Royal Opera House Muscat (after a punchy climb of Bausher-Al Amerat) and Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain, 5.7km at 10.5%) will ignite a tight battle for the final victory.



For the first time, the Oman National Team will participate alongside seven WorldTeams, nine ProTeams, and one Continental Team

Following the six days of action, traditional celebrations will be held in the nation's capital, Muscat.

Discussing the return of the race to Muscat, Basil bin Ahmed bin Amir al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth said, "We're delighted that we're once again

able to host this fantastic event. I'm particularly proud of our Oman National Team. Not only will they be competing in the Tour of Oman for the first time, but they will also be attending a training camp in France this summer, aiming to take their abilities to new heights. But inspiring the youth of our country to compete at a global level is only one benefit — the Tour of Oman also brings with it the eyes of the world, giving us a chance to show what our country can offer as a destination, not only for sports, but as a one-of-a-kind travel destination as well. Particularly after the challenges of the past two years, it's wonderful to be hosting events like this once again."





How far is curbs-free travel?

Ease in some restrictions is giving hope to the travel freaks. Nearly two years after the international curbs on travel were imposed, the IATA has urged the governments to accelerate relaxation in travel restrictions as Covid-19 is assuming the status of ‘endemic’ from ‘pandemic’

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

One of the few things that people dreamt of during the pandemic was to travel across the geographical boundaries fearlessly and to feel the pleasure of visiting their near and dear ones. They heard about so many countries which enticed them to know their cultures as well. They wanted to renew their love for tourism.

One restriction after another dashed their dreams, of course, due to the surge in Covid-19 cases putting the travel industry in shambles worldwide.

Ease in some restrictions, however, is giving hope to the travel freaks. They are heaving a sigh of relief. Nearly two years after the international curbs on travel were imposed, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) has urged the governments to accelerate relaxation in travel restrictions as Covid-19 is assuming the status of ‘endemic’ from ‘pandemic’.

The IATA mandate on easing travel restrictions means removing all travel barriers, including quarantine and testing for those who are fully vaccinated with World Health Organization (WHO)-approved vaccines.

Additionally, it has suggested that quarantine-free travel for non-vaccinated travellers with a negative pre-departure antigen test result should be enabled to save the traveller’s time and money.

Accelerating the easing of travel restrictions is sought in recognition that travellers pose no greater risk for Covid-19 spread than already exists in the general population.

Also, with the experience of the Omicron variant, there is mounting scientific evidence, and opinion opposing the targeting of travellers with restrictions and country bans to control the spread of Covid-19. IATA observes that the measures have not worked.

“Today, Omicron is present in all parts of the world. That’s why travel, with very few exceptions, does not increase the risk to general populations. The billions spent on testing travellers would be far more effective if allocated to vaccine distribution or strengthening healthcare systems”, said Willie Walsh, IATA’s Director General, during an online press conference.

A recently published study by Oxera and Edge Health demonstrated the “extremely limited” impact of travel restrictions on controlling the spread of Omicron has found that if the countries which took extra measures with respect to Omicron had been in place just

before the identification of the variant, the peak of the Omicron wave would have been delayed by just five days with three per cent fewer cases.

Additionally, the absence of any testing measures for travellers would have seen the Omicron wave peak seven days earlier with an overall 8 per cent increase in cases.

Omicron is highly prevalent in various countries. If all travel testing requirements were removed, there would be no impact on Omicron case numbers or hospitalisations, according to the IATA.

“It is clear that travel restrictions in any part of the world have had little impact on the spread of Covid-19, including the Omicron variant. The UK, France and Switzerland have recognised this and are the first to remove travel restriction measures. More governments need to follow their lead. Accelerating the removal of travel restrictions will be a major step towards living with the virus”, said Walsh.

The WHO Emergency Committee has recommended either lifting or easing international traffic bans as they do not provide added value and continue to contribute to the economic and social stress experienced by States. Furthermore, the failure of travel restrictions introduced after the detection and reporting of the Omicron variant to limit the international spread of Omicron demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such measures over time.

“Easing travel restrictions to or from any country is a great step forward in fighting the battle against the variant together. People are now used to the reasons and precautions of the Corona variants and are highly responsible nowadays. Opening up more avenues for the tourism industry would be a welcome move on any count”, says tourism expert Renee Johnson.



New discoveries in Bisya by Palaeolithic exploration

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JAN 29

The Palaeolithic exploration of the French Archaeological Mission, led by Dr Amir Beshkani, has discovered an important prehistoric site in Al Ma'amoor. Some lithic artefacts were found on the surface and, for the first time in central Oman, excavations led on the site revealed stone tools in their stratigraphic context.

This unique discovery sheds light on 12,000 years old habitation in the area, helping to learn more about the prehistoric populations of Oman.

The French Archaeological Mission in central Oman works in the region of Bisya (Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate) in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman. Supported by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French National Research Centre and the Paris-Sorbonne University, the team is co-headed by Dr Martin Sauvage and Dr Mathilde Jean.

The scientific activities of the team aim at documenting the rich heritage of Oman. Several periods are investigated, from the prehistoric times (Palaeolithic) to the Early Bronze Age and the birth of Omani culture.

The team also works at Al Dhabi, on an Early Bronze Age site. This important site gathering monumental architecture,



settlement and tombs is a unique opportunity to understand the roots of the history of central Oman. The mapping of the whole site (Dr Martin Sauvage) by aerial views, topography and on-site drawing highlights the organisation of the main tower on the hill (50m in diametres) and of the settlement walls on the foothills.

Under the supervision of Dr Olivia Munoz, two tombs from the Hafit period (3200-2700 BC)

were excavated. One of them was reused during the Umm an-Nar period (2700-2000 BC) and delivered human bones, local and imported pottery as well as shell and cornelian beads. The tombs show the long-distance connection between Oman (ancient Majan), Iran and the Indus valley since that time.

The excavation mainly focused on the settlement (Dr Mathilde Jean). A 150 m2 area was investigated, unearthing several

The French Archaeological Mission in central Oman works in the region of Bisya (Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate) in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman



buildings made of stone and mudbrick from the Umm an-Nar period (2700-2000 BC). Several rooms were found, including a possible courtyard, probably forming a house.

Objects from the daily life were found on the floor of the building, including pottery and grinding stones for preparing food. Under this main occupation, older levels were also excavated: a number of pits and fireplaces probably belonging to more ancient periods

that still have to be determined using radiocarbon dating.

The history of Al Dhabi and the region of Bisya is at least 5,000 years old.

This is the time when ancient populations become sedentary, when agriculture and oasis were born.

The role of Al Dhabi in this rich history is still to be precisely determined but the site is already an important place for the birth of Omani culture.

SQU to implement distance learning system

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has decided to implement the distance learning system for the next two weeks for students of all colleges. SQU excluded post-

graduate students and clinical courses that require direct application in the training places in the College of Nursing and the third stage in the College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The decision comes based on developments related to the spread of Covid-19 and the latest data, which indicate an increase in the number of cases in the Sultanate of Oman.



English course conducted for local community

MUSCAT: The English Language Centre of UTAS-Ibri has conducted a General English course as a service to the local community.

The course duration was five days, from January 9 to 13. Around 20 students attended the course.

They were from different government bodies in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The course was delivered by three lecturers from the centre. On the last day of the course, Dr Sultan al Ghafri, HOS-ELP, congratulated the students on completing the General English course and distributed certificates of participation hoping that they would use English with adequate proficiency in their workplaces.



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing	Tender Specification Fees
CCCRC/T/003/2022	Supply and Installation of Air Compressors	01/02/2022	07/02/2022	OMR 25

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre – Purchase Department.

Quotations should be emailed to purchase@cccrc.gov.om on or before 07 February 2022 before 10:00 AM. with subject "CCCRC/T/003/2022 - Supply and installation of Air compressors"

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



MINISTRY OF HEALTH ROYAL HOSPITAL ANNOUCEMENT FOR TENDER



THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF ROYAL HOSPITAL INVITE SPECIALIZED COMPANIES TO SUBMIT TENDER

TENDER NO	DESCRIPTION	LAST DATE FOR COLLECTION OF TENDER DOCUMENT	CLOSING TIME/ DAY/DATE	ELIGIBILITY	TENDER FEE (NON- REFUNDABLE)
20/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-3	SUPPLY OF ELECTRICAL SPARE PARTS	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
22/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-5	SUPPLY OF ELECTRONICS SPARE PARTS	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
23/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-6	SUPPLY OF ELECTRICAL SPARE PARTS	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
24/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-7	SUPPLY OF MECHANICAL SPARE PARTS	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
21/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-4	SUPPLY & INSTALLATION OF CCTV CAMERA	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS
59/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-10	MODIFICATION OF ROYAL HOSPITAL RENAL DIALYSIS WATER LINE	03/02/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON TUESDAY 22/02/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD EXCELLENT GRADE	25 RIALS
7/2022/ MOH/ DGRHP-11	SUPPLY OF REAGENTS FOR MICROBIOLOGY LABORATORY OF THE ROYAL HOSPITAL	24/01/2022	BEFORE 10 AM ON MONDAY 31/01/2022	SPECIALIZED COMPANIES REGISTERED WITH TENDER BOARD	25 RIALS

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Finance-Royal Hospital one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Biden to send troops to eastern Europe

UKRAINE DIPLOMACY PUSH

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is maintaining pressure on Russian leader Vladimir Putin over Ukraine after announcing a small troop deployment to eastern Europe even as top Pentagon officials backed a renewed push for diplomacy.

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Western leaders to avoid stirring “panic” over the massive Russian troop buildup on his country’s borders, Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed on the need for de-escalation.

Neither Putin nor his European and American counterparts had until now appeared ready to give ground in the weeks-long crisis, the worst in decades between

Russia and the West.

But according to a Macron aide, Putin told the French leader in a call lasting more than an hour that he had “no offensive plans.”

In Washington, Biden nevertheless said on Friday he would soon send a small number of US troops to bolster the Nato presence in eastern Europe as tensions remain heightened.

The United States already has tens of thousands of troops stationed across mostly Western Europe.

At the Pentagon, top officials urged a focus on diplomacy while saying that Russia now had enough troops and equipment in place to threaten the whole of Ukraine.

Any such conflict, warned the top US general, Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley, would be “horrific” for both sides.



A reservist of the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces takes part in military exercises on the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine. — Reuters

“If that was unleashed on Ukraine, it would be significant, very significant, and it would result in a significant amount of casualties,” Milley said.

But speaking alongside Milley, Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said there “is still time and space for diplomacy.”

“Mr Putin can do the right thing as well,” said Austin. “There is no reason that this situation has to devolve into conflict.”

During his talks with Macron, Putin “expressed no offensive plans and said he wanted to continue the talks with France and our allies,” the aide to the French president said.

Their conversation “enabled us to agree on the need for a de-escalation,” the aide told journalists. Putin “said very clearly that he did not want confrontation.” — AFP



Buddhist monks take part in the funeral of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Zen Buddhist monk, poet and peace activist after he died aged 95, at Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, Vietnam. — Reuters

Vietnamese bid farewell to father of mindfulness

HUE, Vietnam: Tens of thousands of Vietnamese on Saturday bade farewell to the late monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh — one of the world’s most influential religious leaders — ahead of his cremation in the country’s Buddhist heartland.

The Zen master, who was credited with bringing mindfulness to the West and whose reach in Buddhism was seen as second only to the Dalai Lama, died aged 95 a week ago at the Tu Hieu Pagoda in the central city of Hue.

His remains were brought to an open cremation site on Saturday morning, followed by a crowd of tens of thousands including Buddhist monks in yellow and brown robes and followers dressed in grey. The procession chanted Buddhist prayers.

“We must bid farewell to our master. He plays an important role in my family’s life, helping us through our most difficult moments,” said Do Quan, a follower who travelled from Hanoi with his wife and son.

Nam Anh, 22, said the monk was a national treasure.

“I am really very proud that Vietnam has such an outstanding figure who had great influence across the world.”

Widely known as the father of mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote more than 100 books on the practice and hosted retreats worldwide.

Born in 1926, Thich Nhat Hanh was ordained aged 16 and went on to found a youth school which trained volunteers to build clinics and infrastructure in villages blighted by war. — AFP

Japan to nominate mines for Unesco list

TOKYO: Japan is set to nominate several mines for consideration as world heritage sites by Unesco, its prime minister said on Friday, despite protests from South Korea that the move is inappropriate as forced labourers were used there in World War Two.

Japan’s cultural affairs agency selected the gold and silver mines on the island of Sado as candidates for listing by the United Nations cultural organisation in December, citing the development of traditional handcraft techniques. The site was also the world’s top producer of gold in the 17th century, according to the agency.

Adding to already fraught bilateral relations, South Korea’s foreign ministry protested the move, saying Korean labourers were forced to work there during Japan’s 1910-1945 colonisation of the Korean peninsula, including during World War Two.

On Friday in Seoul, South Korea’s Second Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-moon formally summoned Japanese Ambassador Aiboshi Koichi to lodge a protest over Tokyo’s decision to go ahead while “ignoring the painful history of forced labour for Koreans,” the foreign ministry said in a statement. — Reuters

Lebanon’s president sees no reason to delay polls

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Saturday he saw no reason for a delay to parliamentary elections in May after three-times former prime minister Saad al Hariri announced he was boycotting the vote and stepping away from politics.

Hariri has been Lebanon’s leading politician since inheriting the mantle of his father, Rafik al Hariri, after his assassination in 2005.

The move opens a new phase in Lebanon’s sectarian politics and adds to the uncertainties facing a country suffering a financial meltdown that marks the biggest threat to stability since a 1975-90 civil war.

Aoun, the Maronite Christian president, was speaking after meeting Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, Lebanon’s senior cleric.

“I emphasised to His Eminence the Mufti the role played by the honourable community in preserving Lebanon’s unity and political diversity, and the importance of participation with all components of Lebanon in national and political life,” Aoun said.

“We are carrying out all the necessary preparations for holding the elections on time, and I do not see any reason for delaying them.”

Western states want the vote to go ahead on time. Together with its allies, the Hizbullah, which is



Lebanon's President Michel Aoun meets with Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, Lebanon's senior cleric in Beirut. — Reuters

designated a fighter group by the United States, won a parliamentary majority in 2018.

A boycott by Hariri and his Future Movement will affect the 20 seats they won in 2018, and many more won by other groups in local alliances with Future.

On Friday, Saad’s older brother, Bahaa, signalled he was entering politics, saying he would “continue the journey” of his father.

He plans to support candidates but will not be running himself, his media adviser said. Bahaa has been fiercely critical of Hizbullah, and the compromising approach adopted by Saad towards the group in the later years of his career.

US TO REROUTE \$67M IN AID: The US plans to reroute \$67 million of military assistance for

Lebanon’s armed forces to support members of the military as the country grapples with financial meltdown.

