

UN seeking 'ceasefire' in Ukraine

UN chief Antonio Guterres said on Monday the global body is seeking a humanitarian ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, as the civilian toll continues to rise a month after Moscow's war on its neighbour. Guterres told reporters he had asked UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths "immediately to explore with the parties involved the possible agreements and arrangements for a humanitarian ceasefire in Ukraine."

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VERSTAPPEN BOUNCES BACK WITH THRILLING WIN OVER LECLERC



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KEY ROAD TO LINK AL BATINAH CARRIAGEWAYS



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BUSY LITTLE HANDS MAKING "LAMA SWEET"



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICES AT \$110.70 A BARREL

Oman oil price for May delivery on Monday reached \$110.70, comprising a decline by \$1.59 from the price of last Friday, which was \$112.29. The average price of Oman oil for March delivery has stabilised at \$83.62, thus \$10.48 per barrel higher than February delivery. Meanwhile, US benchmark West Texas Intermediate oil and Europe's London Brent crude both dropped more than six per cent in value to stand at \$109.71 per barrel.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY'S E-SERVICES

The Ministry of Social Development launched the first phase of the ministry's digital transformation project, which covers social security and social support services, comprising a total of 20 subservices. Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development said that the launch of the first phase of e-services is considered a vital step due to the wide range of services provided by the ministry to citizens. Al Najar added that the ministry is looking forward to launching another phase of its project which will cover social security services and other services for people with disability. **DETAILS ON P3**

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'EVERESTING' CHALLENGE AT AMERAT CLIMB



Cycling up and down a hill until you've tallied 8,848 metres of ascent – the height of the Mount Everest, without sleep is not many endurance cyclists would have dared to attempt. Oman-based cyclist Paul Wilcox and Omani endurance athlete Hashim al Farsi have successfully completed such unique challenge called 'Everesting' on the Amerat Climb at the weekend.

DETAILS ON P10

Chemical in broccoli slows Covid-19 virus

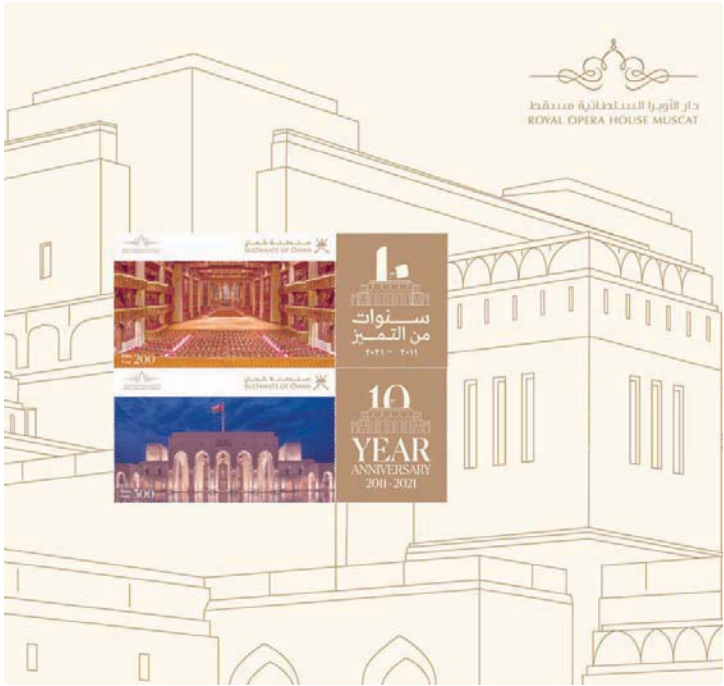
BALTIMORE: A chemical found in broccoli and other vegetables may offer a promising approach to preventing and treating Covid-19 after small amounts of the compound were found to reduce Sars-CoV-2 growth in mammalian cells and mice. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Children's Centre in Baltimore, have found sulforaphane, a plant-derived chemical or phytochemical found in broccoli and other cruciferous plants, can inhibit the replication of Sars-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes Covid-19. The results, published in the 'Nature Journal Communications Biology' showed promising evidence after combining even smaller amounts of sulforaphane with remdesivir, an antiviral medication used to treat some



hospitalised Covid-19 patients. The researchers say sulforaphane has already been found to have anti-cancer effects, but the public shouldn't rush to buy sulforaphane supplements online or in stores due to a lack of regulation and the need for studies in humans to prove the chemical's efficacy. The team says it plans to do human studies to determine whether sulforaphane can prevent or treat infection.

— Agencies

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF JOURNEY



ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT

10 YEARS OF JOURNEY

10th Anniversary 2011-2021

The Royal Opera House Muscat on Monday launched the newly released commemorative stamp, designed in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the opera house. Since the opening of the opera house in October 2011, the building, the programming and public engagement in cultural enrichment have been dynamic and exciting. Over a decade of world-class programming has seen packed audiences for stars, world premieres of epic operas, co-productions commissioned and performed by the opera house, and the curation of multiple exhibitions. The Royal Opera House Muscat has expanded to include the House of Musical Arts which is linked via the world's first interactive musical bridge.

DETAILS ON P2

Majlis seeks more funds for health sector

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Majlis Ash'shura held its 10th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022), under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, on Monday.

The meeting saw the presentation of an urgent matter by Hameed bin Ali al Nasseri regarding shortage of medical staff and retreat of healthcare standards at health institutions since 2014 due to the financial crisis. It said that the health institutions have lost hundreds of national medical professionals and health workers due to retirement or resignations.

In order to overcome the problem, Al Nasseri proposed some recommendations which included applying the medical regulation particularly with regard to the promotion and incentive packages of medical professionals and reinstating the government-funded scholarship and qualification programmes for medical and assistant medical staff especially senior nurses to overcome the problem of staff shortage.

The urgent matter requested the Ministry of Finance speed up



Allocations need to be provided to the Ministry of Health and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. More funds are also necessary for construction of hospitals and health centres

HAMEED BIN ALI AL NASSERI

the allocations provided to the Ministry of Health and the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and the construction of hospitals and health centres, the allocations which have been halted for years as well as the provision of medicines, cleaning and maintenance and replacement of old vehicles and medical equipment.

Another urgent matter presented by Mansour bin Abdullah al Saeedi, member of the council, shed light on the delay in maintenance of some schools affected by Cyclone Shaheen.

TURN TO P2

Oman's tourism strategy to focus on nature and adventure

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman will be showcased as a destination that will offer tourists top quality products focused on luxury, adventure and nature.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Asma al Hajri, Deputy Director-General of Tourism Promotion, said: "It is very important to showcase the Sultanate of Oman as a niche tourist destination as defined in our marketing strategy. Like many other destinations the Sultanate of Oman is also impacted by the pandemic. However, we are looking for brighter future ahead of us and I am optimistic that the travel industry will revive again soon."

TURN TO P5



Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tender for 2022:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tenders bids	Tender Price
11/2022	Supply and Implement Servers in HQ and DR Sites	07 April 2022	21 April 2022	55 RO
12/2022	Oracle Infrastructure Support Renewal with Local Support	07 April 2022	21 April 2022	25 RO

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E-Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. The Vendors must provide **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value valid for (120) days on website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24402200 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

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Majlis seeks more funds for health sector



FROM P1

It said that the government's efforts to provide services for citizens are undeniable. However, he added, even after six months since Cyclone Shaheen some sectors have been rendered non-functional, citing the example of Zahrat Al Madaen School which has 948 students and 80 teaching and administrative staff. The school has not been included in the maintenance schedule for this year and the students and teachers have not been shifted to another school.

APPROVALS

The meeting approved a proposal for adding an article to the Oman Penal Law to allow the publication of judicial rulings in cases of betrayal of public trust and crimes related to public office.

The council approved an agreement on air transport services between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Tajikistan referred by the government in light of the visions of the Services and Social Development Committee.

The council also approved a report submitted by the Services and Social Development Committee regarding an agreement for regulating air transport services between the governments of

the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and an agreement for air transport services between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Senegal.