According to a notification sent to Congress, the State Department intends to change the content of previously appropriated foreign military funding for Lebanon to include “livelihood support” for members of the Lebanese military, citing economic turmoil as well as social unrest.

“Livelihood support for (armed forces) members will strengthen their operational readiness, mitigate absenteeism, and thus enable LAF members to continue fulfilling key security functions needed to stave off a further decline in stability,” said the notification to Congress, seen by Reuters. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MANILA

Philippines to re-open to vaccinated foreign tourists

The Philippines will re-open to fully vaccinated tourists from most countries on February 10 and lift quarantine requirements, officials said, nearly two years after closing its borders to contain the coronavirus.

Tourism operators across the archipelago nation famed for its beaches and dive spots have been devastated by a plunge in international visitors and restrictions on domestic travel.

Their misery was worsened by a super typhoon that smashed into



the country in December, wiping out resorts, restaurants and bars in popular tourist destinations.

“The tourism industry can now recover and it can contribute big to jobs, livelihoods and the country’s economic growth.”

BANGKOK

Thai beach declared disaster area after oil spill

A beach in eastern Thailand was declared a disaster area on Saturday as oil leaking from an underwater pipeline in the Gulf of Thailand continued to wash ashore and blacken the sand.

The leak from the pipeline owned by Star Petroleum Refining Public Company Limited (SPRC) started late on Tuesday and was brought under control a day later after spilling an estimated 50,000 litres of oil into the ocean 20 km from the country’s industrialised eastern



seaboard.

Some of the oil reached the shoreline at Mae Ramphueng beach in Rayong province late on Friday after spreading over 47 sq km of sea in the gulf.

HONIARA

Australia flies medical team to Covid-hit Solomons

Australia flew a small team of emergency medical specialists to Honiara after the Solomon Islands requested help in battling a worsening outbreak of Covid-19. Australian officials said the team of eight experts landed in the capital alongside a shipment of more than 37,000 vaccine doses.

“The multi-disciplinary team includes specialists in emergency medicine, infectious disease control, logistics and occupational therapy,” the



foreign affairs department said in a statement. “The Australian government is committed to standing with the people of Solomon Islands as they respond to and recover from Covid-19.”

Stunted education dims prospects for India’s economy and its youth

EMILY SCHMALL & SAMEER YASIR

Some children have forgotten the alphabet or what their classrooms look like. Others have dropped out of school entirely, scrounging for work and unlikely to ever resume their studies.

For years, India has been counting on its vast pool of young people as a wellspring of future growth, a “demographic dividend”, as many liked to put it. Now, after two years of the coronavirus pandemic, it is looking more like a lost generation, crushing the middle-class dreams of families looking for better opportunities for their children.

Hundreds of millions of students across India have received little to no in-person instruction with schools intermittently shut down since the start of the pandemic. As pandemic restrictions are lifted, then reimposed, schools are often the first places to close and the last to reopen.

Mahesh Davar, a farmhand in central India, is pained to see his young sons working beside him. He and his wife toiled in the fields to send their boys, now ages 12 and 14, to school, hoping it would secure them better jobs and easier lives.

Their education effectively ended almost two years ago, when schools shifted online; the family lacked the money for Internet access. Around the globe, more than 120 million children have faced the same situation, according to the United Nations.

“Poor people like us fight everyday to keep the stove burning”, Davar said. “Tell me how and where we will afford the money for mobile phones?”

Until the pandemic, India was pulling millions of people out of poverty, pinning its hopes of greater economic growth on education. That building block for the future is now eroding, threatening to upend India’s hard-fought progress and condemn another generation to manual, off-the-books labour.

“In India, the numbers are mind-numbing”, said Poonam Muttreja, head of Population Foundation of India, an advocacy group in New Delhi. “Gender and other inequalities are widening, and we’ll have much more of a development deficit in the years to come.”

Many countries are weighing the trade-offs between children’s education and public health. As omicron has spread across the United States and Europe, officials have struggled to figure out how and when to keep schools open.

In South Asia, Sri Lanka has decided against closing schools, while in Nepal, they are shut until at least the end of this month, despite the near impossibility of remote instruction in the Himalayan countryside. Swamped with new infections, Bangladesh reversed an earlier decision to allow vaccinated pupils to attend class, closing schools down for all students.

The repercussions can be especially dire in South Asia. Girls are entering into child marriages, and boys have abandoned their education to work

The repercussions can be especially dire in South Asia. Girls are entering into child marriages, and boys have abandoned their education to work



Anuradha Maindola cooks while overseeing the schoolwork of her children Rudra and Ishita, who Maindola estimates have spent only about a month attending school in person since March 2020, at their home in Dehradun.

India’s working-age population is projected to peak at 65 per cent in 2031 before it begins to decline. It’s a potential asset that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has celebrated, as recently as this month.

“The strength of the youth will take India to greater heights”, he declared at a youth festival.

Typically, a large share of the population entering the workforce would be an economic boon. Now, it could prove a burden, as undereducated and underemployed people in a welfare state such as India end up consuming a larger share of resources, from free medicine to food subsidies.

The ranks of the underemployed are already swelling in India’s capital, New Delhi, which draws young people from villages across the country seeking economic opportunity. Many of them sleep on sidewalks, warm themselves next to big pots of boiling chai and stand every morning at a designated pickup place for daily labourers.

In a gritty corner in the old part of the city littered with clay teacups and spent beedis, Briju Kumar jostled with dozens of others hungry for a day’s work at a construction site. At 14, he abandoned online studies during a partial lockdown last year to contribute to the family’s finances.

“If schools open, I’m not sure I will go back. Only if there is no work”, he said.

His family migrated from Bihar, one of India’s poorest states, when Briju was in the fifth grade so that his father, who never attended school, could earn more money driving an auto rickshaw. Intermittent lockdowns forced

the elder Kumar off the roads and his son out of school.

Even before the pandemic, India’s education system was woefully inadequate, with many public schools in rural areas short of teachers and books. Less than half of students possess the reading and math skills to progress to the next grade.

Now, India’s spending on education — already far lower than wealthier countries — has been slashed even more. According to the World Bank, government spending on education fell from 4.4 per cent of gross domestic product in 2019 to 3.4 per cent in 2020.

With schools closed, more children are also going hungry. Many families rely on free school lunches to help meet their children’s nutritional needs.

During India’s first two waves of the pandemic, children were largely forgetting more than they learned, Unicef found. Armed with this data, Unicef has lobbied state governments, which oversee education, not to close schools.

But as Covid-19 infections soared in India, big cities closed schools again last month. Rural India followed suit.

Anuradha Maindola, a lawyer in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand, said her two children, Rudra and Ishita, had only spent about a month in physical classrooms since the Indian government’s first lockdown in March 2020.

She decided to have 8-year-old Ishita, who is struggling to read and write, repeat the first grade. “My children were learning nothing online”, she said.

Art that unspools the mysteries of the universe

TAUSIF NOOR

The past two years and counting, with their plague and political upheavals, have suggested that uncertainty is the order of the day. If it can be difficult to remember what pre-pandemic stability looked like, searching for signs to make sense of it all only feels right.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has turned to New York-based artist and designer Tauba Auerbach for answers. In characteristic fashion, Auerbach — a Bay Area native — has responded with further questions, doggedly seeking out new ways to induce tiny transformations in our perception of randomness.

Recognising that the very existence of randomness keeps us going, the artist has committed to a practice that maps the limits of what can possibly be known.

Since 2009, Auerbach — whose pronouns are they/them — has sustained a rigorous drive for investigating both scientific and spiritual concepts, drawing equal inspiration from the precision of mathematical proofs, the intuitive features of reiki (a form of energy healing), qi gong (a gentle system of movement) and the inherent entropy of the cosmos.

Consequently, Auerbach doesn’t stick to one medium, favouring instead an eclectic mix of painting, photography, design, music, sculpture and typography. Combining the curiosity of a novice with the nimbleness of an expert, Auerbach offers with each project a truly refreshing contribution to contemporary art — namely, the conviction that the world is still full of wonder.

That idea sits at the heart of “S v Z”, Auerbach’s first museum survey, which opened in December after some pandemic-induced delays. Organised by curators Jenny Gheith and Joseph Becker, the exhibition gathers about 16 years of Auerbach’s creative output across a single floor of the museum.

The show’s open-ended plan offers slightly angled, free-standing walls and vitrines that encourage visitors to take in Auerbach’s art nonchronologically, letting each facet of the 41-year-old artist’s practice speak for itself. At times, it’s difficult to keep the scope of this practice in mind: Works include a Bible in which all the text is rearranged in alphabetical order; album covers for musician friends such as Greg Fox and Meara O’Reilly; and publications made through their imprint, Diagonal Press.

Auerbach’s most recognisable works are a series of paintings titled “Fold” (2009-12). Three are on view here, and they work as a key to the artist’s sensibility: To make these paintings, Auerbach folded pieces of canvas to create deep creases, then unfurled the material and sprayed acrylic paint onto its surface. When stretched and hung, traces of the once 3D folded canvas is transformed into gradient patterns resulting in a textured surface of light and shadow.

The artist’s fixation on scientific theorems and rational systems can sometimes be frustrating. For the 2018 video “Pilot Wave Induction III”, Auerbach recorded droplets of silicone vibrating to various frequencies in the cone of a speaker to illustrate a (since-disproven) theory of quantum mechanics, which infers that a substance can’t exist in two materials at once.

Auerbach doesn't stick to one medium, favouring instead an eclectic mix of painting, photography, design, music, sculpture and typography

Near this installation hangs a set of fuzzy, multicolour abstract photographs, the “Static” series from 2009, which depict the insides of picture tubes. An adjoining gallery houses “7S, 7Z, 1s, 2Z.”

A large kinetic sculpture from 2019, made from twisted steel cables and soap solution, it continuously produces large bubbles modelled on fascia, the connective tissue that holds our bones and organs in place.

Although each of these pieces is mesmerising — hypnotic, even — I’m sceptical of their ambitions. They seem both too arcane and oversimplified, as if the artist were trading on the viewer’s scientific naivete, aiming to dazzle rather than guide us through the technical ideas at the core of the work.

This is what makes Auerbach a fascinating artist and this show a sleeper hit: Auerbach possesses a sense of humility about what we can know and executes experiments that revel in curiosity rather than end results.

At the centre of the exhibition sits the Auerglass Organ, a behemoth of an instrument built in 2009 by Auerbach and musician Cameron Mesirow, who performs under the name Glasser.

Fantastical, like something out of Willy Wonka’s factory, the instrument was designed to be played simultaneously by two performers who must carefully adjust their movements according to the rhythm of their partner.

Something clicked for me while watching their performance in the gallery. The colours in the “Fold” paintings seemed more iridescent; the abstract symbols and glyphs in Auerbach’s drawings appeared to pulse and vibrate.

A mile in their shoes



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Last week a young woman in her early thirties came to my clinic with her father. A few years ago, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a mental health condition that leaves the person battling severe mood swings that affect his or her social and occupational performances along with their quality of life.

After a short admission to a mental health unit, she was able to regain her health and get back to work. A few weeks later, she stopped taking her medication and came to my clinic feeling very depressed and lacking motivation to do anything.

Her father understood clearly that stopping medication was the main reason behind the return of depression. Both him and I were trying to understand why she would stop her medication when we had explained to her what would happen if she did that.

This situation made me reflect on the difficulties people with mental health problems face on a daily basis as they try to regain their strength and continue to take responsibility for their family, work and their future even when they are questioning what the point of all of this is.

People who experience mental health problems are often misunderstood and constantly judged by those around them so it's not uncommon for them to be called 'lazy,' 'attention seeker' and 'drama queen.' Such terms can even come from close friends and family.

Others would be so overprotective that the person feels smothered by his or her spouse or parent.

Sometimes the medications we prescribe have side effects like feeling sleepy or gaining weight, or lacking energy. These side effects do not occur all the time and not all

WE MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT OTHERS AND OURSELF ALL THE TIME, THESE JUDGMENTAL CAN HAVE NEGATIVE IMPACT TO OUR MENTAL WELL-BEING AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

patients experience them yet those who do find it difficult to get the balance between the good effects and side effects.

That is the reason why a good doctor communicates well with his or her patients. Being judgmental is a human nature, our brains tend to judge behaviours of others in order to make sense of the world around us. An English proverb says "You can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes."

Tells us not to be judgmental of others. From a psychological point of view, being judgmental means thinking, speaking, or behaving in a way that is critical of other people, condemning their ideas as bad, stupid or unworthy.

Sometimes we judge ourselves in a negative way which can lead to low self esteem, depression and anxiety. This is why being aware of one's tendency to judge him or herself and others is an essential step towards being a better person.

A group of artists brought the concept of 'A Mile in My Shoes' to life. They designed an exhibition with a different collection of shoes and audio stories that explore shared life experiences of people from different backgrounds, such as refugees, war veterans or a neurosurgeon.

Visitors would walk a mile in the shoes of a stranger while listening

to their story. The stories cover different aspects of life, from loss and grief to hope and love and take the visitor on an empathetic as well as a physical journey.

This experience encourages empathy among people as they learn about others.

So how can one be less judgmental? Psychologists recommend a few steps that can make us less judgmental. These include acknowledging having the thought and then asking yourself why you felt the need to judge?

Try to challenge the assumption you made about that person's behaviour and then find some way to excuse the behaviour. If you know the person you are judging, try to remind yourself about their good qualities. Above all, learning to be less judgmental takes time and training but you will get there eventually.

Minimum wage in focus as Portugal heads to polls

LEVI FERNANDES

Like nearly one in four workers in Portugal, Fernanda Moreira, a food services worker at a hospital in a Lisbon suburb, earns the minimum wage. "We don't live, we survive," said the 40-year-old mother of a 12-year-old boy whose husband earns just a bit more than her.

"We learn to live with the essentials. It is frustrating and sad."

Portugal's large and growing pool of workers like Moreira who earn the minimum wage — and the incumbent Socialist party's plans to raise it further — is a key issue in Sunday's snap election.

Nearly 900,000 workers in Portugal earn the minimum wage, which was raised this year by €47 to €822 (\$927) per month, still one of the lowest in western Europe.

Their numbers have doubled over the past decade, according to a study by economist Eugenio Rosa, who warns Portugal "is becoming a nation of minimum wages."

Prime Minister Antonio Costa has vowed to raise the minimum wage above €1,000 a month by 2026 if he is re-elected. It stood at 589 euros when he took office in 2015. "It is even possible to go beyond that," Costa said on Monday during a radio interview. But the two hard-left parties that have propped up his minority government have slammed the proposed increase as too little while the main opposition centre-right PSD party argues it goes too far.

The Communist party voted against Costa's proposed 2022 budget, prompting the early election, in part because it deemed this year's minimum wage hike too small. The PSD argues minimum wage increases should track growth in productivity and the economy.

PSD leader Rui Rio points out that Portugal's GDP per capita has increased by an annual average of just 0.3 per cent between 2001 and 2020, less than half the EU growth rate.

Rio, an economist by training, says the government should focus instead on raising the medium wage since qualified graduates are being forced to choose between "miserable wages" at home and emigration.

While the minimum wage has steadily risen, the medium wage has stagnated at €1,160 per month, reducing the gap between the two. — AFP

For skiers, a winter of discontent



CINDY HIRSCHFELD

The writer is an Editor-in-Chief at Cross Country Skier

"Is it just me, or do some of the lefties look older this season?" asked my husband as we rode a chairlift at Snowmass, in Colorado — our local resort — a couple of days after Christmas. I reminded him that during the holidays, the Aspen Skiing Co executive team comes out to Snowmass and its other three ski areas to drive shuttles, work at on-mountain restaurants and, yes, help load lifts.

But this time, the usually morale-boosting "we're all in this together" gesture was a necessity, as the company's mountains, like those throughout ski country, faced hiring shortfalls and a surge of omicron-driven Covid cases.

Having executives chip in "was not only a goodwill gesture, but it definitely helped with staffing levels," said Jim Laing, chief human resources officer at Aspen Skiing Co.

The company's hiring has been down about 7 per cent this winter, and at one point it had 275 employees out sick on one day. "We didn't shut down a restaurant, a shop or a lift," he said.

Across the US, ski areas both big and small have been scrambling to keep lifts spinning, terrain open and crowds of pandemic-weary skiers happy and fed.

"Every resort in the country is experiencing some level of staffing shortages," said Doug Fish, president and founder of the Indy Pass, which gives access to 81 independently owned ski areas.

At Killington, in Vermont, where winter staff is down 20 per cent to 30 per cent, according to resort spokesperson Kristel Killary, only one of three base-area rental locations is open and some on-mountain restaurants offer limited service on weekdays.

Nearby, Magic Mountain, lacking enough ski patrollers to operate safely, didn't open at all one day in early January. Likewise, New Hampshire's Black Mountain was shuttered for five days because of a Covid outbreak among staff. Other New Hampshire resorts, including Attitash, Wildcat and Crotched Mountain, struggled to open much of their terrain.

At Crested Butte Mountain Resort, in Colorado, the T-bar that offers access to many of the resort's signature



Visitors at Magic Mountain in Londonderry.

steeps hasn't operated yet this season, requiring guests to hike — skis or snowboard in hand — anywhere from 15 minutes to a half-hour or more to reach those slopes.

Staffing shortages forced Utah's Alta to cancel its traditional New Year's Eve torchlight parade and fireworks display. And Timberline at Mount Hood in Oregon didn't open its Summit Pass area for two days in mid-January.

As guests have encountered these disruptions, some have taken to social media to air frustrations, and many have directed their comments towards Vail Resorts, which operates 37 ski areas and offers the multiresort Epic Pass. Epic Pass holders accuse Vail of using a flawed business model that exacerbates this year's challenges.

The Instagram account Epic Lift Lines has nearly 36,000 followers, and an online petition to "hold Vail Resorts accountable," launched in late December by Jeremy Rubingh, a Seattle skier frustrated with logistics at Vail-owned Stevens Pass, has been signed by almost 44,000 people. Complaints run the gamut from no parking spots and lengthy lift lines to a lack of open terrain and limited operating hours and services at Vail Resorts' ski areas across the country.

Rubingh, 41, a documentary filmmaker and commercial fisherman, typed the petition on his phone after driving one hour and 45 minutes

from his home to Stevens Pass to find plenty of snow but more than half of the mountain closed. "I think we should all have a little grace around the pandemic and the impact it has, but when I looked around at what every other ski area in the state was doing, they had the majority of their lifts and 90 per cent or more of their terrain open," said Rubingh, an Epic Pass holder. "I felt disenfranchised as a customer."

Vail Resorts spokesperson Jamie Alvarez said in an e-mail that "the impacts of Omicron on our workforce was significant over the holidays."

At some resorts, we had more than 10 per cent of our employees excluded at once," Alvarez said that meant resorts could not open some terrain and restaurants, and everything from parking to transportation and ski and ride school was affected.

She said the numbers have since subsided, and the company is still trying to hire. Alvarez also cited a recent announcement that Vail Resorts will add or upgrade 21 lifts across its ski areas for next season, part of a \$320 million capital investment.

Labour issues in the ski industry go beyond temporary Covid absences. Vail Resorts has been involved in negotiations with the ski patrollers at its Park City resort, in Utah, for a year and a half, and just reached an agreement to raise their wages.

— *The New York Times*

Solitude:
An equal
opportunity
tenant



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

Loneliness is probably the one thing about the pandemic that can't be fixed in a hurry, and though I am not clinically depressed about not being able to see, even engage with, and certainly not socialise with my friends, it does get to me!

We are, after all, a social species, for whom

socialisation is almost a condition of survival, and loneliness is something that most of us are able to 'park' during our most active, most productive years, but that tends to have more impact on us as we begin to 'slow down,' in our 60s, when our decreasing mobility reduces our physical ability to socialise. Now, before hordes of healthy and active over sixties come down on me like a ton of rocks... there are exceptions to the rule.

Hawkey and Cacioppo imply that loneliness is synonymous with the perception of, rather than objective social isolation, and people can live relatively solitary lives not feeling lonely, however conversely, they can live an what appears to be a full, rich, and enviable social life and feel profound loneliness. They write, "Loneliness is defined as a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's social needs are not being met by the quantity, or especially the quality,

of one's social relationships," and of course, thanks to Covid-19, re-labelled variously as 'Delta' and 'Omicron,' these are now an uncomfortable reality.

Long held scientifically proven perceptions of isolation alter our perspectives so that we become more perceptive of threats, maybe even starting to see them where none exist, while we also become vulnerable to desperation, which changes the way we approach every day, becoming less active, depriving us of quality sleep,

and psychologically crippling our ability to see humour, or good, in anything. In other words, we virtually (no pun intended) become grumpy and unattractive. People don't want to spend time with us even if they could. Talk about 'hamster wheels!'

An uncomfortable consequence is that most of us prioritise sociability to such an extent that we see our phones, tablets, laptops, and computers, as the epitome of communicability, eventually settling for them as the best we can do. We become slaves to the pseudo-connectivity of the Internet, and that actually drives us even more swiftly, more surely, into the arms of real-world solitude.

Lonely is not just being alone, it is feeling alone, but Nandang Sugiharto spoke of the most lonely and haunted feelings in the world are when you reach for those you thought would always be there, and they are not. We always feel then at our most forlorn, and it is strange then how our loneliness, always a matter of relationships, has now become a matter of acquaintances, and the matter of setting the bar ever lower. It's such a shame.

They say, they sing, they write, they act out that love hurts, when really it is a 'babe in arms,' compared to the world of hurt that loneliness brings. Rejection, disappointment, blame, broken hearts, lost love, embarrassment, loss, envy, comparison, doubt, disrespect, injury, betrayal, fault, discrimination, carelessness, stupidity, even innocent words spoken rashly, they can all hurt... but none of them as badly as loneliness.

There is no simple response, no easy answer, though Islam is replete with empowering advice that asks you to reflect and seek the comfort of your faith. Mufti Ismail Menk writes, "When you feel lonely and frustrated, know that it is a part of your trials and tribulations, and guide your heart back to the Almighty for peace." Yasmin Mogahed too offers advice that, "Your anxiety is a sign that you have placed your faith in yourself, rather than Allah." I wouldn't be so sure, but I do admire the certainty of faith.

I like the ironic expression that loneliness is an 'equal opportunity tenant,' one that is thriving in an isolationist environment, with a fervour we were unprepared for. Our character, belief, and personality have never been so fundamental to 'finding' one another again.



CRUDE MESS

A worker cleans up crude oil on Mae Ram Phueng beach following a spill caused by a leak in an undersea pipeline owned by Star Petroleum Refining Public Company Limited (SPRC) in Rayong on Saturday.
— AFP

New Le Pen family feud looms
ahead of French election

ADAM PLOWRIGHT

The bitter personal rivalries inside France's far-right Le Pen dynasty burst into the open again on Friday, threatening to undermine the family's matriarch and presidential candidate Marine just over two months from elections.

Marine Le Pen, 53, spoke of her pain on Friday after learning that her ambitious young niece Marion was considering publicly backing a rival in this April's polls.

"I have a very unique story with Marion because I brought her up along with my sister for the first years of her life, so obviously it's brutal, it's shocking, it's difficult for me," Le Pen told CNews.

Marion Marechal, who is more than 20 years younger than her aunt, has long been seen as a rival heir in the anti-immigration and ultra-nationalist family that has dominated far-right politics in France for five decades.

Marechal told *Le Parisien* newspaper on Thursday she was still thinking about who to support while dropping heavy hints she would opt for Eric Zemmour, an anti-Islam pundit and bitter rival of her aunt.

"No decision has been taken," said Marechal, who dropped the Le Pen family name in 2018.

"If I support Eric, it won't just to be to stick my head in and say hello: it would mean coming back to politics," she added.

Such a move could add momentum to Zemmour's campaign, which has stagnated since November, and would likely lead to other figures from Le Pen's National Rally (RN) party switching sides.

"Lots of people in the RN are trying to find out what I'm going to do," Marechal told *Le Parisien*. "Some of them say their decisions to leave depend on me."

Polls currently indicate that Marine Le Pen is the more likely of the two far-right candidates to make it into the second round of the election on April 24, but analysts say the race is highly unpredictable.

Surveys make centrist President Emmanuel Macron the favourite.

Relations within the Le Pen clan are notoriously stormy, with Marine clashing repeatedly with her father Jean-Marie after taking over his National Front party in 2011.

Jean-Marie, a 93-year-old former paratrooper in frail health, took to Twitter to say he hoped to speak with his daughter and grand-daughter in the coming days.

"I will give my thoughts at another



Marine Le Pen (left) and Marion Marechal.

time when I judge it to be useful," he wrote.

He too is not certain to support his daughter, saying in October that he would back "the best-placed candidate from the national camp" and praising Zemmour for his hardline rhetoric on Islam and immigrants.

MARION MARECHAL, WHO IS MORE THAN 20 YEARS YOUNGER THAN HER AUNT, HAS LONG BEEN SEEN AS A RIVAL HEIR IN THE ANTI-IMMIGRATION AND ULTRA-NATIONALIST FAMILY THAT HAS DOMINATED FAR-RIGHT POLITICS IN FRANCE FOR FIVE DECADES

In 2015, Marine Le Pen threw Jean-Marie out of the party he co-founded in the 1970s after he repeated his view that the Holocaust was a mere "detail" of World War II.

At the heart of the jockeying within the family is a fight over political strategy, as well as the leadership of France's far-right movement if neither Le Pen, nor Zemmour succeed in their campaigns this April.

Marion Marechal is seen by may

observers to be a future leader of far-right nationalist camp.

In her third tilt at the presidency, Marine Le Pen is seeking to project an image of moderation and seriousness.

Long seen as lacking stature and ridiculed after a weak presidential debate performance in 2017, Le Pen is focusing on the economy and jobs while criticising Zemmour for his "brutality" and "provocations" on race and Islam.

"You won't see over-statements or excesses from me," she said on Wednesday. "There won't be a race to be the most radical or create a buzz."

Hardliners in her party consider her to have gone too far into the mainstream and prefer Zemmour who has several convictions for hate speech and claims white French people are being deliberately "replaced" by immigrants.

While Le Pen was pledging no more "provocations" on Wednesday, Zemmour was promising that introducing "zero immigration" to France would put an end to delinquency.

Asked whether he was implying that all delinquents were immigrants during an interview on the Public Senat channel, he replied: "Yes, well, immigrants or children of immigrants."

Elected as the youngest member of parliament in 2012 at the age of 22, Marion Marechal stepped back from frontline politics five years later to spend more time with her daughter and open a political sciences school focused on nationalism. — AFP

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah crosses stunning Omani terrain.

Al Attiyah secures seventh career victory at Oman Rally

MUSCAT: Qatar’s Nasser Saleh al Attiyah and Spanish co-driver Alba Sánchez González managed their pace to perfection to seal an emphatic victory in Oman Rally Sohar International on Saturday.

With the hard work done on Friday’s gravel stages, Al Attiyah avoided risks over the closing half dozen speed tests to secure a seventh victory in Oman by the margin of 15min 13.8sec in his Autotek Volkswagen Polo GTI. It was the Qatari’s 79th career MERC win and gave him the perfect foundations on which to build a challenge for an 18th regional title.

Sánchez González, who was standing-in for Mathieu Baumel as Al Attiyah’s co-driver, became the first female to win a round of the MERC since Veronika Havelková partnered Vojtěch Štajf to a one-off victory in Qatar in 2018. Sweden’s Tina Thörner had been the first female ever to win a round of the MERC alongside Al Attiyah in Qatar in 2009.

“It was important that we got off

to a winning start here in Oman and I am very happy with this result”, said Al Attiyah. “I was able to manage my pace today, avoid punctures and take no risks. Today was about preserving the car and protecting the lead.

“The stages are fantastic with amazing landscapes. Alba stood in for Mathieu and did a fantastic job. I am delighted for her that she has a first win in the Middle East.”

The man in form over the final day was a resurgent Hamed al Wahaibi, the Omani veteran bouncing back from turbo issues at the start of day one to win five stages on Saturday. That enabled Al Wahaibi and Kiwi co-driver Tony Sircombe to finish in sixth place in their Motortune Škoda Fabia.

“It was a good rally and we had a great run but had a puncture in the last one”, said Al Wahaibi. “I really attacked this afternoon. I took it a bit easier in the morning and pressed hard this afternoon. We’ve certainly got the car set up for Qatar. I think we have found

2022 OMAN RALLY SOHAR INTERNATIONAL - POSITIONS AFTER SS13:	
1. Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Alba Sánchez González (ESP) Volkswagen Polo GTI – 2hr 25min 17.2sec	
2. Petr Kačirek (CZE)/Václav Kopáček (CZE) Škoda Fabia 2hr 40min 31.0sec	
3. Nasser Khalifa al Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta 2hr 43min 29.3sec	
4. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 3hr 05min 39.1sec	
5. Ihab al Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 3hr 09min 21.8sec	
6. Hamed al Wahaibi (OMN)/Tony Sircombe (NZL) Škoda Fabia 3hr 13min 49.6sec	
7. Abdullah al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al Hmoud (JOR) Škoda Fabia 3hr 14min 50.3sec	
2022 OMAN NATIONAL SOHAR RALLY - POSITIONS AFTER SS13:	
1. Haitham al Soomar (OMN)/Wael Al-Shabani (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII – 2hr 58min 30.7sec	
2. Alain Nawfal (LEB)/Bashar Qassimi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000R 3hr 27min 36.4sec	
3. Musab al Soomar (OMN)/Bassam al Qasmi (OMN) Kia Rio 4hr 33min 36.2sec	

something very positive for there. All is good. Looking forward to the next one. I had a very fun day today and that’s what it’s all about.”