The council approved an expressed desire for increasing the retirement pension in light of the opinion of the Economic and Financial Committee.

Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head and rapporteur of the committee, presented the justifications for submitting the request, pointing to the need to alleviate the burden on retired citizens to enable them to meet the increasing costs of living and advancing economic activity by booting the purchasing power of individuals in view of the economic downturn and the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

PENSIONS

The meeting also approved an expressed desire to increase the monthly pensions for social security families as per a suggestion made by the Services and Social Development Committee. The expressed desire is based on the fact that the current social security pension falls short of meeting the minimum basic needs. The Services and Social Development Committee confirmed that it is

working on legislative review of the Social Security Law to achieve the required social security standard.

The council also approved a report submitted by the Youth and Human Resources Committee on the expressed desire to provide an integrated clinic at the sports complexes and an ambulance with medical staff specialised in sports medicine. The committee agreed to the desire in principle and recommended the activation and application of the legal articles regulating the rules of competitions, taking into account the need to enhance the financial allocations in order to ensure the implementation of all health requirements stipulated by the legislation governing the sports sector.

The council reviewed the response submitted by the Council of Ministers regarding the expressed desire to determine a percentage of the annual government withdrawal from the net profits of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). The Council of Ministers said in its response that the issue of withdrawals from investment returns is among the most important objectives of OIA which targets to augment the public revenues. The council reviewed the draft amendment of some provisions of the Notary Public Law.

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Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Introduction

Duqm Power Company SPC (herein the "Employer") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake the following Services /Project in Duqm. The Employer Invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below.

No	Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	RFP Issuance Date	Bid Submission Date
1	DPC-DPW-00-000-LE-TND-0025	Request for Proposal for Construction of Landscape works for DIPWP Project in Duqm.	The Contractor's scope of works will be for construction of landscape (Hardscape and Softscape) works in Duqm, Al Wusta Region. The brief Scope of Works as follows: • Construction of landscape works for DPC located at Duqm. • Building external finishing works. • Irrigation and other related works through completion.	OMR 50 non-refundable (Tender Fee is waived for SME's Riyadhha Cardholder and Bidders who previously participated for the same)	3-April-2022	24-April-2022

Request for proposal

The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 3-April 2022 Oman time.

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with relevant Government Authority for works of this nature, and have necessary experience in Oman for similar services. We particularly encourage Contractors currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading "Construction of Landscape works in DIPWP Project in Duqm" to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package



ROHM celebrates 10th anniversary, unveils commemorative stamp

AFRAH AL BLAUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), in cooperation with Oman Post, on Monday launched a commemorative stamp designed in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the opening of the opera house, and in commemoration of the achievements, concerts and international musical performances hosted by the house during the past decade. The stamp can be purchased from March 31 at the box office, the gift shop, and the Oman Post store in the Opera Galleria. The price of the stamp is set at 0.500 baisa.

Since the opening of ROHM in October 2011, the building, the programming and public engagement in cultural enrichment have been dynamic and exciting. Over a decade of world-class programming has seen packed audiences for stars, world premieres of epic operas, co-productions commissioned and performed by ROHM, and the curation of multiple exhibitions.

ROHM has expanded to include the House of Musical Arts which is linked via the world's first interactive musical bridge. Inaugurated in 2019, the new building has a capacity of 548 seats to complement ROHM's 1,057 seats.

The Exhibition of Musical Arts and the Music Library completes the House of Musical Arts, further defining the achievements of the last 10 years.



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CPA strictly monitoring prices of essentials ahead of Ramadhan



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has decided to deal with seriously any undue price hike or hoarding of essentials ahead of the holy month of Ramadhan. For this, strict market monitoring is in place.

“Wide monitoring and awareness-raising efforts are in place to protect consumers’ interests in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman ahead of the holy month of Ramadhan,” a spokesperson at the CPA told the Observer.

An official body set up to watch the market and safeguard the consumers from inappropriate market practices has been to

We are making sure that the prices of goods on the shelf and check-out counters are the same to avoid any price discrepancy. Additionally, our teams are visiting suppliers’ commercial centres to ensure that the consumer rights are protected

SALIM AL HAKMANI
Chairman of CPA

keep an eye on price stability and ensure a constant supply of goods.

“The CPA has conducted inspection tours to the commercial centres in the capital since last week to ensure the stability of prices and the availability of goods. The Authority and all its departments have developed an action plan to intensify control over the markets, explaining the mechanisms for implementing and applying laws and regulations related to the protection of consumer rights to ensure that there is no undue price hike,” a statement from Salim al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority said.

The teams comprising judicial control officers and shop inspectors are inspecting regular

shops, fruit and vegetable markets and sheep pens, meat shops, car agencies, textile stores, shops that sell traditional Omani dresses, sewing shops, perfumes, incense, nuts, sweets and others.

Besides ensuring the credibility of Ramadhan promotions and the conformity of the offers with the applicable legal procedures, these teams will be in action during the mornings and evenings throughout the holy month.

“Also, we are making sure that the prices of goods on the shelf and check-out counters are the same to avoid any price discrepancy. Additionally, our teams are visiting suppliers’ commercial centres to ensure that the consumer rights are protected,” he further said.



Ministry of Social Development launches 20 e-services

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Monday launched the 1st phase of the ministry’s digital transformation project, which covers social security and social support services, comprising a total of 20 subservices.

HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the launch of the first phase of e-services is considered a vital step due to the wide range of services provided

by the ministry to citizens.

Al Najar added that the ministry is looking forward to launching another phase of its project which will cover social security services and other services for people with disability.

She further said that the ministry faced many challenges in providing social services due to the nature of each case, social variables and the occurrence of changes, and modifications to systems, regulations and laws.

RNO continues Sea Lion drill



DUQM: The naval exercise Sea Lion 1/2022, carried out by the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), continued at Al Wusta Maritime Zone, on Monday. The exercise will conclude on March 30.

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of RNO followed up the exercise activities accompanied by RNO senior officers. They were briefed about the exercise and viewed live firing

of surface-to-surface missiles at mock sea targets displaying the capabilities of RNO and the skills of its vessels’ crew in the handling of sea targets.

The implementation of the sea drill comes within the framework of the annual training plans carried out by the RNO with the aim of sustaining the readiness of its fleet and personnel in various maritime tasks. — ONA

Cyber security meet to focus on ‘safe economy’

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

National and international cyber experts will discuss ideas and actions to ensure a ‘safe economy’ at the 2nd Oman Cyber Security Conference to be held under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, on Wednesday.

Abdullah al Shuali, Editor in Chief of Oman Daily Observer, will moderate the media session of the event, which is expected to come out with crucial recommendations towards a “safe economy free from cyber threats.”

The event titled ‘Partnership for a Safe Economy’ is scheduled at the Sheraton Hotel.

Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, will deliver a keynote speech at the conference hosted by Hatim bin Hamed al Taie, Secretary-General of the Conference, followed by the opening statement by Dr Ali bin Salem al Balushi, Director of the Electronic Defence Centre.

A survey tour of the work of the teams participating in the “Ethical Hacking Response Exercise”

will be implemented with the participation of a group of ethical hacking experts and cybersecurity specialists, on the sidelines of the conference, soon after a film entitled “Partnership for a Safe Economy” is screened.

The first session will discuss ‘Electronic Security and Partnership Requirements’ that includes a working paper ‘Possible Legislative Frameworks to Achieving Cyber Security’ presented by Mohammed bin Ahmed al Lamki, member of the Technology and Innovation Committee in the State Council.

Abdullah bin Nabil bin Abdullah al Ghassani, a cyber security specialist at Cyber Security Park of Oman Data Park Company, will present a working paper entitled ‘Towards partnerships that keep pace with development and protect systems and information.’

Then a working paper entitled ‘The Concept of Partnership in Cyber Security Strategies’ will be presented by Mazin bin Nasser al Salmi, a researcher in cyber security affairs at the Electronic Defence Centre.