Czech Petr Kačirek and co-driver Václav Kopáček were Al Attiyah’s closest rivals in their Duck Racing Škoda Fabia. Competing in his first MERC rally, the Czech reached the finish in Nakhl 2min 58.3sec ahead of the third-placed crew of Qatar’s Nasser Khalifa al Atya and Italian co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini.

Oman’s Zakariya and Mohammed al Aamri led the MERC2 category in a Subaru Impreza until mechanical issues forced them out of fourth overall on the penultimate stage. Jordan’s Issa Abu Jamous and Emad Juma duly moved up to fourth to win MERC2 and Ihab al Shorafa and Yousef Juma secured fifth place and second in the category.

A team of mechanics worked hard on Friday afternoon to repair Abdullah al Rawahi’s damaged Škoda Fabia and the Omani repaid

their efforts with a string of solid stage times over the final day. Like Al Wahaibi, he had suffered hefty time penalties, restarted under Rally2 and reached the finish in seventh overall.

“Yesterday was a disaster with the technical issue we had on SS3”, said Al Rawahi. “We are running the new car with limited spare parts and we struggled a bit. The technical team did a great job. They managed to repair the car, not 100%, and that’s why we took it easy today.

“We wanted to save the car and finish the rally to get the championship points. The stages were technical and we learned a lot. We also used the day to test Michelin and Pirelli tyres. It was more of a test and great experience for us. I am only 24-years-old and I am proud to be racing against the likes of Nasser and Hamed. I am learning all the time.”

The 2022 FIA Middle East Rally Championship now heads to Qatar on February 10-12.



OHA elated after successful Women's Asia Cup 2022

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 29

The Oman Hockey Association made massive efforts to deliver Women's Asia Cup 2022 on a successful note and were elated after its completion.

The appreciation from the top officials of International Hockey Federation (FIH) and Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) was delivered to the organising committee headed by Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, chairman of Oman Hockey Association (OHA) on the successful organisation of the Asian event.

The seven days event concluded in Muscat on Friday night and the Japan team lifted the title of the championship after edging South Korea team 4-2 in the final. The triumph was the third title for the Japanese women's team in their history.

The chairman of OHA, Dr Marwan said after the concluding ceremony that the tournament was successful in all the levels including technical and logistics.

"Definitely, there are strength and weakness points from hosting this top Asian event. We will work hard to develop the weakness area. This event was a rehearsal ahead of hosting the World 5s Hockey Championship in 2024. The Asian championship



was the top event as four teams from the Asian continent advanced to the FIH World Women Hockey championship in summer," he added.

The OHA chief pointed out that the Asian championship helped to strengthen the relationship with the other national hockey federations.

"We will work closely with many federations to develop the women's hockey sport in the Sultanate of Oman. Initially, we

may have a common training centre with China. Also, we will work with Indonesia and Malaysian federations in this side. The championship was accompanied by a training course in technical coaching and umpiring field. We are aiming to have many new women coaches and umpires in the near future. We need more women technical coaches and referees to begin with Oman women league soon," he ended

KEEP FIGHTING

The head coach of Japan team, Jude Menezes, expressed his joy on lifting the title of the Asian championship. "We managed to finish the tournament unbeaten. The team showed high performance during all the matches in group stage and final stages. We kept improving in every game. The 10-days camp in Muscat ahead of the tournament helped us a lot to show strong performance in the tournament. "



he added.

The former India goalkeeper commented on South Korea leading in the match: "Hockey is a long game and lasted for more than 60 minutes and we knew we had to keep fighting until we managed to win the fixture," he concluded

TOUGH TOURNEY

Japan player, Shihori Oikawa, said that the tournament was hard as they played against strong

teams including India and China and Korea. "We played every team with different tactics and managed to beat the opponents. Also, all the players were focused and this is one of the factors for winning all the games. I am proud of my team-mates for their top show in all the games," she said

She concluded her statement with a special thanks to Oman and the organising committee for hosting this successful tournament.

Egypt progress in Cup of Nations impacts on top club

YAOUNDE: Egypt's progress at the Africa Cup of Nations could come at a heavy cost to its most popular club, dividing fan loyalties as the country awaits a key quarterfinal clash in Cameroon on Sunday.

It also highlights a strange decision by Fifa to host its Club World Cup at the same time as the final week of the Cup of Nations tournament in an unprecedented overlapping of dates.

Cairo giants Al Ahly will participate in the Club World Cup in the United Arab Emirates next week, playing their first game against Mexican club Monterrey in Abu Dhabi on February 5.

But if Egypt beat Morocco in Sunday's Cup of Nations quarterfinal, and advance to next week's semifinal and final, Ahly will have to play without six of their best players, who are in the Egypt squad at the tournament in Cameroon.

They also have another player, Ali Maaloul, in Tunisia's squad and he is in the same situation, as his national team play Burkina Faso in their quarterfinal match on Saturday.

Al Ahly, who enjoy fanatical support from millions of Egyptians and across the Middle East, were incredulous when Fifa in November belatedly announced that the Club World Cup would take place on February 3-13.



Egypt coach Carlos Queiroz during training. — Reuters

It was to have been played in Japan but they withdrew as hosts in September because of concerns over the Covid-19 pandemic.

The overlap in dates and potential impact on Al Ahly being able to take their strongest team the Club World Cup was pointed out in a protest to world football's governing body but fell on deaf ears.

"Al Ahly sent official letters to the Egyptian Football Association, the Confederation of African Football and Fifa, requesting the three parties to collaborate to resolve the clash of dates, but no one has responded to our protests," the club's director of football Sayed Abdelhafiz said.

The Club World Cup offers the African champions a rare chance to measure themselves against top clubs from Europe and South America.

At last year's Club World Cup, hosted in Qatar, Al Ahly lost to Bayern Munich in the semifinal. — Reuters

Shotokan Karate Center concludes its internal competition

MUSCAT: The indoor championship of the Shotokan Karate Center concluded on Friday in the sports Hall of the National Private School at Al Khuwair, with the participation of 59 players representing the branches of the centre and spread in the Governorate of Muscat.

The championship was divided into kata and kumite competitions.

In the closing ceremony, the players who got the first



three places from all categories participating in the kata and kumite competitions were

honoured by the management of the Shotokan Karate Center.

The Shotokan Karate Center

and all its members extend their thanks and appreciation to the parents and the management of the National Private School for their cooperation and services to make this event a success.

It is worth mentioning that the Shotokan Karate Center is preparing to hold the seventh edition of the International Shotokan Karate Competition, which will be held at the beginning of next March at Al Amal Sports Club.

Victories for OHI, Al Jadidi, Mazoon Up and Global Corp

MUSCAT: Douglas OHI rode on superb 4 for 14 by Shamsudheen Shareef and whirlwind 59 off 27 by Shahid Mehmood to thrash OCT Muscat by 9 wickets in a 30-over B Division League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

OCT Muscat was dismissed for 98 in the 27th over due to outstand bowling by Shareef, Ahmed Barkath (2 for 12) and Viplav Kumar (2 for 14). OHI raced to the target in just 9.3 overs scoring 99 for 1 thanks to brilliant batting by Shahid. Manikandan Rajagopal claimed 3 for 31.

Brief Scores (B Division): OCT Muscat 98 all out in 26.4 overs (Khalid al Balushi 29 – 2x4, Shamsudheen Shareef 4-14, Ahmed Barkath 2-12, Viplav Kumar 2-14) lost to Douglas OHI 99 for 1 in 9.3 overs (Shahid Mehmood 59 – 12x4, Manikandan Rajagopal 3-31) by 9 wickets.

DHANESH STEERS AL JADIDI TO VICTORY

Dhanesh Krishna struck an unbeaten 44 to help Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting seal a 5-wicket victory against Al Waad Trading and Contracting Enterprises in a C Division T20 league game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 on Friday.

Al Waad posted 144 for 7 on the board,

Sandip and Jamshid Anwar topscoring with 42 and 38 respectively. Charles Jacob took 2 for 27.

It took Al Jadidi only 17 overs to surpass the total as it reached 145 for 5 thanks to Dhanesh's top knock of 44 not out and Muthumurugan's 37.

Brief Scores (C Division): Al Waad Trad & Contracting Enterprises 144 for 7 in 20 overs (Sandip 42 – 3x4, Jamshaid Anwar 38 – 2x4, 1x6, Charles Jacob 2-27) lost to Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting 145 for 5 in 17 overs (Dhanesh Krishnan 44 not out – 5x4, Muthumurugan Muniyasamy 37 – 5x4, Qamar Nazir 29 – 4x4) by 5 wickets.

KHADER BATS MAZOOON UP TO BIG WIN

Khader Mohammed's excellent 64 not out and Fahad Mohamed's superb all-round show powered Mazoon Up to an emphatic 6-wicket win over Winner's Jotun in a D Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Prajeesh top scored with a fine 36 off 19 as Jotun scored 153 for 8 in 20 overs. Fahad bowled brilliantly, taking 3 for 23.

Mazoon Up rode on magnificent 64 by Khader and Fahad's 35 off 16 to seal the win in the 15th over, scoring 154 for 4. Renju Radhakrishnan bagged 2 for 19.

Brief Scores (D Division): Winner's Jotun 153 for 8 in 20 overs (Prajeesh 36 – 8x4, Fahad Mohamed 3-23) lost to Mazoon Up 154 for 4 in 14.5 overs (Khader Mohammad 64 – 5x4, 1x6, Fahad Mohamed 35 – 5x4, 1x6, Renju Radhakrishna 2-19) by 6 wickets.

WASEEM TON TAKES GLOBAL TO VICTORY

In another D Division match at ground 2, Waseem Abbas slammed a strokeful 122 off 64, including 7 sixes, to steer Global Corp Logistics to an impressive 70-run victory against Ideal Technology on Friday.

Apart from Waseem's century, Marshal Barmeda contributed 33 as Global posted 201 for 7 on the board. Vijesh, Deepesh and Biji bagged two wickets each.

Ideal failed to rise to the occasion, folding up for 131 in 18.5 overs due to brilliant bowling by Manikandan (3 for 33), Mohammed Siddique (2 for 15 and Amal KP (2 for 9). Biji Sundar top scored with a fluent 41 off 32.

Brief Scores (D Division): Global Corp Logistics 201 for 7 in 20 overs (Waseem Abbas 122 – 10x4, 7x6, Marshal Barmeda 33 – 4x4, Vijesh Vijayakumaran 2-33, Deepesh Unnikoru 2-40, Biji Sundar 2-22) beat Ideal Technology 131 all out in 18.5 overs (Biji Sundar 41 – 3x4, 1x6, Manikandhan Sundarat 3-33, Muhammed Siddique 2-15, Amal KP 2-6) by 70 runs.



SHE BECAME THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN TO BE CROWNED SINGLES CHAMPION AT THE GRAND SLAM SINCE CHRIS O'NEIL CAPTURED THE WOMEN'S TITLE IN 1978

Barty realises dream, ends 44-year home drought

MELBOURNE: Ashleigh Barty tamed big-hitting American Danielle Collins to win the Australian Open on Saturday and end the home nation's 44-year wait for a singles champion.

Barty's adoring fans, many of them in green and gold, flocked to Melbourne Park in anticipation of celebrating 'Australia Day' for a second time in three days.

The 25-year-old did not disappoint and she had fans all around Australia roaring and jumping for joy when she fought back from 5-1 down in the second set to complete a 6-3 7-6(2) victory and win her third Grand Slam title.

She became the first Australian to be crowned singles champion at the Grand Slam since Chris O'Neil captured the women's title in 1978.

O'Neil was present in the stands cheering as the crowd on the floodlit Rod Laver Arena arranged for Barty to receive the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup

from her idol, mentor and fellow indigenous Australian, Evonne Goolagong Cawley.

"This is a dream come true for me, and I am so proud to be an Aussie," said Barty, who teared up when Goolagong Cawley was announced as the trophy presenter.

Barty has now won a Grand Slam on three different surfaces, with 23-time major champion Serena Williams the only other active female player to have achieved the feat.

Australian great Rod Laver approved.

"A Grand Slam champion on three different surfaces, you are the complete player @AshBarty and I am so happy for you tonight," tweeted Laver, who watched on from the stands of the arena that is named after him.

Barty came into the contest having won 11 of her past 13 finals and had conceded just 21 games during the past fortnight, dropping serve only once. She also had a 3-1 head-to-head lead against the 28-year-old American.

But it was Collins who was the first to set up a break point

Australian Open			
Women's singles champions			
2022	Ashleigh Barty	AUS	
2021	Naomi Osaka	JPN	
2020	Sofia Kenin	USA	
2019	Naomi Osaka	JPN	
2018	Caroline Wozniacki	DEN	
2017	Serena Williams	USA	
2016	Angelique Kerber	GER	
2015	Serena Williams	USA	
2014	Li Na	CHN	
2013	Victoria Azarenka	BLR	

in the match with some forceful groundstrokes.

A calm and composed Barty found the range with her serve to get out of trouble and then nosed ahead by breaking Collins in the next game when her opponent served up a double fault.

If Barty believed she would cruise to victory, there was more drama and more fight left in Collins.

Some uncharacteristic forehand

errors from Barty allowed Collins, who will make her top-10 debut when the rankings are updated on Monday, to break early in the second set.

The American let out a shriek of "Come On" to celebrate opening up a 3-0 lead.

The American broke Barty's delivery, which looked almost impregnable this past fortnight, a second time in the set.

But when Collins appeared to be on the verge of levelling the match as she served at 5-1, the Australian showed nerves of steel and raised her game.

Barty got the set back on serve and then dominated the tiebreak to complete a memorable comeback that left the home nation rejoicing.

"As an Aussie, the most important part of this is being able to share it, and you guys have been nothing short of exceptional," an emotional Barty said on court.

"This crowd is one of the most fun I have ever played in front of.. you relaxed me and forced me to play my best tennis. Against a champion like Danielle I had to bring that today." — Reuters

Australian Open 2022: Ashleigh Barty's route to victory

In the final rounds

Quarter-finals	Semi-finals	Final
January 25 Ashleigh Barty (AUS/N ¹ seed) 6-2, 6-0 Barbora Krejickova (CZE/N ⁴) 3-6, 2-6 January 26 Danielle Collins (USA/N ²⁷) 7-5, 6-1 Iga Swiatek (POL/N ⁷) 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3	January 27 Ashleigh Barty (AUS/N ¹) 6-1, 6-3 Madison Keys (USA) 6-4, 6-1	January 29 Ashleigh Barty (AUS/N ¹) 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) Danielle Collins (USA/N ²⁷)

*Prize money to the player exiting

Source: Australian Open

business



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business



**For the first time in the Sultanate,
BankDhofar introduces the PaySticker**

Now you do not have to worry about forgetting your debit card. Place the sticker on your mobile phone and use it to pay by tapping your mobile phone on the POS machine.*

*The maximum payment via the PaySticker is OMR 40 per transaction, OMR 100 per day.

For more information
<https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/PaySticker.aspx>



*Terms & conditions apply

the best bank for you 24751111 www.bankdhofar.com

CMA moves to regulate cryptocurrencies

LANDMARK STEP: Capital Market regulator invites consultants to bid for contract to advise on drafting and implementation of 'Regulatory Framework for Virtual Assets (VAs) and Virtual Assets Service Providers (VASPs)'

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Sultanate of Oman is preparing to make a landmark foray into the trillion-dollar global crypto ecosystem, which in recent years has witnessed the explosive growth of crypto-currencies, the planned introduction of digital central bank currencies, and new digital innovations in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs).

Last week, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) launched a competitive tender for the selection of a consultancy firm to advise the Authority on the drafting and implementation of a 'Regulatory Framework for Virtual Assets (VAs) and Virtual Assets Service Providers (VASPs)'.

The goal, it noted, is to support the establishment of a legislative and regulatory framework for the regulation of Virtual Assets and the licensing, supervision and



regulation of service providers.

Virtual Assets (VA) refer to the 'digital representation of value that can be digitally traded or transferred' either for payment or investment purposes. They include, but are not limited to, cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin or ethereum, asset-backed security tokens, other virtual currencies such as stablecoins, and related phenomena like Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs).

Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP) refer to companies or businesses that facilitate, among

other services, exchanges between virtual assets and fiat currencies, exchanges between one or more forms of virtual assets, and the transfer / safekeeping / management of virtual assets and related instruments.

Together, they represent a cryptocurrency presently estimated to be worth \$3 trillion globally.

Significantly, the latest tender announcement by the capital market regulator marks an important shift from the longstanding 'wait and see' policy

adopted by Omani authorities on matters related to the crypto-universe.

In repeated advisories to the general public, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has been warning that it has not licensed any agency or bank to trade in cryptocurrencies in the Sultanate of Oman.

Protections granted to investors under the Banking Law 112/2012 do not cover any digital or virtual currencies, as well as activities involving their usage, the banking sector regulator

The latest tender announcement by the capital market regulator marks an important shift from the longstanding 'wait and see' policy adopted by Omani authorities on matters related to the crypto-universe

has frequently advised. But mindful of the immense global popularity of cryptocurrencies and their potential benefits as an alternative and disruptive offering to traditional banking, the apex bank announced last year that it had set up a high-level task force to study the complete gamut of issues encompassing the economic advantages — as well as risks — associated with any decision to authorise the use of cryptocurrencies in the Sultanate of Oman.

"In order to firm up our policy response (to the use of virtual assets), studies are under way at the national level by a task force team consisting of members of the financial sector regulators," Tahir bin Salim al Amri, CBO Executive President had stated during a seminar last September.

"The Central Bank, through public notices, has cautioned

the users, holders and traders of cryptocurrencies about the financial, operational and legal and security-related risks, besides the lack of customer protection mechanisms in this regard. It's a new thing for all of us, and we have to make sure that everybody is protected before we engage into either regulating or allowing or even avoiding banning anything that may actually move the economy forward," Al Amri had further noted at the time.

In formulating a comprehensive legislative framework for regulating virtual assets and related activities in the Sultanate of Oman, the CMA says it will take into consideration legislations currently adopted in key global jurisdictions before choosing "the most appropriate to be adopted and implemented".

Additionally, the entire initiative is planned to be implemented in two phases: Phase 1 will focus efforts on drafting a suitable framework for virtual asset regulation, as well as guidelines for licensing VASPs, with the goal of underpinning the growth of the sector; Phase 2 will cover the provision of training and technical support to the CMA in the implementation of the framework.

Interested consultants have until March 23, 2022, to submit their bids for the advisory contract.

Asian LNG prices rise on colder weather, tensions



A liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker is tugged towards a thermal power station in Futtsu, east of Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

LONDON: Asian spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) rose as cold weather in Japan and parts of northern China lifted demand and amid concerns over European supply disruptions from Russia.

The average LNG price for March delivery into north-east Asia rose to \$27.00 per metric million British thermal units (mmBtu), up \$4.00 or 17.4% from the previous week, industry sources said.

Colder weather in Japan has caused a rapid decline in LNG stockpiles and prompted some utilities to buy on the spot market to secure additional supplies,

traders said.

Refinitiv meteorologist Isaac Hanks expects colder weather to slowly expand over Asia into February, with temperatures forecast 1-2 degrees Celsius lower than normal in Japan.

Asian buyers are also trying to attract US shipments back to Asia from Europe ahead of an expected pick-up in demand. The spread between the S&P Global Platts' Japan-Korea-Market, which is widely used as a spot benchmark in the region, and the Dutch TTF price from May onwards is no longer negative, a signal for trade flows to shift, traders added. — Reuters

Oman-Netherlands talks focus on renewable energy and hydroponics

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted a delegation of government and business leaders from the Netherlands on Thursday. The interaction covered opportunities for increased trade and investment ties between the two countries.

In addition to avenues for joint ventures between Omani and Dutch businesses, the Dutch side also explored opportunities for partnerships in the renewable energy, chiefly wind and solar, and also green hydrogen.

Dutch businesses were also keen to showcase their expertise in modern desalination and hydroponic technologies.

Also during the session, an official of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources shared details about the Sultanate of Oman's experience in constructing recharge and flood protection dams. Besides helping replenish freshwater aquifers,



A SEPARATE PRESENTATION BY OMAN WATER AND WASTEWATER SERVICES COMPANY (OWWSC) LOOKED AT THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES DEPLOYED BY THE COMPANY IN WASTEWATER TREATMENT AND THE USE OF TREATED EFFLUENT TO BEAUTIFY THE COUNTRY

some of these structures also contribute to recharging wells.

In another presentation, the FAO Representative in the Sultanate of Oman gave an overview of water stress issues in the Near East and North African regions.

To address some of the challenges, the FAO has laid out programmes that include strategic water related initiatives, water and food policy reviews, investment

plans proposals, agricultural development plans, and support for greenhouse based farming agriculture.

It is also working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, as well as Sultan Qaboos University in studying farming practices in the Sultanate of Oman.

A separate presentation by Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) looked at the latest technologies deployed by the company in wastewater treatment and the use of treated effluent to beautify the country.

Majis Industrial Services outlined its expertise in providing water solutions through seawater intake system for industrial cooling purposes, production of potable water, production of ultrapure, and treatment of industrial and sewage water in Sohar Port and Free Zone, and the adjoining Sohar Industrial City. — ONA

Bank Muscat Board proposes 35% dividend for 2021

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has proposed a 350-per cent dividend for the year 2021.

The meeting of the Board of Directors chaired by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani, Chairman, on Wednesday, January 26, 2022, approved the 2021 financial results and dividend payout, subject to the approval of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and shareholders of the Bank.

Continuing the Bank's dividend payment track record, the Board of Directors has proposed a 30-per cent cash dividend and a 5-per cent dividend in the form of bonus

shares for the year 2021.

The Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) after the cash dividend payout will be 21.30 per cent which is well above the regulatory minimum.

Shareholders would receive a cash dividend of RO 0.030 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 107.234 million on the Bank's existing share capital.

In addition, they would receive bonus shares in the proportion of 1 share for every 20 ordinary shares aggregating to 178,723,739 shares amounting to RO 17.872 million.

The proposed cash dividend and issuance of bonus shares are subject to the formal approval of the Annual General Meeting of



the shareholders and regulatory authorities.

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO 189.63 million for the year 2021 compared to RO 163.36 million reported in 2020, an increase of 16.1 per

cent. Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 335.54 million for the year ended on 31 December, 2021, compared to RO 322.13 million for the same period in

2020, an increase of 4.2 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 139.94 million for the year ended on 31 December, 2021, as compared to RO 134.41 million for the same period in 2020, an increase of 4.1 per cent.

Operating expenses for the year ended on 31 December, 2021, was RO 191.46 million as compared to RO 179.85 million for the same period in 2020, an increase of 6.5 per cent.

Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the year 2021 was RO 60.22 million as against RO 81.04 million for the same period in 2020.

The decrease is mainly attributed to the precautionary and collective provisions created

by the Bank during the first half of 2020, due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the historic decline seen in global crude oil prices.

The Bank remains vigilant of the continuing stress in the macro-economic and business conditions and its potential impacts. Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 2.3 per cent to RO 9,191 million as against RO 8,983 million as at 31 December, 2020.

Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 3.7 per cent to RO 8,775 million as against RO 8,459 million as at 31 December, 2020.

SICO appoints Al Hashar as board member

MUSCAT: SICO BSC (c), a leading regional asset manager, broker, and investment bank (licensed as a wholesale bank by the CBB), announced that it has expanded the size of its Board of Directors to ten members from nine.

Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar (**pictured**), CEO of Bank Muscat, has been appointed as non-independent Executive Director of the Bank. Bank Muscat, which owns a 10.38-per cent stake in SICO, has nominated Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar as its representative in SICO's Board after obtaining the approval from the regulator.

The shareholders resolved in the extraordinary general meeting held on Wednesday, January 26, 2022, to expand the Board to 10 members and to appoint Shaikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar as



Director.

SICO previously acquired a majority stake in the Saudi-based Muscat Capital, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bank Muscat, which has since been rebranded as SICO Capital. The acquisition took place by way of a share swap.

As a result of the transaction, SICO owned 72.7 per cent of SICO Capital and Bank Muscat owned 9 per cent of SICO. Subsequent to the swap transaction, Bank

Muscat acquired an additional 1.38 per cent stake in SICO, which, together with the shares previously acquired, represents a shareholding of 10.38 per cent of SICO's share capital.

"We are very pleased to welcome Shaikh Waleed as the newest member of our esteemed Board of Directors," said SICO's Chairman, Shaikh Abdulla bin Khalifa al Khalifa. "His regional expertise and decades of experience in the banking and finance sector will be invaluable to SICO as we grow and expand our businesses regionally in the coming years."

Shaikh Waleed al Hashar is the Chief Executive Officer of Bank Muscat, a position that he has held since 2019. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability, The College of

Banking and Financial Studies, and the Oman Banks Association.

Al Hashar has over 28 years of experience in banking, as well as the oil and gas sectors, where he held senior positions in a number of firms before joining Bank Muscat. He holds a postgraduate diploma in General Management from Harvard Business School and a BSc and Masters in Business Administration from California State University in Sacramento, USA.

"I look forward to working with my fellow board members and with the chairman and executive management at SICO as we embark on the Bank's next phase of development," said Al Hashar. "I am confident that the new partnership between SICO and Bank Muscat will be a fruitful one, as we continue creating value for all our stakeholders."

Ali al Habsi to be brand ambassador of Belkin



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Ace Omani footballer Ali al Habsi will be endorsing Belkin, a US brand in the GCC, represented by Omani firm Amaal Company. Al Habsi entered into an agreement with the promoters to be the brand ambassador of Belkin at an event held at the Ramada Encore on Wednesday.

Belkin is an accessories market leader delivering power, protection, productivity, connectivity, audio, security and home automation solutions for a broad range of consumer electronics and enterprise environments.

Designed in Southern California and sold in more than 50 countries around the world, Belkin creates products that empower people through technology at home, at work and on a new adventure.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Ali al Habsi said he is keen to support local firms to help them achieve their goals and make it globally renowned. "I am happy with this cooperation and I look forward to contributing to creating a new phase of success for the local brand."

Amaal is an Omani business ventures and franchising firm based in Muscat with a strong

presence in the local and regional markets.

"We are glad to sign the cooperation agreement with the most prominent Arab football star Ali al Habsi. Our cooperation with Ali Habsi to be the ambassador of the Belkin brand will enhance our position in the Gulf region market and will help us achieve our planned goals for the upcoming period," said Shaikh Al Harith al Khalili, Executive Partner at Amaal, adding that the association would add to Ali al Habsi's successful journey and they look forward to a sustainable relationship of cooperation and partnership with him.

"The selection of Ali al Habsi to be the Belkin brand ambassador, highlights the goals which Belkin seeks to achieve for the global brand. We are proud to be the Official Operator of Belkin Stores in the Gulf region. We are fully aware that the reputation of Ali al Habsi, our national star goalkeeper, is a source of inspiration and confidence for Omanis, Gulf people and Arabs in general, as he is known for his successful football career in Europe and this will positively reflect on Belkin brand in terms of its presence in the region," adds Shaikh Jihad al Khalili, Executive Partner at Amaal.

Toyota Yaris with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The Toyota Yaris is available with exclusive benefits like service 2 years/20,000 kms, (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 125. The campaign is valid until March 9, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.) Terms and conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

Cutting-edge design defines the exterior of the Yaris, with its dynamic angles as well as sleek headlamps and clearance lamps. The front of the Yaris has a horizontal grille for a wider yet more aerodynamic appearance.

Daytime running lamps have also been integrated into the



shape of the grille for a sleek appearance, while slimmer LED rear combination taillights adorn the rear of the car with a unique look.

The Yaris hatchback is adorned

lights, stylish shark fin antenna, LED high mount stop lamp, front fog lamps, sporty mesh type lower radiator grille in the front, black luggage door garnish with a vibrant red accent.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Yaris sedan is equipped with a choice of 1.3L and 1.5L engine and hatchback is equipped with a 1.5-Litre engine.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom.

Digital Private School pursues authorisation as IB World School

MUSCAT: Digital Private School (DPS), a co-educational school for Omanis and international students starting in KG1 up to Grade 9, is pursuing authorisation as an IB World School.

IB World Schools share a common philosophy — a commitment to high-quality, challenging, international education — that DPS believe is

important for its students.

Only schools authorised by the IB Organisation can offer any of four academic programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP), the Diploma Programme (DP), or the Career-related Programme (CP).

DPS is candidate school for the Primary Years Programme

(PYP) and the Middle Years Programme (MYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB). Candidate status gives no guarantee that authorisation will be granted.

DPS opened its doors to students on September 22, 2021. The school will open Grade 10 in September 2022, accepting students of all nationalities.

It is a co-educational school for Omanis and international students starting in KG1 up to Grade 9.

It is currently implementing the PYP Framework from KG 1 to Grade 6 and the MYP Framework in Grade 7-9.

It welcomes all nationalities, with diverse, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to be

a part of the school in order to create a real world that allows students to accept and understand their differences.

The school have students from the Sultanate of Oman, India, Croatia, Serbia, Russia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Lebanon, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan. The class sizes are small, with no more than 20 students in a class.

The school have international teaching staff who bring their different styles of teaching and experiences to DPS.