The second session is entitled ‘Economics of Electronic Security’

OMAN CYBER SECURITY CONFERENCE
مؤتمر عُمان للأمن الإلكتروني

الأربعاء 30 مارس 2022 | شيراتون عُمان - قاعة عُمان

شراكة من أجل اقتصاد آمن

رئيسة الجلسة

المهندس مقبول بن سالم الوهبي

رئيس الجلسة

الدكتور علي بن سالم البلوشي

رئيس الجلسة

المكرم حاتم بن حمد الطائي

الجلسة النقاشية: نحو شراكة فاعلة من أجل اقتصاد آمن

الرعاية

عبدالله الشصامي

الرئيس

محمود بن أحمد البلوشي

الرئيس

محمود بن أحمد البلوشي

الرئيس

محمود بن أحمد البلوشي

المحور الأول: الأمن الإلكتروني ومتطلبات الشراكة

مهاجر بنت سعيد الفلكية

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المحور الثاني: اقتصادات الأمن السيبراني

سعيد بن محمد البادي

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and includes the presentation of a number of working papers by eminent personalities in the field. Aziza bint Sultan al Rashidiyah,

Director of Cyber Security Services at the National Information Safety Centre at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and

Information Technology, will present a working paper entitled ‘The Cybersecurity Industry and Integrated Roles’ while Saeed

bin Mohammed al Badi, Senior Information Security Specialist at Daleel Oil Company will present a working paper entitled ‘Towards Unified Penetration Indicators’.

Dr Ahmed bin Hammad al Kalbani, Dean of the Academy of Advanced Cyber Security, will present the last working paper in this session, entitled “Innovation in Enhancing Readiness for Cyber Security”.

The conference will conclude with a discussion session entitled “Towards an Effective Partnership for a Safe Economy”, in which Mohammed bin Ahmed al Lamki, Member of the Technology and Innovation Committee at the State Council, Dr Ahmed bin Hammad al Kalbani, Dean of the Academy of Advanced Electronic Security, and Maysa bint Saeed al Dhankiyah, Assistant Director of Cyber Security will participate.

Ernst & Young, Niaz bin Ahmed al Balushi, Director of Information and Technology Department at Daleel Petroleum Company and Anas bin Mohsin al Balushi, Senior Cyber Security Engineer at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) will also be part of the sessions.



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

EXCITEMENT has set in as the Muslims worldwide are gearing up to welcome the holy month of Ramadhan in a little over a few days.

Against hybrid celebrations featuring virtual traditions during the last two years upended by the Covid-19 pandemic, enthusiasm is building up now at different levels in the days leading up to the big days.

This will be the third socially distanced Ramadhan in the Sultanate of Oman compared to the previous two, although the authorities have restored normalcy across all sectors, with daily Covid-19 cases registering a sharp decline over the past weeks.

“With the advent of the blessed month of Ramadhan, the entire schedule will change. Even though the past two Ramadhans were a bit sad because of the pandemic restrictions, this year we will make it greater with our kith and kin”, said Mubarak al Wahaibi, owner of a contracting company in Ruwi.

Leave alone congregational prayers, the atmosphere of fasting together and wishing all the people you meet is so mesmerising, he said.

Abdullah al Balushi, a schoolteacher, is thrilled that no one is thinking about the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic, and there is no worry that any expected restrictions will hamper Ramadhan traditions.

“What is on everyone’s mind is how to make the month more special. While precautions will be in place and restrictions will prevail, the heightened spirituality and love for each other will be thriving”, he said.

OUTBREAK OF THE PANDEMIC

This is the first Ramadhan since the outbreak of the pandemic. Now expectations are that families can eat together, so people are buying more, he told ‘Observer’.

Ramadhan plans were altered last year when mosques were closed due to the pandemic and shopping centres shut, he said adding, “now I am delighted to see all the places hustling and bustling, all day long and even into nights”.

However, what worries many people are the prices of some of the commodities, which have seen a rise in the recent weeks following the Russia Ukraine war.

The Consumer Protection Authority last week asked suppliers and retailers not to increase prices of products and commodities that are currently available in the market and have been affected by the increase in oil prices.

At the same time, hypermarkets and retailers across the country have started making several promotions and offers of different consumer goods at competitive prices to attract more customers.

Some of the leading hypermarket groups have created special spaces for items used, especially during Ramadhan, with posters welcoming customers.

“This is one of the best sales seasons for us as people buy significant quantities of goods, especially food items. We have enough items in stock and have already put many of them in special offers and promotions”, said Mohsin Valliath, Marketing Executive of a hypermarket.

He said that his company has already ordered in advance most of the commodities in the countries from which it imports them so that they can give reasonable retail prices to the customers.

EXCITEMENT
AS RAMADHAN
SET TO
BEGIN SANS
‘VIRTUAL
TRADITIONS’



■ OMAN, FRANCE DISCUSS FOOD SECURITY COOPERATION



MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, met here on Monday with Jean-Yves Le Drian, French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

The two sides explored areas of cooperation related to food security.

They also discussed developing the bilateral relations.

The meeting was attended by Veronique Aulagnon, French Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, and the delegation accompanying the guest.

— ONA

Tourism strategy to focus on nature and adventure



FROM P1

“Travel industry is a resilient industry, consumers are looking at experiences when travelling abroad and this is what the Sultanate of Oman is unique and offers to our guests,” she said.

This event will help to decrease the impact of pandemic by having global key players meeting together face to face with our Omani trade partners in order to engage and put the Sultanate of Oman on a global map.

“Our beautiful country is now open and ready to welcome visitors from all around the globe, thanks to our government which has relaxed travel restrictions.”



Al Hajri said 2019 is our year of benchmark and we are hoping to go back to same numbers and eventually our target goal is to increase between 30-50 per cent in coming year, which is possible as the ministry has reopened representative offices in key source markets such as the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Netherlands, Nordic

countries and India and as well with the help of our national carrier Oman Air to increase the air capacity in those markets.

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism hosting the Global Travel Week Middle East for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman, she said, “We brought 70 buyers from all over the world and most of them are from Europe, Middle East and India.

“The purpose is to strengthen relationship between Omani partners and international buyers. It will give opportunity to showcase what Oman offers — luxury products, adventure and the blessed nature of our county.”

SAI participates in ARABOSAI meeting

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is taking part in the consultative meeting to develop the strategic plan for the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI). The meeting is being held with the participation of the member bodies, heads of the ARABOSAI's committees and the representative of the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI) in the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

The meeting reviews the outcomes of the analysis for the internal and external surveys related to the strategic plan, the actions taken by the plan's committee, in addition to presenting the strategic plan of the INTOSAI. The meeting reviewed experiences of related regional organisations (AFRO-SAI-E and IDI).

During the meeting, the SAI will present a working paper on the achievements of the Institutional Capacity Development Committee in aspects related to the strategic and operational plan, in addition to training and scientific research activities. — ONA

Oman witnessed across-the-board growth in 2021



SAMUEL KUTTY

[@samkutttyp](#)

On the back of the expansionary fiscal policies and uptick in both oil and non-oil activities, the Sultanate of Oman witnessed strong economic growth in 2021.

“Despite challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, there have across-the-board improvements in all sectors”, said Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

While oil activities registered a growth of 25.5 per cent, the performance by non-oil sectors rose by 7.8 per cent in 2021.

The minister, who was participating in a programme “With the Youth”, said that the fiscal balance programme, rationalised government spending and the introduction of some levies including the value added tax helped the overall performance of the economy in the previous year.

To alleviate the impact of the pandemic, the minister said, several measures including stimulus packages, especially for small and medium enterprises, have already been rolled out during the last several months.

At the same time, Al Saqri expressed his concern that an expected increase in inflation at a rate of 4.4 per cent due

to the Covid-19 pandemic has caused major challenges to the supply chains.

“Still, the issue is being addressed domestically through several measures including spending controls, review of interest rates by banks and the same on bonds”, the minister said.