The school is equipped with the latest digital technology with interactive smartboards in all classrooms and chrome books from Grade 1. It will also be offering robotics and VR opportunities.



Phase 1 of Barka Desalination IPO opens today

TRACK RECORD: Roadshow meetings generate strong investor and analyst interest

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 29

Phase I of the IPO of Barka Desalination Company (BDC) opens for subscription by investors on January 30, 2022 and will close on February 3, 2022.

During Phase I of the IPO the offer price will be discovered through book-building mechanism based on bids submitted by large and sophisticated investors in the Sultanate of Oman. Investors will be able to see the progress of the IPO live on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) website www.msx.om.

The investors need to apply for a minimum of 250,100 shares in Phase I of the IPO. Following the successful close of Phase I and discovery of the offer price, the IPO will be offered to retail investors at a fixed price through the E-IPO route. Investor interest is gaining momentum in the IPO of Barka Desalination Company SAOG (under transformation) (BDC), the company said in a press statement.



BDC, alongside the issue manager – Bank Muscat Investment Banking, has been holding several meetings with key investors for Phase I of the IPO (i.e. Book Building).

Meetings were conducted with more than 50 key investors from the Sultanate of Oman as well as the region with some meeting being conducted in Muscat while others through a virtual session.

The investors appreciated a number of aspects for BDC

including long term offtake agreement until 2038 with the Omani government-owned OPWP, resilient demand for water in the country and dividend yield range of 8.4 - 10.6 per cent being offered to IPO investors.

They also commended that the project has marquee founders including Engie, Itochu, Suez and W J Towell, who have strong track record and deep commitment to the project.

Investors also appreciated

the commitment by two leading names – National Power & Water Co LLC (an investment arm of Bahwan Engineering Group), and Bank Muscat SAOG to participate in the IPO as anchor investors and confirming their interest at the price of baisas 145 per share i.e. at the highest end of the price range.

BDC also had meetings with key research analysts, who are expected to issue research reports on the IPO.

Ubhar Capital, which has

already released their report on 24 January, has recommended a 'Subscribe' rating for the IPO with fair value of baisas 160 per share implying an upside of 10 per cent to the higher end of the IPO price range and 39 per cent to the lower end of the price range.

The report mentions, "BDC is an attractive dividend-paying company with steady revenues over the water purchase agreement (WPA)". The report further added, "...we believe BDC deserves a premium as equity-holders are treated differently in this company."

Backed by revenues contracted by the Government of Oman owned OPWP up to 2038, BDC plans to offer the shares in a price range of baisas 115 to baisas 145 which translates into an attractive dividend yield of 8.4 - 10.6 per cent to IPO investors. The first proposed dividend of baisas 6 per share will be paid in April 2022, soon after the close of the IPO.

BDC's Chairman Muradha Sultan commented that, "BDC has taken steps to strengthen the dividend case for its public investors. BDC does not have any cash sweep obligations in their financing arrangement with the senior lenders.

Further, the founding

shareholders have provided certain loans to BDC the payments for which would be subordinated to BDC's regular dividend to shareholders including public investors. This will provide further cushion to the company's dividend profile."

Commenting on the Phase I of the subscription period, Patrick Thienpont, CEO of BDC, said: "The IPO of Barka Desalination Company presents a unique and compelling opportunity backed by a consortium of marquee founder shareholders, a robust contractual framework, attractive dividend yield, and investing in a strategic asset employing proven technology driven by a strong and experienced management team. We are confident that investors will see the investment case presented by BDC and join our journey of success."

Bank Muscat Investment Banking is the financial adviser and sole issue manager for the IPO transaction. BDC has also appointed a large collection syndicate consisting of Ahli Bank, Bank Dhofar, Bank Muscat, Oman Arab Bank, Sohar International Bank, Ubhar Capital and United Securities, who would be accepting application forms from potential investors in the IPO.

MSX30 Index closes week lower

MUSCAT: The MSX30 Index ended the week down by 1.53 per cent week-on-week. All sub-sectors ended in the red territory. The Services Index ended the lowest and was down by 1.96 per cent week-on-week. The Financial Index and the Industrial Index were lower by 1.62 per cent and 1.46 per cent week-on-week, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index also fell by 0.89 per cent week-on-week.

Omanis and GCC investors absorbed most of the selling pressure from foreigners. Foreigners sold a net value of \$1.7m worth of stocks on the MSX this week. During the week, many companies announced their Board of Directors' resolutions on the MSX website, where many companies' boards have proposed dividends.

While the dividend proposals are subject to shareholder and regulatory approval, we have analysed the numbers and seen that: RO 125m worth of dividends have been proposed so far, up by 31 per cent YoY, largely led by banking and leasing stocks that have announced.

News came during the week that the Sultanate of Oman has formally launched an electricity spot market, the first in the Middle East, to increase the efficiency

of power procurement, the state news agency said on Wednesday. The Sultanate of Oman has also extended the timeframe of a planned redirecting of electricity subsidies for residential consumers to 10 years from 5 years, and capped power tariffs for the same category throughout 2022 at December 2021 levels.

Fitch Ratings has revised Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC's (Mazoon) outlook to stable from negative, while affirming the company's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB-'. The action follows a recent similar action on the Sultanate of Oman's outlook.

Mazoon's ratings are constrained by the sovereign ratings, reflecting Fitch's view of their strong links. The company's credit profile reflects Mazoon's stable profitability, with a significant share of EBITDA from regulated electricity distribution, as well as expected negative free cash flow (FCF) over the next four years, due to significant capex and higher dividends.

Fitch forecasts metrics to remain commensurate with the ratings. The Sultanate of Oman's daily average production of crude oil and condensates exceeded 1m barrels per day (bpd) mark in December 2021, up by 4 per cent

in comparison to daily average output recorded for the full year 2021.

Oil output during December increased to 1.01m bpd compared with 998,300 bpd in the previous month and 971,200 bpd during the full year 2021, the data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information showed.

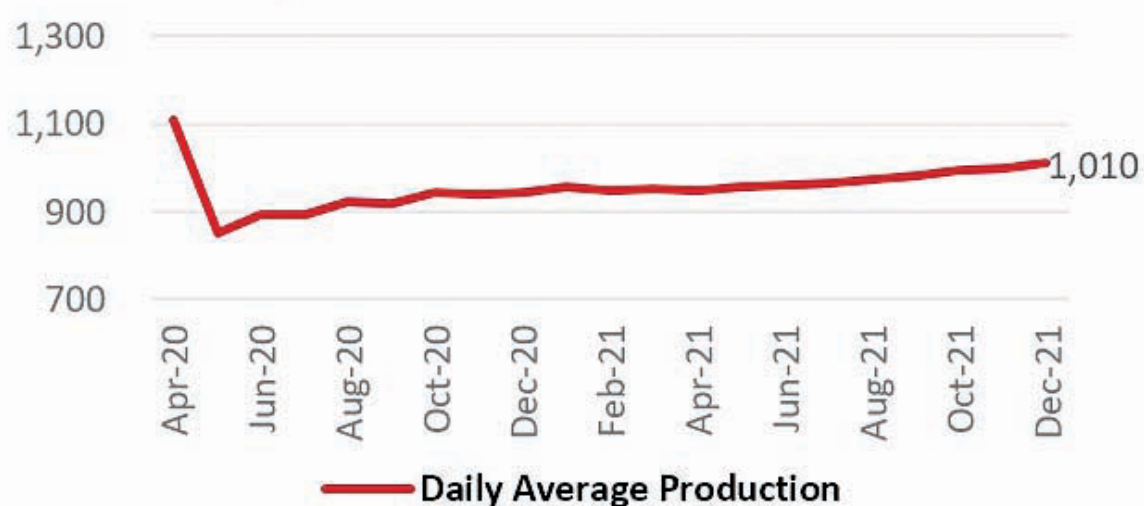
As per the latest CBO quarterly bulletin (September, 2021), gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of the leasing sector reached RO 169.6m or 17.1 per cent of gross finance assets of the sector. NPAs had been rising until 4Q20 but are down since then.

Provision cover has also improved, which had previously fallen to the lowest level of 0.58x at end-FY20. It now stands at 0.74x of NPAs at end-9M21. As per the initial disclosures on MSX by the leasing companies, combined net profit of the listed leasing companies is up 95 per cent YoY to RO 17m.

Combined quarterly net profit stood at RO 6.245m, up 104 per cent YoY and 51 per cent QoQ on account of lower provision expense for expected credit losses, as the post-pandemic economic recovery continues. Total gross finance assets stood at RO 987.6m at end-9M21, roughly flat since end-FY20.

Courtesy: U-Capital

Daily Average Production ('000)



Oman 2022 versus 2021

NIDHI NEGANDHI

As the oil and gas sector forms a major portion of the Sultanate of Oman's GDP, with a contribution of 51 per cent in 2021 to the total revenues of RO 10.9 billion, the recent surge in oil prices has once again refocused attention on the importance of hydrocarbons to the Omani economy. Omani crude production is expected to rise 10 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to 1.1 million barrels a day (bpd) in 2022 as against 0.9 million bpd through 2021.

With a conservative oil price projected in the budget of \$50/barrel, actual yields based on buoyant oil price trends of recent weeks will be significantly higher than projected revenues of approximately RO 7.2 billion from the oil and gas sector in 2022 versus RO 8.2 billion recorded in 2021. The increase in production output by Opec+ from February 2022 onwards would aid in recovery.

Even so, concerns over the Omicron variant and lack of appropriate restrictions in key geographies continue to pose a threat to the growing demand.

Given the current oil price of \$85/barrel, oil prices are expected to average out at \$75/barrel for 2022 as per the US Energy Information Administration, 50 per cent higher than the projected price, leading to an approximate 22 per cent YoY hike in revenues from oil and gas sector to an estimate of RO 10 billion in 2022, whose proceeds are earmarked to repay debt and reduce the budget deficit of RO 1.5 billion in 2022.

The non-oil and gas sector is expected to grow by a staggering



The non-oil and gas sector is expected to grow by a staggering 21 per cent YoY in 2022 with expected revenue of RO 3.3 billion versus actual RO 2.8 billion in 2021

21 per cent YoY in 2022 with expected revenue of RO 3.3 billion versus actual RO 2.8 billion in 2021. The imposition of VAT from 2021 onwards has added a new stream of revenue for the country.

In anticipation of potential volatility in oil prices, the government has reduced the quantum of expenditure by 4 per cent YoY to RO 12.1 billion in 2022 versus the actual expenditure of RO 12.6 billion in 2021.

However, the projected investment expenditure has been increased to RO 2.9 billion for 2022 versus RO 2.6 billion in 2021.

Efforts to offload revenue generation from oil and gas and on-load onto various other sectors continue to take the centre stage with attractive incentives and investments into 110 such productive projects through Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

Although it's been said time and again that the plan is to promote other productive

sectors such as tourism, logistics, etc, the OIA plans to spend 48 per cent, i.e. RO 1.4 billion of the total RO 2.9 billion on energy projects while 28 per cent (RO 802 million) on public services in 2022.

Nonetheless, the funds directed towards the energy sector have shrunk in 2022 against the RO 1.6 billion spent in 2021. With spending of RO 12.1 billion against revenue generation of RO 10.6 billion, the budget deficit for 2022 is posted at RO 1.5 billion (at an average oil price of \$50/barrel).

However, it still remains higher than the actual deficit recorded in 2021 of RO 1.2 billion (at an average oil price of \$61/barrel). The Sultanate of Oman has more than halved the quantum of foreign borrowing to 20 per cent in 2022 versus 42 per cent in 2021, and instead increased domestic borrowing to 55 per cent in 2022 as against 31 per cent in 2021.

The projected lower debt to GDP ratio of 64 per cent for 2022 versus 67 per cent in 2021, including the recovery of oil prices and narrowing of budget deficit from previous years, has led to Fitch revising the outlook to stable while affirming the rating at BB- in December 2021.

(The writer is a Muscat-based credit analyst. He can be contacted at nidhinegandhi12@gmail.com)

Italian CEOs’
Putin call exposes
European discord

Europe’s businessmen and women are in a bind. Top executives at some of Italy’s largest companies, including utility Enel and lender UniCredit, tuned in for a Zoom chat on Wednesday with President Vladimir Putin to discuss economic ties with Russia.

With a possible invasion of Ukraine looming, the government in Rome was unimpressed. The corporate conundrum leaves other European businesses with chunky Russian exposure, especially in Germany, feeling nervous.

Take trade. Germany exported \$25 billion of goods to Russia from January to November last year, second only to China and comfortably more than the \$15 billion shipped from the US. Others aren’t far behind. Italy will be reluctant to lose its \$11 billion of exports to Russia in the same period, close to 1 per cent of its GDP. France shipped a similar quantity.

In the other direction, Russia is the main supplier of oil, natural gas and coal to the EU. But while Germany derives up to three-quarters of its non-EU natural gas imports from Russia, the ratio is less than a half for France and less than a quarter for Spain, Eurostat data shows. Germany thus has greater incentive to avoid a gas embargo.

Companies like Italy’s Pirelli, whose boss was due on the Putin call, are also directly invested, with factories in the country of 145 million people. UniCredit and France’s Société Générale both own Russian banks, although the former has cooled on plans to buy another one.

The EU invested 311 billion euros in Russia in 2019. Flows slowed sharply in 2020, but Germany remained Russia’s biggest external investor, with 26 projects.

Retired European politicians strengthen the ties. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder is a chairman at state oil company Rosneft and on the shareholders’ committee of Gazprom subsidiary Nord Stream.

Former Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl also sits on Rosneft’s board. An ex-prime minister of France has links with petrochemical giant Sibur. Such figures may well be lobbying against the harshest penalties for Russia and its already stagnating economy. All of which plays into Putin’s hands. — Reuters

The corporate conundrum leaves other European businesses with chunky Russian exposure, especially in Germany, feeling nervous



SUPPORTING WORKERS

People march during a protest in support of Amazon and Starbucks workers in New York City. US labour authorities have filed a complaint accusing e-commerce giant Amazon of using threats and surveillance against its workers trying to organise a union at a New York City warehouse. Amazon allegedly grilled workers about union activities at the Staten Island site, promising to address grievances in exchange for voting against representation, the National Labour Relations Board (NLRB) argued in its complaint. — AFP

Work with what you know best



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

The writer is a member of the International Press Association

THE LESSON FROM THIS COLUMN FOR BEGINNER PROPERTY FLIPPERS, IS TO VIEW THE VENTURE STRICTLY AS A BUSINESS

Last week we talked about the business of flipping properties, which consists of acquiring houses or condos that are priced under market value, perform a fast renovation and resell at an increased price, thus generating a profit.

I have received emails from the *Oman Daily Observer* readers asking for clarifications on specific points, which I am going to address in today’s column.

A reader that requested to stay anonymous, shared that he attempted a property flip abroad, but he lost money. The deal sounded great on paper — according to his recount — but he did not factor in a large amount of costs, so it turned into a loss.