Al Saqri stressed on the need for complying with the fiscal balance plan of the 10th Five-Year Plan and its financial management system aimed at accelerating economic growth and creating more job opportunities.

The Plan aims to achieve a real growth rate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of not less than 3.5 per cent on average during the years of the plan, and to achieve a growth rate of GDP at current prices by an average of 5.5 per cent during the years of the plan.

To address this challenge and correct labour market imbalances, the 10th Plan adopted policies that contribute to changing the composition of work

from its current situation. It is expected that 27,000 jobs will be generated annually.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the GDP of the Sultanate of Oman at the end of December 2021 increased by 16.1 per cent to reach RO 33.016 billion compared to RO 28.442 billion at the end of December 2020.

Donate blood before Ramadhan

KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

With the holy month of Ramadhan is approaching, the Central Blood Bank in Bausher has exhorted donors to visit the Centre during the working hours and donate blood.

Every year, there is a remarkable drop in blood donors visiting the Centre to donate blood during the fasting month even though it has been declared harmless.

Donating blood and platelets during the month of Ramadhan is absolutely harmless, and a fasting person can donate blood any time of the day.

However, due to restoration and other medical reasons and to keep the person safe, medics say one can donate blood after breaking the fast.

However, people who are not fasting are welcome to donate blood or platelets during the day.

His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili,



the Grand Mufti, has earlier issued a decree on this, saying blood can be donated after Iftar as transfusion amounts to breaking fast during the day.

Besides, the less working timings in the holy month is another deterrent as many don't find time to visit the Centre.

Usually, the Centre is open from 8 am till 1 pm and from

7.30 pm to 11.30 pm, except on Friday.

“We conducted a public blood donation drive in association with the National Blood Bank because of the holy month when fewer people turn up to donate blood”, said TP Muneer, a social worker who steered a camp on Friday.

The camp was conducted in association with the “We

Help Blood Donors Oman” and Muscat KMCC Al Khoudh area Committee at the Muscat Premier Medical Centre, where nearly 70 people from different backgrounds joined hands in the mission supervised by the officials from the Ministry of Health.

“We earnestly request all fellow beings to visit the Blood Bank and donate the lifesaving liquid to support the national initiatives to save lives”, the team said.

“To meet the scarcity of donors during the month, the Blood Bank conducts mobile blood drives from 8 pm to 11 pm and as many as 30 mobile blood donation drives are usually lined up for the month at various parts of the country”, a spokesperson from the Blood Bank said.

“Additionally, the bank makes it a point to collect an additional storage of blood prior to the beginning of the month so that the need for blood can be met to a great extent”, she added.

CMYF blood camp on Friday

MUSCAT: Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), a voluntary organisation, is conducting a blood donation camp on Friday.

The camp will be held at Bausher Blood Bank, opposite to the Royal Hospital. CMYF founder-president

Ramdas Chandaka called upon all humanitarians to participate in this noble cause of saving other's life. The CMYF has been honoured by the Ministry of Health on several occasions in recognition of its continuing support for blood collection services in Oman.



Announcement of the tender TND GS BV /02/2022 for the supply PPE and HSE tools

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC have been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for supply PPE & HSE equipment and tools. To participate to bidding please send e-mail to: mohamed.farid@INIMA.com, subject **TND GS BV /02/2022** within 3rd April 2022 1:00 PM including copy of CR, copy of SME card if any, copy of VAT certificate. A reply with full list of items to be quoted will be reverted to candidate same day.

Bid closing time: **7th April 2022 1:00PM**

Validity of offer: **One month**

Currency: **OMR**

Commercial Offer shall be sent to : mohamed.farid@INIMA.com

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC General Terms and Condition for Purchasing are applied.



Libyans want peace, elected government: UN adviser

TUNIS: The Libyan people want to end a decade of violence and elect a government, showing “zero appetite” for further conflict despite a renewed political standoff, the UN’s top in-country official said. Speaking as concerns mount over the sustainability of a 17-month-old ceasefire, Stephanie Williams also insisted that deepening fractures, including a re-emergence of rival governments, can be “worked through”.

“Most Libyans really want to put an end to 11 years of chaos, division and war — and do so in a peaceful way by going to the ballot box,” Williams said.

Libya was meant to hold elections last December, as part of a UN-guided peace process aiming to draw a line under a complex conflict that dates back to the 2011 revolt that toppled and killed ruler Muammar Gaddafi.

But as political factions wrangled over their legal basis and the eligibility of controversial candidates, the polls were indefinitely postponed.

Williams said that was “a huge disappointment” to Libyans, especially after some 2.8 million citizens registered to vote amid a rare



Stephanie Williams, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in Libya during an interview in the Tunisian capital Tunis. — AFP

period of optimism following a landmark October 2020 ceasefire.

A new fissure deepened early this month when Libya’s eastern-based parliament approved a new cabinet in a direct challenge to a Tripoli-based unity government that was painstakingly stitched together through UN-led talks a year ago. That move was quickly followed by ominous military manoeuvrings on the capital’s outskirts.

“There is a crisis over the executive, there is a political conflict over who sits in Tripoli,” Williams acknowledged in an interview in Tunisia.

“But that can be worked through.” The latest in a long line of standoffs pits Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah’s interim government in Tripoli against Fathi Bashagha, a former interior minister chosen by parliament as his successor. Bashagha is

supported by eastern-based military strongman Khalifa Haftar, who waged a devastating but ultimately unsuccessful 2019-2020 offensive against a previous “unity government” in Tripoli.

Bashagha’s backers say Dbeibah was only meant to lead the country to the December 24 vote — and that his mandate has therefore expired. But the incumbent insists he will only cede power to an elected administration.

Williams, an Arabic-speaking American diplomat who reports to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, has warned publicly against escalation and offered to mediate.

Williams said she had met thousands of people from across the country in recent months. Based on those talks, “there is zero appetite to return to large-scale conflict in Libya,” she said. “There’s always going to be a degree of shallow legitimacy attached to any executive that is not directly elected by the people.”

The political manoeuvring that has obstructed elections has also laid bare the “massive disconnect between the political class and the body politic”, she added. — AFP



Yemeni workers carry bags of flour at a bakery in Sanaa. — AFP

Yemen faces ‘troubling outlook’: UNDP chief

DOHA: War-torn Yemen faces an “extremely troubling outlook” after a serious escalation between Ansar Allah fighters and Saudi Arabia, the head of the United Nations Development Programme warned on Sunday.

Achim Steiner, the UNDP’s administrator, also said the impoverished country is at risk of being “forgotten” as Russia’s war on Ukraine grabs the world’s attention. “It is an extremely troubling outlook at the moment for the people of Yemen,” Steiner said in an interview at the Doha Forum, when asked about the latest surge in hostilities.

“The reality is that desperation, poverty, destruction have reached a level in Yemen where the majority of the population is in one way or another unable to

sustain itself anymore,” he added.

On Friday, a fighter attack on a Saudi oil plant set off a huge fire near Jeddah’s Formula One circuit during televised practice sessions. The attack was one of 16 drone-and-missile assaults on the kingdom that day.

The wave of attacks came just before Saturday’s seventh anniversary of the coalition’s military intervention in Yemen. The coalition stepped in to support Yemen’s internationally-recognised government in 2015, after the fighters seized the capital Sanaa the previous year.

The war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly and left millions on the brink of famine in what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian catastrophe. — AFP

US, Philippines kick off their largest-ever war games

MANILA: The Philippines and the US launched the largest-ever joint military drills in the archipelago nation on Monday, signalling deepening defence ties as fresh tensions surface in the disputed South China Sea.

The war games are the last under outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, who previously threatened to cancel exercises and axe a key military deal with longtime ally the United States as he pivoted towards China.

Nearly 9,000 Filipino and American soldiers will take part in the 12-day training event across the main island of Luzon, which is usually an annual affair but was cancelled or curtailed during the pandemic.

Philippine military chief General Andres Centino said at the opening ceremony in Manila that the largest round of the Balikatan war games reflected the “deepening alliance” between the two countries.

US Major General Jay Bageron said the “friendship and trust”

Nearly 9,000 Filipino and American soldiers will take part in the 12-day training event

between their respective armed forces would allow them to “succeed together across the entire spectrum of military operations”.

The exercises will cover maritime security, amphibious operation, live-fire training and counter-terrorism, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Recent manoeuvres between the two countries focused on potential conflict in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims almost in its entirety.

Since taking power in 2016 Duterte has moved closer to China, but has faced pushback from the Philippine public and concern in the military wary of



Philippine and US officials pose during the opening ceremony for a 12-day joint military drill at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City, east of Manila. — AFP

Beijing’s territorial ambitions in the waters.

Trillions of dollars in trade pass through the strategic sea and it is thought to contain rich petroleum deposits, making it a frequent source of regional friction.

China has ignored a 2016 ruling

by the Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration that its historical claim is without basis.

It has reinforced its stance by building artificial islands over some contested reefs and installing weapons on them.

The future of the war games was

thrown into doubt after Duterte said in February 2020 that he planned to axe the Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides the legal framework for the United States to hold joint military exercises and operations in the Philippines.

But he walked back the decision last July, as tensions between Manila and Beijing over the South China Sea spiked following the detection of hundreds of Chinese boats parked at a reef off the Philippines.

On the eve of the joint drills, the Philippine Coast Guard accused its Chinese counterpart of steering one of its ships within metres of a Filipino patrol boat near the disputed Scarborough Shoal -- a flashpoint between the two countries.

That came weeks after Manila confronted Beijing’s ambassador over a Chinese navy ship “lingering” in the Philippines’ archipelagic waters.

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to media requests for comment on the war games.

But on the Scarborough Shoal incident, China’s foreign ministry on Monday urged the Philippine ships to “earnestly respect China’s sovereignty” over the area.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

RAMALLAH

Jordan’s king makes rare West Bank trip

Jordan’s King Abdullah II met Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas in Ramallah, in his first trip to the Israeli-occupied West Bank since 2017, Abbas’s office said. Abdullah’s visit came as foreign ministers from four Arab countries and the US wrapped up a meeting which host Israel hailed as “historic”, following a series of normalisation agreements last year.

Abdullah’s visit, which lasted about two hours, was held less than a week before Ramadhan,



which last year saw waves of violence across the West Bank and east Jerusalem. The Jordanian king met Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid earlier this month to discuss strategies for containing unrest during Ramadhan.

YANGON

Suu Kyi ‘in quarantine’ after testing positive

Detained former Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has skipped three days of her trial in a junta court after Covid-19 was detected among her staff and she was placed in quarantine, a source with knowledge of the case said.

The 76-year-old’s civilian government was ousted in a coup last year that triggered mass protests and she faces a raft of charges that could see her jailed for more than 150 years.

Currently on trial for alleged



corruption, breaching Myanmar’s official secrets act and pressuring the election commission, Suu Kyi has not appeared in court since last Thursday, the legal source said.

VALLETTA

Malta’s PM sworn in after landslide poll win

Malta’s Prime Minister Robert Abela was sworn in following a landslide victory in weekend elections that delivered his Labour party a third term in government.

Labour won 55.11 per cent of the vote, final results showed — a bigger win than in 2017 or 2013 despite low turnout and the legacy of scandal over the murder of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. It was the first electoral test for Abela, a 44-year-old lawyer, since he took the helm of the tiny Mediterranean island



nation in January 2020 following a Labour party vote. His predecessor Joseph Muscat was forced to quit after being accused of shielding his allies from the investigation into Caruana Galizia’s 2017 assassination in a car bomb.

Ukraine puts \$565 bn price tag on war damage

KYIV: The Ukrainian government estimated on Monday the economic damages losses from the Russian invasion, which has been under way for just over one month, at nearly \$565 billion.

Economy Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said on Facebook that the \$564.9 billion estimate includes immediate damage plus expected losses in trade and economic activity.

“It should be noted that everyday the numbers change and unfortunately they are increasing”, said Svyrydenko, who is also a deputy prime minister.

Damage to public and private property — with Russian forces resorting to fierce bombardments that have levelled some cities as their assault, which began February 24, has stalled — was the biggest element.

Svyrydenko said public infrastructure losses — including damaged roads, railways and airports — totalled \$119 billion, while damage to private property including housing was up to \$90.5 billion.

Damages and losses suffered by private firms was put at \$80 billion.

Svyrydenko estimated gross domestic product in 2022 would be down by \$112 billion, which would be a drop of more than 55 per cent of Ukraine’s economic activity last year.

Ukraine’s government will likely miss out on \$48 billion in tax revenue, or just about all of what it was expecting to take in this year.

Meanwhile, \$54 billion in foreign direct investment will likely not materialise.

Svyrydenko said Ukraine’s government would seek to confiscate Russian assets seized in the country as compensation. “Ukraine, despite all the obstacles, will seek to exact compensation payments from the aggressor”, she said.

Meanwhile, nearly 3.9 million people have fled Ukraine since Russia’s invasion a month ago, UN figures showed Monday, with the flow continuing to slow. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said 3,862,797 Ukrainians had fled the country — an increase of 41,748 from Sunday’s figures.

— AFP

Russia, Ukraine set for face-to-face peace talks

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine will restart face-to-face peace negotiations amid warnings that the situation in the besieged city of Mariupol was now “catastrophic”.

President Volodymyr Zelensky hailed the resumption of over-the-table talks, saying they must bring peace “without delay” and signalling a willingness to compromise on the most sensitive topics.

The two sides have not met in person in weeks, but will hold three days of talks in Istanbul from Monday, according to David Arakhamia, a Ukrainian negotiator, lawmaker and Zelensky ally.

Several rounds of talks have already failed to end the war sparked by the Russian assault, which is now in its second month.



An abandoned Russian armoured vehicle in the village of Mala Rogan, east of Kharkiv. — AFP

by fierce Ukrainian resistance, the Istanbul talks will test whether battlefield setbacks have tempered Moscow’s demands.

Moscow was recently forced to abandon its efforts to capture Kyiv, and -- according to senior Russian general Sergei Rudskoi -- focus on the “main goal” of controlling the eastern Donbas region.

The fate of Russian-occupied Donbas and Crimea, as well as fundamental disagreements about Kyiv’s alignment with the West are again set to be the focus of negotiations.

“Our goal is obvious -- peace and the restoration of normal life in our native state as soon as possible”, Zelensky said in a late-night video message that also set out his negotiating red lines.

“Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are beyond doubt. Effective security guarantees for our state are

Several rounds of talks have already failed to end the war sparked by the Russian assault, which is now in its second month

not occupy Ukraine.

Commentators hope that vagueness will now give him more room to accept an agreement, claim victory and end the war.

It remains to be seen whether talks will be hampered by US President Joe Biden’s shock declaration that Putin “cannot remain in power”.

The ad-libbed remark sparked outrage in Moscow and seemed to undercut Biden’s own efforts for the West to present a united front.

Asked by reporters Sunday if he had been calling for regime change, Biden responded: “No.” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also told media that was “not the objective of Nato, nor that of the US president.”

Macron warned that any escalation “in words or action” could harm his efforts in talks with Putin to agree on evacuating civilians from Mariupol. — AFP

No EU quotas needed for refugees

BRUSSELS: The European Union needs a distribution system based “on solidarity”, not fixed quotas to shelter people fleeing the war in Ukraine, German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said. Speaking before a special EU interior ministers meeting, Faeser said the EU has already achieved a common understanding and Germany does not want to jeopardise this “by sticking rigidly to quotas.”

EU interior ministers are meeting to consider proposals from the European Commission to further coordinate the bloc’s response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine escaping the Russian invasion. This includes plans to centralise the EU’s registration systems for refugees, agree further financial support for struggling EU member states and devise strategies to protect against human trafficking.