The property was a beautiful farm house on the hills of Tuscany, Italy. However, our reader did not consider that many areas in Italy fall under conservation scheme.

Thus, strict rules apply when attempting to renovate both the interior and the exterior.

Also, EU regulations impose standards for energy saving. Those who do not adhere to such standards would have a hard time reselling the property, seen as “inferior” in

the market.

Especially because potential new buyers would have to face the standards adaptation expenditures themselves, since the property flipper did not absorb them.

Most renovations and adaptations need to be vetted by professional architects and engineers, in order for the local municipality or relevant authorities to approve. The mortgage application comes with upfront costs too.

And let us not forget that property taxes could be a real pain in the neck... especially in countries like Italy. Not to mention that our reader had to travel to Italy a few times, bearing the costs of his trips.

Lastly, upon reselling the property, he incurred in more administrative costs. His loss summed up to 45 thousand euro after completing the flip.

Another reader called Maya, shared with me that with her husband successfully flipped 6 properties in the past 10 years. She mentioned that their secret is to buy properties in their area of comfort.

Of 6 properties that they flipped at a profit, only one was not in their city. She did not disclose in which country or city they flipped properties.

I found Maya’s story quite important as a lesson. For example, Martin, a friend of mine, a German living in Malaysia, is actively flipping properties really close to him. Not in the same city, not in the neighbourhood, but in the same condo where he lives.

The property development counts more than a thousand units, and he flipped ten or more in just 5 years. He knows the condo very well, and he has perfected a flipping formula that is applicable to his condo specifically.

Same contractors, same vendors, same furniture. Everything is the same. Copy and paste renovation.

He shared with me that using the same suppliers grants him up to 20 per cent discount on each transaction. This offers him almost a wholesale price on his renovations. Martin sees flipping property as a pure business. He profits between 8 per cent and 15 per cent on each flip.

To conclude, I think the lesson from this column for beginner property flippers, is to view the venture strictly as a business. Work with what you know best, and avoid unpleasant surprises — such as hidden costs — due to lack of research.

Inflation will hurt both stocks and bonds



NOURIEL ROUBINI

The author, Professor Emeritus of Economics at New York University’s Stern School of Business, is Chief Economist at Atlas Capital Team, CEO of Roubini Macro Associates, and Co-Founder of TheBoomBust.com

Rising inflation in the United States and around the world is forcing investors to assess the likely effects on both “risky” assets (generally stocks) and “safe” assets (such as US Treasury bonds).

The traditional investment advice is to allocate wealth according to the 60/40 rule: 60 per cent of one’s portfolio should be in higher-return but more volatile stocks, and 40 per cent should be in lower-return, lower-volatility bonds.

The rationale is that stocks and bond prices are usually negatively correlated (when one goes up, the other goes down), so this mix will balance a portfolio’s risks and returns.

During a “risk-on period”, when investors are optimistic, stock prices and bond yields will rise and bond prices will fall, resulting in a market loss

for bonds; and during a risk-off period, when investors are pessimistic, prices and yields will follow an inverse pattern.

Similarly, when the economy is booming, stock prices and bond yields tend to rise while bond prices fall, whereas in a recession, the reverse is true.

But the negative correlation between stock and bond prices presupposes low inflation. When inflation rises, returns on bonds become negative, because rising yields, led by higher inflation expectations, will reduce their market price.

Consider that any 100-basis-point increase in long-term bond yields leads to a 10 per cent fall in the market price — a sharp loss. Owing to higher inflation and inflation expectations, bond yields have risen and the overall return on long bonds reached -5 per cent in 2021.

Over the past three decades, bonds have offered a negative

overall yearly return only a few times.

The decline of inflation rates from double-digit levels to very low single digits produced a long bull market in bonds; yields fell and returns on bonds were highly positive as their price rose.

The past 30 years thus have contrasted sharply with the stagflationary 1970s, when bond yields skyrocketed alongside higher inflation, leading to massive market losses for bonds.

But inflation is also bad for stocks, because it triggers higher interest rates — both in nominal and real terms.

Thus, as inflation rises, the correlation between stock and bond prices turns from negative to positive.

Higher inflation leads to losses on both stocks and bonds, as happened in the 1970s. By 1982, the S&P 500 price-to-earnings ratio was eight, whereas today it is above 30.

More recent examples also show that equities are hurt when bond yields rise in response to higher inflation or the expectation that higher inflation will lead to monetary-policy tightening.

Even most of the much-touted tech and growth stocks aren’t immune to an increase in long-term interest rates, because these are “long-duration” assets whose dividends lie further in the future, making them more sensitive to a higher discount factor (long-term bond yields).

In September 2021, when ten-year Treasury yields rose a mere 22 basis points, stocks fell by 5-7 per cent (and the fall was greater in the tech-heavy Nasdaq than in the S&P 500).

This pattern has extended into 2022. A modest 30-basis-point increase in bond yields has triggered a correction (when total market capitalisation falls by at least 10 per cent) in the Nasdaq

and a near-correction in the S&P 500.

If inflation were to remain well above the US Federal Reserve’s target rate of 2 per cent — even if it falls modestly from its current high levels — long-term bond yields would go much higher, and equity prices could end up in bear country (a fall of 20 per cent or more).

More to the point, if inflation continues to be higher than it was over the past few decades (the “Great Moderation”), a 60/40 portfolio would induce massive losses.

The task for investors, then, is to figure out another way to hedge the 40 per cent of their portfolio that is in bonds.

There are at least three options for hedging the fixed-income component of a 60/40 portfolio. The first is to invest in inflation-indexed bonds or in short-term government.

© Project Syndicate, 2022

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Tally
POWER OF SIMPLICITY

TALLY FOR VAT

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: Guruprasad +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@asiasolutions.net
ASIA SOLUTIONS

https://www.asiasolutions.net

TallyPrime

SUNDAY JANUARY 30, 2022 JUMADA AL THANIA 27, 1443 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Ask for FREE Demo

Tally is now available on the **Cloud**

Think TALLY
Call 977 TALLY (977 82559)

TSO, Tally Solutions for Oman, by Infinity Thoughts LLC : 977 TALLY (977 82559) * sales@tallysolutionsoman.com * www.TallySolutionsOman.com

TallyPrime

VAT REGISTRATION, RETURN FILING, TAX CONSULTANCY

Contact: 9246 9602 / 9723 0025

VACANCY IN SHIPPING

We are looking for candidates for the post of **Logistics Sales Executive** and **Logistics Sales Coordinator** with experience in the Freight Forwarding industry to Join our Freight Forwarding (Sea/Air) team in Oman.

Education: Graduate

Nationality: Any Nationality

Mandatory Requirements:

- Minimum 3 years Sales experience in Freight Forwarding / Shipping Logistics in Oman.
- Fluent English (preferably in Arabic also).
- Driving Licence GCC/Oman is required for Logistics Sales Executive only.

Please send your CV at **careersoman90@gmail.com**

المجرة للشحن اللوجستية GALAXY CARGO LOGISTICS

WORLD WIDE AIR & SEA CARGO SERVICES

Location: Rex Road, Behind Modern Oman Bakery
GSM : +968 99635330 / 93569551
Email : gcloman@hotmail.com
Website : gcloman.com

Airport to Airport
Port to Port
Door to Door
FCL Services
LCL Services
Consolidation
GCC Road Transport
Professional Packing
Moving Local & International

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

EURO CHOICE FOODS L.L.C
(Importers of Frozen, Chilled, Fresh & Dry Food Products)

Food Service
Catering Supply
Ship Chandling
Re-export
Fresh Fruits & Vegetables
Fresh & Chilled Meat and Chicken
Dairy Product & Grocery Items

Tel: +968 24435211 / 24435177
foodservice@eurochoicefoodsllc.com
www.eurochoicefoodsllc.com

*As proven in many virology lab tests

SHYCOCAN
Virus Attenuation Device

FOR ENQUIRY, OFFER OR PURCHASE
CONTACT: 78676045

DISABLES COVID FAMILY VIRUSES

ATTENUATES COVID WITH 99.9% EFFICACY INDOORS

100% SAFE
EFFECTIVE
PLUG & PLAY
ROBUST

Dr. Monikeerthana Anandhasekar
MBBS, DPM, MRCPsych(UK)
Specialist Psychiatrist

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

Al Salama Polyclinic
Modern Al Salama Polyclinic

Appointments:
24451726 - 24455904
24451739

WE ACCEPT ALL MAJOR INSURANCE CARDS

Emergency number: 94502100

SIT. WANTED

25 years old BS electrical engineer, having 2 years experience from Philippines in construction and telecommunication company. Having training in cable testing. Contact: 94759002.

SIT VACANT

SIT VACANT URGENT NEED
Urgently required 1 No. **Crusher Operator** with minimum 5 years experiences in crusher machine, operating for a leading crusher in Sultanate of Oman. Kindly call 25542760/25540330. E-mail: scpsur@hotmail.com

FOR RENT

Villa for rent at Azaiba, 5 bedrooms, maderoom, family halls, dining room, kitchen, parking. Contact WhatsApp: 79255270.

FLATS in Ruwi, Wadi Al Kabear and Al Khwair. 99358589/ 97079146.

FLATS, 2BHK in Ghubrah near Indian School. 99341138/ 90991079.

FOR RENT

5 BEDROOM villa in Al Athaiba. Contact 97716641.

FLATS, 2BHK and 1 BHK in Mumtaz 99341138/ 90991079.

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT: 95605353, 95605454
BARKA: 95893242, 93743308
SOHAR: 96773031, 95347988
FALAJ: 94002341, 95136067
SALALAH: 94575905, 97858656
DUQUM: 97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmtcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo 800 Bz/Kg Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

FOR RENT

Substantial Villa in Hay Al Shatti near Grand Hayatt. 3 Floors with 40 Rooms, 22 Bathrooms which is suitable for Embassy / Clinic / School / Multipurpose Office / Residential Premises.

TEL : 99643760 / 24704994

AL NAMANI CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR AIR & SEA CARGO WORLD WIDE

ALL OVER INDIA EXPRESS DELIVERY

Online Tracking
TOLL FREE NUMBER: 80066766

0.800 BAIZA PER KG

INDIA | BANGLADESH | INDONESIA | PHILIPPINES | SRI LANKA | ETHIOPIA | ALL GCC SERVICE AVAILABLE

95587410, 99785420, 99638698, 98523831

HO: RUWI - HAMRIYA, GHALA, AL AMRAT, SEEB, SOHAR, SUWAIQ

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Flat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 96438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

FOR RENT

Shop/Store/Office space available in the building opposite old Ruwi Police Station behind Joy Alukkas. Approx space 50 sq.m with attached bathroom.

Contact: 99369880 / 99311209

SERVICES

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**.
Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

AUTOCAD/REVIT ARCH MEP, part/full- time.
Contact WhatsApp: 79037728.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation, Packing & Cargo Services

CARGO SERVICES BY AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE
DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK
PROFESSIONAL PACKERS & MOVERS
MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi 99851366 92495068
Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

ZEN POLYNE

"TARPAULIN WAREHOUSE IN OMAN"
INDIAN BRAND BEST QUALITY LLDPE TARPAULINE CROSS LAMINATED MULTI-LAYER TARPAULIN

FEATURES OF ZEN-POLYNE
U.V. STABILIZED
100% WATER PROOF
LIGHT WEIGHT
THERMO - WELDED JOINTS.
FLEXIBLE & CUSTOMISED SIZES.
STRONGEST TARPAULIN EVER
SUPERIOR DART IMPACT STRENGTH

RAVIRA

Please Contact: OMAN : +968 9329 1473 / 7937 1865
UAE : +971 5030 58676
Mail id: ravirainternational@gmail.com Web: www.raviraent.com

USED SHEET METAL FABRICATION MACHINES

(Ideal for Manufacturing of Electrical / Switchgear Panels, Steel Enclosures, Steel Doors, Steel Furniture, S.S. Steel Fabrication)

- CNC - PRESS BRAKE - Rarely used (Bending Machine) - Turkey
- Shearing Machine 3m x 6mm - Taiwan
- Spot Welding Machines - Italy
- Mig Welding Machines - Italy
- Tig Welding Machines - Italy
- Hydraulic Power Press - Italy
- Notching Machine - Italy
- Shark - Bandsaw - Italy
- Variety of Dies
- 1mm Galvanised Steel Sheet 4 x 8 (JSW India) - Bundles of 100
- Also available: Shuttering Jacks, Concrete Mixer - Big & Small, Core Cutting Machine (All rarely used)

Contact : RIYAN OVERSEAS LLC
Mob : 9282 2121 / 9985 5801 - Email : mail@riyanmuscat.com

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O.Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of **Schneider Electric**

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhoory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

trust only in the best

OUR SERVICES

- CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE
- OIL & GAS EQUIPMENT TRADING
- MANPOWER SUPPLY
- TRANSPORTATION & HEAVY EQUIPMENT RENTAL
- ANTI-CORROSION COATING

TECHNICAL FOR GENERAL TRADING & CONTRACTING SPC

Office no: 31, 3rd floor, Building no: 537, Street no: 5016, Area- 24
P.O.Box: 123, P.C: 113, Ghala, Muscat
22386444 / 967990700
info@hitech-oman.com
HI-TECH GROUP Kuwait

www.hitech-oman.com www.hitechkw.com

apave Apave Gulf LLC

We are hiring! Only Omani Nationals

- HSE Advisor (NEBOSH IGC / IOSH Certified)
- Plant Inspector (API Certified - 570 / 653 / 510)
- NDT Inspector (ASNT Level II in Ultrasonic Testing)
- Data Analyst (Experience in Data entry operation and MS Office - Excel & Word skill is essential)
- Mechanical Piping Draftsman (AutoCAD experience)

Fresh graduates those who are willing to undergo certain technical training may also apply

Please submit your application with latest CV and contact numbers to: Email: info-gulf@apave.com

مخازن مغلقة ومبردة للإيجار في الدقم
COLD & CLOSE STRORES FOR RENT AT DUQM

79111172
99333223
97777456
94111118

مميزات المخازن
• مساحة لكل مخزن 1000 م مربع
• موقع استراتيجي وقريب من ميناء الدقم
• مواقف بمساحات كبيرة مبلطة باللاترولون
• توفر كافة وسائل السلامة والوقاية من الحرائق

OMAN DAILY
Observer

PRIME MOVERS FOR SALE

4x2 Mercedes Model 2010
4x2 Mercedes Model 2009
6x4 Mercedes Model 2011

Please contact: 9321 2634

features

OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | editor@omanobserver.om



Film explores how local farmers turn to sugarcane for a living

As of late, several Omanis had been looking into growing sugarcane as an alternative source of income. The knowledge of farming sugarcane including processing it to become brown sugar had been passed on from generation to generation. This group of film-makers look into how it is becoming an industry on its own built from the sweat of the old Omanis... **P20**

READ



GHOST STORY

BY PETER STRAUB

For four aging men in the terror-stricken town of Milburn, New York, an act inadvertently carried out in their youth has come back to haunt them. Now they are about to learn what happens to those who believe they can bury the past — and get away with murder.