Russian newspaper ceases publication

MOSCOW: The Russian newspaper ‘Novaya Gazeta’, which is known for its critical coverage of the country’s political establishment, said it is temporarily ceasing publication until the war in Ukraine ends due to pressure from the authorities. The print and online editions will not appear until “the end of the’ special operation on the territory of Ukraine”, the paper’s editorial staff wrote on Twitter, which is blocked in Russia, using the Kremlin’s euphemism for the invasion.

The newspaper is run by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dmitry Muratov and is one of the last remaining independent media outlets in Russia. Muratov has publicly criticised President Putin’s assault on Ukraine. But the newspaper itself has refrained from directly mentioning the “war” in Ukraine after the enactment of a new law restricting freedom of the press and freedom of expression in Russia.

War ends Sri Lanka-Russia flights

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka’s national carrier ended direct flights to Russia -- the crisis-hit island’s biggest source of tourists -- because of the Ukraine war. It was the only operator of direct connections and the move is a major blow to Sri Lanka’s hopes of reviving its pandemic-battered tourism industry and earning foreign exchange to import food, fuel and medicines, which are in short supply.

Sri Lankan Airlines said it was stopping the Colombo-Moscow route with immediate effect, blaming prohibitive insurance rates after Moscow’s war on Ukraine. In addition, international sanctions on Russian banks made it impossible for its Moscow office to repatriate its earnings, a spokesman said.

Russia expels three Slovakian diplomats

MOSCOW: Moscow is expelling three Slovakian diplomats, Russia’s foreign ministry said in a tit-for-tat move after Bratislava expelled three Russian diplomats for espionage earlier this month. The Russian ministry said it had summoned Slovakia’s ambassador to Moscow and told him three diplomats were now persona non grata “as a retaliatory measure”.

Moscow also complained of “obstacles” for Russian overseas agencies in Slovakia and “threats to their safe functioning”. Slovak authorities said on March 15 that they had decided to expel three Russian diplomats following information from intelligence services.

— Agencies

STOYANKA: Russian snipers are still targeting the deserted crossroads into the village of Stoyanka, but Andrii Ostapets hopes to bring food to his neighbours - and to his cats, if they are still alive. The 69-year-old private museum owner has returned one week after fleeing the village on Kyiv’s western edge, having heard that Ukrainian troops were driving back Moscow’s forces.

“We saw people killed, we saw burnt down houses, we lived through hell” when Russia occupied the village, says Ostapets, protected from the biting cold by a thick leather jacket.

“Yesterday they pushed them back from our farm. The Russians have no chance to stay alive -- they can either surrender or die.”

A bitter wind whips through Stoyanka, which has been turned into a ghost village after nearly a month on the western frontline of Russia’s attempt to encircle the Ukrainian capital.

The sound of shelling still



A woman is helped out of an ambulance after fleeing her home in the Kyiv suburb of Stoyanka. — AFP

booms from the low forested hills that surround the village - where Ukrainian defence volunteer forces say Russian snipers are lurking. Gunfire crackles at a distance.

The fighting continues despite Moscow signalling on Friday that it had scaled down the aims of its month-old war on Ukraine, focusing now on the eastern

Donbas area.

Ukraine says it is pushing back the stalled Russian advance on Kyiv in areas such as Stoyanka, just half a kilometre from the western city limits. “I have a full car of groceries, the people and pets who stayed there, we’ll bring them food”, says Ostapets. “We are waiting for permission and we will go save those alive.”

Stoyanka has been turned into a ghost village after nearly a month on the western frontline of Russia’s attempt to encircle the Ukrainian capital

Most of the houses on the approach to Stoyanka appear to be empty, and some have been destroyed by shelling. At a sandbagged checkpoint where people are waiting to deliver aid, one militia member said it was “suicidal” to try to cross into the main part of the village at the moment.

“Two civilians were shot by snipers today”, says a civil defence volunteer toting a Kalashnikov rifle, his face covered by an olive green balaclava. The village was still being targeted by sniper fire, mortars and shelling, much of it coming from the surrounding woods, said the volunteer, asking not to be named. — AFP

Which ‘attachment style’ are you?



HYESHA BARRETT
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The writer is a life coach and a neuro-transformational coach

There are four different attachment styles and we all possess at least one of them. These are defined by how, as babies, we adapted in accordance to our caretakers fulfilling our needs. Attachment styles are usually formed by 18 months which is an interesting time of development. The child is very perceptive but too young to have cognitive memories so these styles are implicit, which are body-based recollections. The first style is ‘Secure’. Children grow up with reliable, emotionally intelligent and stable parents who are sensitive to their needs. They grow up feeling loved and understood whereby they feel free to express themselves. As adults, they are well-rounded people, who are emotionally available for others as they are for themselves. The epitome of possessing high self-worth and self-love.

The second style is ‘Anxious’. This style is inconsistent and unpredictable. The parents partially provide safety and security, yet also the complete opposite. They are irregular in their behaviour, usually due to their own instabilities and insecurities. Sometimes the child gets their needs met, sometimes they are completely dismissed which creates high levels of anxiety and uncertainty. Another way this attachment style shows up is being characterised by a strong fear of abandonment and rejection. The child feels a heavy responsibility to take care of the parents and in turn s/he is often afraid of being alone. Adults can be jealous or suspicious of their partners. Such individuals can develop low self-esteem and need constant reassurance. To heal this style the person needs to learn a

IT IS HEALTHY FOR A CHILD TO SEE THEIR PARENTS GOING THROUGH BIG EMOTIONS, AS THEY ARE ALSO LEARNING THAT IT IS GOOD TO RELEASE FEELINGS

sense of self, understand their own needs and consistently take care of them. The third style is ‘Avoidant’. This is where the child was physically and emotionally dismissed, had to figure out life on their own and felt extremely neglected. As the child grows up, their way of keeping safe is to create distance and avoid relationships. They are not accustomed to being nor feeling loved and find it hard to show love to themselves nor others. The way to heal this style is to lean into

relationships and adoration. They need to relearn how to be present through doing inner work and understanding their feelings. The fourth style is ‘Disorganised’ where the child experienced abuse. It is very scary as although the caregivers sometimes provide comfort, they are also a source of terror. This creates a lot of confusion in the nervous system. Often this person is in fight or flight mode and has a hard time trusting others. These individuals grow up to either hide from the world or can be very aggressive. They crave love and affection yet don’t know how to ask for it and when they get it, often push it away. Healing this style is dealing with the trauma by seeking somatic therapy. We typically move between two styles which are malleable depending on the different

relationships we have cultivated over time and the inner work we have done on ourselves. It is very possible that we can all move and stay in secure attachment. I hope you have gained clarity and insight into some characteristics of your behaviour. Being equipped with this knowledge and understanding that your parents did the best they could with the resources they had available at the time, will allow you to better comprehend yourself. We stand in a much more empowering position acknowledging our past and when we understand what is needed in order to learn and grow, we will undoubtedly create a better future. With a choice to enhance our mindset, this will enable us not hinder us and we will assuredly mature into wiser versions of ourselves.

Brazilians join fight in far-away Ukraine

FLORENCE GOISNARD, AND LUJAN SCARPINELLI

Wearing a camouflage T-shirt that clings to his biceps, Brazilian policeman Saulo packs his bag with combat boots, camping gear, gun holsters and a knife — “just the essential” to go fight in Ukraine. The 35-year-old Sao Paulo man quit his job as a military police officer to travel more than 11,000 kilometres and join Ukraine’s fight against the Russian invasion. “I identify with the cause, with the Ukrainian people who are suffering the injustice of a foreign aggressor”, said Saulo, who asked that his last name not be used for security reasons. “And I want to help avoid World War III”, he said, laying the items on his short packing list out on his bed alongside his black duffel bag. Picking up a small Brazilian flag, he added it to the pile. Although President Jair Bolsonaro has said Brazil will remain “neutral” over the conflict — drawing criticism in some quarters — hundreds of Brazilians have taken steps to go fight in Ukraine. They are looking to join the 20,000 volunteers from more than 50 countries who have applied to join the International Legion of Defence of Ukraine, a corps launched to help fend off the invasion, according to figures from the Ukrainian foreign ministry. Saulo said good-bye to his partner and two children and left for Poland, where Brazilians already on the ground have promised to help him join the war. He bought the one-way ticket with his own money. Saulo said he made his decision after seeing images from Ukraine of bombed-out residential buildings and hospitals. That convinced him to answer President Volodymyr Zelensky’s appeal to join the new foreign legion and fight “elbow to elbow” with the Ukrainian army. “There’s a risk I won’t come back. Anyone who goes over there knows that. We’re not little kids”, said Saulo, who sports a tattoo of a big black skull on his right arm, a knife clutched in its teeth. His only fear, he said, is the conflict “erupting into nuclear war.” The Ukrainian foreign legion’s only requirement to join is military or firearms experience, according to representatives of the website fightforua.org, which is helping organise the effort. Other webpages set up for Brazilians rallying to the cause have hundreds of members, such as Portuguese-language Facebook group “Volunteers to Fight in Ukraine”, with 1,800. The site is a forum for would-be volunteers to swap information — though members said they limited their interactions, fearing Russian spies could be watching. One would-be volunteer, Guilherme — his name was changed for safety reasons — said he saw going to the front as a way to make a fresh start in life. — AFP

Tanya’s sister was trapped in Mariupol. This is their story



FARAH STOCKMAN

The writer is a US journalist who has worked for ‘The Boston Globe’ and is currently employed by ‘NYT’

On the second day of the war, Tanya gave up her job as a tax accountant in Massachusetts and informed her husband that she needed to go residence to Ukraine. Her sister and her sister’s two teenage sons had been holed up within the lavatory of their residence in Mariupol, a seaside metropolis that was getting shelled. Tanya acquired a textual content from her: “We’re so scared.” By the sixth day of the war, her sister’s water had been lower. They couldn’t even flush the bathroom. “We’ll use the cat litter box”, her sister wrote. Go to a bomb shelter, Tanya urged. Then, out of the blue, the textual content messages stopped. Tanya sobbed, imagining them lifeless. But her father, who lives within the pro-Russian metropolis of Donetsk in Japanese Ukraine, didn’t imagine that Russian troops would damage them. He referred to as it pretend news, dismissing the photographs of destruction. He despatched her video of Russian troopers saying: “Don’t be afraid. We just came here to free you.” Tanya cursed him out and blocked him on her messaging app. The subsequent day, she caught a flight to Poland. I met Tanya in Boston’s airport on March 2, as we waited for a flight to Warsaw. I noticed her Ukrainian passport and her eyes, puffy from crying, and requested her to inform me her story. I ended up touring together with her to the Ukrainian border and have stored in contact together with her ever since. Tanya is a nickname — she didn’t need to use her actual title, to guard her mother and father, who she feared may face retaliation in Donetsk for her selections. The war in Ukraine is usually portrayed as a battle between autocracy and democracy; the East in opposition to the West. Tanya’s story reveals that, for a lot of households, it might probably additionally really feel like a civil battle, pitting the previous in opposition to the younger. Tanya’s mother and father help Russia, even now. “We are Russian”, her father informed her. Old individuals

in Donetsk, like Tanya’s mother and father, are nostalgic concerning the Soviet Union, she informed me. They are the welcoming committee that Vladimir Putin informed Russians to count on when he ordered this assault. THE BATTLE IN UKRAINE IS USUALLY PORTRAYED AS A BATTLE BETWEEN AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY; THE EAST IN OPPOSITION TO THE WEST But Tanya, like so many Russian audio system of her technology, sided with Ukraine. “People my age or younger”, she stated, “They don’t want to go back.” Every Ukrainian I interviewed who grew up talking Russian at residence had a narrative like Tanya’s. Russian audio system, who make up roughly one-quarter of Ukraine’s inhabitants,

had been favoured throughout the Soviet period. But Tanya’s technology got here of age as communism crumbled. They turned Ukrainian in an approach their mother and father by no means did. Volodymyr Zelenskyy — a Russian speaker younger sufficient to be Putin’s son — is a first-rate instance of this. He was elected Ukraine’s president with a large majority, and lots of his supporters wished him to cease Russia from meddling in Ukraine’s affairs. He did so extra boldly than any earlier Ukrainian president had dared. Tanya was born in Volnovakha, a city exterior Donetsk, in 1978. She turned 11 the year the Berlin Wall fell and was 13 when Ukrainians voted overwhelmingly to interrupt away from the Soviet Union. She says she was the primary in her class to resign from the Pioneers, a communist model of the Girl Scouts. She’d all the time hated the propaganda about “Grandpa Lenin” and the expectation that she ought to by no means let her brightness present. Back then, panties got here in a single shade: Beige. “If you wanted it black, you had to dye it”, she informed me. The dye stained her mom’s midriff. Somehow, Tanya knew that higher underwear was on the market, even when she’d by no means seen it. — The New York Times



An elderly woman stands amid rubbles near a damaged apartment building at a front line district of Kharkiv amid Russian war on Ukraine. – AFP

A journey for the mind



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

Just a few days to the holy month of Ramadhan and the preparations are in full swing.

With all the goodness of spirituality it is a time when one can go inward and truly understand one's personal journey. An immense opportunity one is blessed with each year and aiding the whole process is fasting for the whole

month only to be broken when the sun is away. So unlike the rest of the months when days are valued as per calendar at each sunrise. Indicating the prominence of Lunar Calendar are the motifs that can be seen everywhere of the crescent and the star after all it is the crescent that announces the arrival of the holy month.

The announcement of the sighting is followed by the billions of greetings that will be exchanged throughout the globe in person and through the digital world. The beauty of Ramadhan in addition to prayers and fasting is that remembering others is also in focus.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Psychiatrist, speaking on Oman Observer podcast — GreenMent said Muslims look forward to these 29 or 30 days every year because it brings in changes in lifestyle in general. Most people enjoy the social aspect of the month as well. He explained that it brings in meetings of family and friends but also about being kind and one

aspect of fasting is that you develop an understanding toward the people who have little.

People tend to give more, pray and reflect on one's own behaviour.

According to Dr Hamed this is one of the opportunities in Ramadhan, reflect on oneself and initiate changes.

However, there is a challenge Dr Hamed pointed out — can this new you or I be sustained?

How many times do we list out the changes we want in life and in our personality and life in general only to go back to where we

were and reach status quo.

There are other challenges one goes through especially if you consume coffee on a regular basis, next week will be almost an obstacle race initially and then the patience and will power will take over. But the challenge is to keep all the good habits that we gain.

Purity of mind is what is aimed in this experience where intentions are pure.

We need to spend quite sometime with ourselves to understand our own intentions and motives. A lot of time what is good for us may not be good for others, well most of the time.

Does this mean we give up for others benefits?

This is the era of entrepreneurship and individualism. In the past finding a job was the ultimate journey, but today learning is a continuous journey. We must adapt and grow with the changes and development.

Changes are one thing that is guaranteed. Proof of that is the discovery of 900 archaeological sites in the Wilayat of Duqm by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

It might be that the area has been earmarked for development in recent years but communities existed in this very area. What is being excavated in some areas even goes back to Iron Age.

So there were people before us who gained lessons of their own. And the Stone Age tools found gives us impression of the years when the people of that period lived. Today our tools are sophisticated with Artificial Intelligence. But the challenges of our minds and theirs might be similar- especially with emotions.



AN UNUSUAL HOBBY

Truong Van Dao stands atop of a wooden tank made from the conversion of an old minibus at his workshop in Bac Ninh province on Monday. A Vietnamese father spent hundreds of hours, investing thousands, to convert an old van into a wooden tank for his son — an unusual hobby in a country once ravaged by war. — AFP

Money at the heart of international efforts to save nature

LAURE FILLON

Can humanity curb spending that harms the world's biodiversity and instead focus funding on protecting it?

That question is at the heart of international negotiations in Geneva, which will set the stage for a crucial United Nations COP 15 biodiversity summit in China later this year.

Almost 200 countries are due to adopt a global framework this year to safeguard nature by mid-century from the destruction wrought by humanity, with a key milestone of 30 per cent protected by 2030.

These ambitions will only be met with a new approach to biodiversity funding and a rethink of the huge sums spent on subsidies harmful to nature, according to observers.

Subsidies for things like fossil fuels, agriculture and fishing can often result in environmental destruction and encourage unsustainable levels of production and consumption, experts say.

The exact figure that the world spends on these harmful subsidies is debated, although the group Business for Nature estimates that it could be as much as \$1.8 trillion every year, or two per cent of global gross domestic product. Financing in general is among the more challenging issues up for debate at the Geneva meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which runs until Tuesday.

"Resource mobilisation at this meeting has become a thorny issue," said Ghanaian academic Alfred Oteng-Yeboah, who has played a key role in international efforts to protect biodiversity.

"It is a balancing act. At the global level money has continuously been a problem."

The draft text contains the aim "to redirect, reallocate, reform or eliminate harmful incentives", reducing them by at least \$500 billion per year.

It also includes a goal of increasing total finance from all sources to at least \$200 billion a year by 2030 and increasing international money that goes to developing countries by at least \$10 billion per year.

SUBSIDIES FOR THINGS LIKE FOSSIL FUELS, AGRICULTURE AND FISHING CAN OFTEN RESULT IN ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION AND ENCOURAGE UNSUSTAINABLE LEVELS OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Last year, a study by groups including The Nature Conservancy and the Paulson Institute estimated that in 2019, the world spent between \$124 and \$143 billion per year on activities that benefit nature.

But they said the amount needed by 2030 should be up to \$967 billion per year, which could include refocussing funding for harmful subsidies.

Vinod Mathur, president of the National Biodiversity Authority of India, is calling for \$100 billion every year in additional funding.

"There has to be substantial funding, not just peanuts. It should be new funding, or additional funding and it should be timely," he said.

Without it, developing countries say

ambitious conservation targets will be impossible to achieve, a real concern given the world has missed virtually all of its biodiversity targets so far.

Rich countries "recognise that there are additional efforts to be made", according to one representative, although they took issue with the developing countries' estimates of funding needed.

Observers expect the private sector to play an increasingly important role.

Last year, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Mike Bloomberg joined other philanthropists in pledging \$5 billion by 2030 for biodiversity restoration and conservation.

The Business for Nature coalition has the support of more than a thousand companies, which like the conservation groups, are asking for an ambitious text.

"Companies need the political certainty to urgently invest, innovate, shift their business models," said Business for Nature Director Eva Zabey, adding that many firms are prepared to be held accountable for their biodiversity impact. As for subsidies, governments often defend them as helping the poor, said Ronald Steenblik, author of the Business for Nature study. But he said "when you do the analysis you find that actually the major beneficiaries are very often the most wealthy".

Some 80 per cent of fishing subsidies, for example, go to industrial fishing and not to small-scale fishermen.

But reforms can be challenging because entire sectors of activity depend on them.

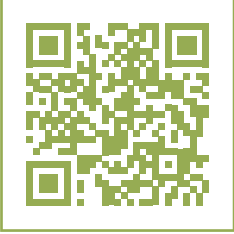
As is often the case in international negotiations, the subject will likely only be resolved in the home stretch, at COP15 in China. — Reuters



Commuters walk past a giant inflatable depicting a piece of coal erected by Greenpeace outside Australian energy company AGL in Melbourne on Monday. — AFP

sport

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EVERESTING CHALLENGE AT AMERAT CLIMB

Willcox and Hashim enter ‘Hall of Fame’ after completing unique challenge



ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Cycling up and down a hill until you’ve tallied 8,848 metres of ascent — the height of Mount Everest without sleep is not many endurance cyclists would have dared to attempt.

Oman-based cyclist Paul Wilcox and Omani endurance athlete Hashim al Farsi none-the-less have successfully completed such unique challenge called ‘Everesting’ on the Amerat Climb at the weekend.

And on Monday, Willcox and Hashim were ecstatic when their effort was approved by HELLS 500 club at the everesting.cc.

“There is no words to describe our feeling. It’s incredible to complete the Everesting challenge and get it approved”, Willcox, a veteran champion of Oman Cycling Association (OCA) Championship, told Oman ‘Observer’.

Willcox and Hashim were the only two to complete the challenge out of 18 cyclists who attempted the Everesting challenge on March 25.

The participants included the local and expatriate riders from the OCA Championship and endurance cyclists.

A total of 30 laps were to be completed up and down the Amerat Heights, and the rider from the United Kingdom was the first to make the finish in 16 hours and 27 minutes.

Willcox started the challenge at 5 pm on March 24 and finished the challenge at 9.30 am on March 25.

The distance covered was 225 km with elevation of 8,968 metres with 8.58 per cent gradient.

“The last two laps I was stretching hard with my energy

level coming down. It was the toughest challenge in my life until now. At 4.30 in the early morning some lights went off the hill but the bike light was sufficient to manage the rest of the period before sunrise”, the 43-year-old said.

Hashim, the brand ambassador of Ironman 70.3 Oman, is still to come terms with the achievement.

“Honestly, I didn’t have that much idea about the Everesting challenge before. Now, this is simply the hardest endurance challenge I had ever attempted”, the youngster, who became the first Omani to complete the Everesting challenge, said.

Hashim completed the challenge in 17 hours 26 minutes.

HALL OF FAME

Both Willcox and Hashim have now earned their place in the ‘Hall of Fame’ of the Everesting challenge after official approval.

Renowned cyclists Mark Cavendish, Greg Henderson, Phil Gaimon, Kevin Vermaerke, Guilio Ciccone and Jens Voigt are some of the elite riders in the ‘Hall of Fame’ after successfully completing the challenge.

The Amerat Climb, the regular course during the Tour of Oman, was also used for the first time with the riders in action on its front side.

Among others who were in the challenge, OCA rider Waleed al Fahdi came short of three laps after completing 27 laps.

Bradley Perkins of United Kingdom, Omani cyclists Mishal al Busaidi and Mohammed al Lamki also made valid attempts to tackle the challenge.

Cycle.kom, an Omani team in the OCA Championship race, was the sponsor of the challenge.

**EVERESTING:
THE RULES**

Record 8,848m
(29,029ft) of
total elevation
gain

Follow one
route on one hill

Descend on the
same route you
climb

No sleep - you
must complete
the challenge in
a single stint

Breaks (eating,
drinking,
recharging) are
included in your
time

You must reach
the summit of
the hill every
time

You must
descend safely
and get back
home

No time limit



Basheer bags Design Group Fide chess crown

MUSCAT: International Master Basheer Quadaimi won the top honours in the first Design Group Fide International chess tournament, which concluded on March 26.

The tournament was inaugurated on March 23 by Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji.

Quadaimi outclassed the field with seven wins out of seven to emerge as the champion. The fight for the top five was pulsating with Hamood al Busaidy, a very promising Omani player, finishing second and Krishanu Sai was outstanding to finish third in a very toughly contested last round.

The curtain came down on the tournament with a glittering and festive prize distribution

ceremony. Players from different category were awarded for their excellent performance with a trophy and certificate.

With over 72 players participating, the tournament saw players of age 7 to 50 years battling it out for the top spot. Lot of credit goes to the tournament arbitrators Musallam, Mrs and Mr Khalid for officiating the tournament in a systematic manner.

Tournament director Divakar along with tournament organiser and sponsor Damodar R Katti were honoured for their efforts to complete a successful event.

The organisers thanked the Oman Chess Committee for being part of the tournament and facilitating with all the gadgets as required to organise such an international tournament.

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The newest West