CONSERVATION

Bali beach releases endangered Indonesian turtles back to ocean

A BATCH OF 40 turtle hatchlings waddled towards the sea in Indonesia on Thursday as part of a release on a beach on the country's most popular resort island of Bali. The turtles, of the olive ridley and hawksbill species, were rescued from Bali beaches and a local conservation group has been urging volunteers to take part in their release, hoping to

boost awareness of the need to protect endangered species. "I participated because we can educate the public about why they should not kill these turtles," said Made Ayu Diah Permata at the island's Sanur beach. "I hope that the turtles can continue to live in the wild so our children and grandchildren can see them."

Indonesia has become a hub of international trafficking of marine turtles, feeding demand from countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam and China. Authorities recently sent 33 endangered green sea turtles rescued during a raid on poachers back to the ocean. "Only 1 to 2 per cent of the sea turtles can survive the cycle of birth long enough to lay eggs — the number is very small," said Agus Budi Santoso, head of the Bali Natural Resources Conservation Center, which organises the releases. "The more we release, the better it will be for the species," he added. Hawksbill turtles are classified as critically endangered according to World Wildlife Fund, and olive ridley turtles classified as vulnerable. — Reuters





find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

SUNDAY | JANUARY 30 | 2022

19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Haunting the Coast of Spain: The Ghost Hotel of Algarrobico



SIXTY YEARS AGO, British film director David Lean travelled to Spain's remote southern province of Almería to shoot his Oscar-winning movie, "Lawrence of Arabia."

The location was chosen because "this really was just an empty desert facing the beautiful sea," recalled Peter Beale, who was a young runner on the film set. The movie crew built a plywood replica of Aqaba, the Red Sea port city, in a dry riverbed leading down to the pristine beach of Algarrobico, a temporary stand-in for Lawrence and his troops to charge on horseback and capture.

In the decades following, many other parts of the Spanish coastline became almost unrecognisable, with massive construction to draw tourists and their dollars. Resort towns mushroomed, yachting marinas eclipsed fishing ports, and golf courses became the greenery of choice to lure foreign visitors, including many retirees from northern Europe.

But even as Almería was itself transformed by greenhouse agriculture, much of its land remained pristine and windswept, rugged and arid, hosting few aside from film crews keen to offer the likes of Clint Eastwood, Orson Welles, Yul Brynner and Jack Nicholson a striking terrain worthy of their movie adventures. To this day, Almería remains relatively hard to access, unconnected to the high-speed rail network that crisscrosses the rest of Spain.

However, mass tourism has not spared Almería entirely, and the beach where Lean built Aqaba is now dominated by an equally incongruous but strikingly more permanent and less successful project: a 21-story hotel that was abandoned when it was nearing completion nearly two decades ago. With three construction cranes still hovering above, the derelict hotel stands as an unused, unusable eyesore in the midst of one of the largest protected nature sanctuaries in southern Europe, the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Nature Reserve.

How such a hotel could be erected, and what should now happen to its giant concrete carcass, has been the subject of a 15-year court battle — one that has also become a litmus test for whether Spain can encourage more sustainable development in its travel industry, which has long underpinned the Spanish economy. The saga of the Algarrobico hotel also underlines another serious issue in Spain and anywhere else where real estate acts as an economic engine: When it comes to facilitating tourism, nature is more easily damaged than repaired.

"How the Algarrobico hotel can still exist is a mystery, but unfortunately the truth is that it is not an isolated case and there have been other Algarrobicos along the Spanish coast," said Pilar Marcos, a biologist who runs the Spanish biodiversity projects of Greenpeace, the nongovernmental environmental organisation. "We have repeatedly managed to ignore regulations in search of the golden goose," she said. — **NYT**

GASTRONOMY

South Indian Food That Goes Back to Its Roots, at Semma



THE SERVERS AT Semma walk around in long-sleeve black T-shirts printed with a white logo that says Unapologetic Indian. This is a reference to Unapologetic Foods, the company that runs Semma along with Dhamaka and Adda Indian Canteen. It's also the group's slogan, a vow to offer cuisine that pulls no punches.

With its sly implication that what other Indian restaurants are selling isn't quite the real thing, "Unapologetic Indian" is a virtuosic piece of marketing. You could also read it as a belated clap-back to the British Raj, which put an area with one of the world's great culinary cultures under the rule of colonial administrators from the country that gave us mushy peas and bubble and squeak.

But after rooting around for a while in the dishes coming out of Semma's kitchen, which has been operating on Greenwich Avenue in the Village since October, I find it hard to imagine anyone on earth who would want an apology for food this good.

The chef, Vijay Kumar, grew up on a rice farm outside the city of Madurai in Tamil Nadu. At Semma, he presents the cooking of his home state in particular and of South India more generally. From the region's long and deep vegetarian traditions — it has several — Semma has extracted a number of dishes that seem more contemporary than you might expect. Mulaikattiya thaniyam, a small, lastingly spicy salad of grated coconut and mung beans bearing pale, crisp, squiggly sprouts, could slide right into the menu at one of the more serious plant-based nightspots in the East Village. So could the Mangalore huukosu, cauliflower fried in a chickpea-and-rice-flour batter and then dressed with coconut chutney.

Not that Kumar doesn't offer

a few dishes that might make New York's new vegan mayor drop his fork. But while Dhamaka double-dog dares you to eat goat testicles, the most eyebrow-raising dish at Semma is probably kudal varuval, a dry curry of goat intestines. It is notable for the warm aura cast by the caramelised onions and coconut milk in its thick gravy, and for the easygoing texture of the guts, neither tough nor mushy but gently firm, like mortadella. You can even make a sandwich by folding some inside a soft triangle of the kal dosa served on the same plate. I'd recommend one of these little canapes to anybody with an open mind about eating at the tail end of the digestive tract.

When Adda arrived in Queens in 2018, followed last year by Dhamaka in Manhattan, their striking visions of Indian cuisine seemed to be fuelled by a personal creative breakthrough of their chef, Chintan Pandya. Instead of editing his native country's vast repertoire to suit American fine-dining values, as he had done at Junoon, or fusing it with other influences, as at Rahi, he went back to the source, locating street snacks and home-style recipes whose original power hadn't been refined out of existence by professionals in white jackets.

One thing that makes Semma so exciting is that it suggests that Pandya had more than a private epiphany. He seems to have hit on an approach that he can share with other chefs — the open source code of Unapologetic Foods. (Pandya is the corporate chef and a partner in the group, which is owned by Roni Mazumdar.)

Until last year, Kumar was the chef of Rasa, in Burlingame, California, where the most popular menu item was a potato fritter on a bun, called a Bombay Slider. He described the cooking as "Southern Indian but with a lot of local California ingredients

and a bit of modern technique." At Semma, he said, "we are completely focusing on true southern Indian food, exactly how we grew up eating it back home."

Not having visited the Kumars' rice paddy, I can't vouch for that. But at Semma he serves two dishes from his childhood that you'd have a hard time finding at another New York restaurant. One is nathai pirattal, snails stir-fried with onions and tomatoes, soured with tamarind and served in a small box made of banana leaves. The other is Chettinad-style venison, a shank braised into sticky tenderness with star anise and a lichen called black stone flower that is one of the prized seasonings of the Chettinad pantry.

Dosas are much less obscure. Almost any local South Indian restaurant from Floral Park in Queens to Iselin, New Jersey, will make you a dosa. This does not mean you have permission to skip the triangular gunpowder dosa at Semma. It may well be impossible to make a dosa with a more dramatic contrast between its crisp, amber-brown griddled exterior and the tender, spongy interior; it seems physically impossible for these two extremes to be united on something no thicker than a potato chip. The standard filling of soft potato masala, yellow with turmeric and speckled with mustard seeds, is launched into orbit by the thrumming heat of a ground-chile spice blend — the gunpowder.

The excitement that Adda and Dhamaka generate through the raw power of rustic cooking Semma gets instead from the brightness of its chutneys, the richness of its coconut-milk sauces, the dense layerings of ginger and freshly ground spices. Semma also has a longer, more varied menu and pays closer attention to vegetables, making it easier to fill the table with dishes that all have something different to say.

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

The Catcher in the Rye

WHENEVER I HEAR THE BOOK TITLE: *The Catcher in the Rye*, the first image that came to mind was a story set in the 1800's US — in a cornfield specifically — with a Bogeyman hiding amidst it kidnapping children.

While reading the book, I was in for a surprise: the book was mainly set in New York City in the 1940s with a teenage protagonist called Holden Caulfield.

The story revolves around the 17-year-old who'd just been kicked out of school after failing in all exams — except English — and causing his fencing team to lose when forgetting their gear in the metro. Holden is too afraid to return home as it's not his first time to be kicked out of a school and can't bear his family's reaction. He decides to spend a few days in New York before heading home for Christmas, to avoid arriving early and hence raising his parent's suspicions. After packing and saying goodbye to his colleagues and the only teacher he likes — Mr Spencer, the history teacher — he heads to the Big Apple. There, Holden spends his time roaming around the city boozing — when he gets the chance — and catching up with people from his past.

As the time of going home approaches, he gets panicky and decides to run away to the wilderness of New England where he could get a job and live anonymously. But his younger sister Phoebe manages to change his mind and he stays in New York.

Although the story is short (234 pages only) with a simple concept, it's packed with events, characters and deep conversation on every single page. The book's main theme is coming-of-age and everything it brings forth: the alienation and anxiety that comes when becoming an adult. J D Salinger uses the first person to narrate the story, so you're experiencing everything that Holden is going through: depression, constant irritation and his view of a society he considers fake.

It affects you after a while and you start viewing everything from his teenage perspective. Even better, Salinger uses phrases that were commonly used by teenagers at the time such as 'crummy' for disappointing and 'chew the fat' for small talk, both aspects relatively fascinating. Since its publication in 1951, the book has always received favourable reviews and was considered an American classic along with Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

It was named one of the best 100 English-language novels of the 20th century by *Time* magazine and BBC's Big Read. However, like every great book, it was the subject of controversy. Between the years 1961 and 1982, it was censored for many reasons: vulgar language used by the main character, promoting blasphemy and promiscuity as well as destructive values and behaviours such as drinking, smoking and lying. Curiously enough, Mark Chapman — John Lennon's assassin — was arrested with a copy of the book in 1981 dedicated to himself: Holden Caulfield.

However, the book was never made into a movie or a play because Salinger was convinced that no one could depict Holden Caulfield but himself. Caulfield was the dream role of many Hollywood actors from Jerry Lewis to Leonardo DiCaprio. Yet Salinger placed the rights of the book in trust by his names, where he was the sole trustee till his death in 2010 and it remains the same. Interestingly, a sequel of the book was published in 2009 by Fredrick Colting called *60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye* — with an adult Caulfield — which Salinger sued and successfully stopped its US publication. With all that said, the book is a rich timeless classic worth exploring.

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of *The World According to Bahja*. rashabooks@yahoo.com



Film explores how local farmers turn to sugarcane for a living

By Arwa al Hashmi

Omanis are some of the world's most resourceful people. This is apparent whenever you travel everywhere in the country — from the dry, often challenging deserts to the rocky and often cold mountains, to the beautiful coastal areas, you will see how they use the resources around them to craft a living.

As of late, several Omanis had been looking into growing sugarcane as an alternative source of income — another testament to their enduring capacity to innovate and look for ways to improve their financial state.

These sugarcane take a long time before it becomes brown sugar but being a commodity, these Omanis realise that there is a market for locally produced items like this.

It usually takes about a year for sugarcane to grow and harvested and another few months will be spent to process it and make it ready for use or sale.

Other than its economic benefit, brown sugar is also a good alternative to white sugar. Omanis use brown sugar to make "Halwa" which is the most popular dessert in Oman. They also use it for medicinal purposes like a cure for stomachache and other enteric diseases.

Many Omani families turned to brown sugar as a family business where they all collaborate to produce it in large amounts and then sell it inside and outside the country. The old people in these families took the responsibility of transmitting knowledge in how to process sugarcane through generations to maintain its historical importance

and show it to different parts of the world. Despite the lack of water, farmers are still keen to harvest the sugarcane and take it to the presses to produce the brown sugar and other related products such as Alzeej and Albloog.

There are but a few areas where sugarcane can grow in Oman. In Al Dakhiliyah, these are usually found in Nizwa, Manah, Bahla, Izki and Al Hamra. People of Al Dakhiliyah inherited this profession from their grandparents and are transmitting it to the new generations. It reflects a healthy lifestyle and it provides them with the money that they need to live. Significantly, Bahla is the major wilayat in growing sugarcane.

"Alzeej" is a film that documents an Omani profession and handcraft that reflects the Omani identity. It features the production of Omani brown sugar presenting its stages as well as providing the audience with some useful information about brown sugar as a cure for some illnesses.

Alzeej film proves the Omanis' attachment to brown sugar production and how some families maintained it and turned it into a business that works for them either financially or physically. In addition, the film represents the indigenous struggle of old Omanis to make money and live a decent life.

The production of the 50-minute film started in 2017 and was completed in 2021. It took this much time because of many factors. To explain, sugarcane is a seasonal plant; thus, it needed to wait until its season arrives. Surprisingly, it takes exactly a whole year to be ready for production.

Abdullah al Raisi, one of the team members said that *Alzeej* documents the sugarcane in terms of growing it, harvesting, regrowing it again

and making brown sugar. It also dealt with the traditional ancient tools that were used in growing the sugarcane and harvesting it as well as the way of extracting the juice which is heated till it boils. After boiling the juice, it turns to what is called sugar and yeast.

Then, they filter that hot liquid to get the brown sugar from it and they call the rest of it Alzeej which is another type of sugar that is less thick. It is used as an alternative for natural honey and/or palm honey.

This film was released in many festivals such as the Arabic Heritage Film Festival where it was rewarded with Alghaf bronze award. It was also released in Expo 2020 Dubai along with its significant participation at the level of the Arab world.

In an interview, the head of Oman Film and Theatre Society, Humaid al Amri stated that the film documents a profession, a craft and the Omani identity. It is one of the topics related to literature, life and society, and this is the value of the cinema in trying to document life in different aspects in a specific period of time and transmitting it to the coming generations.

The team is comprised of Salah al Hadhrami, Abdullah al Raisi, Mohammed al Kindi, Qasim al Sulaimi, Yaqoob al Saadi, Ahmed Yahya, Ishaq al Khiyari, Ayoob al Hadhrami, Marwan al Hadhrami, Faisal al Riyami, Shaima al Wuhaibi and Haitham al Hashmi.

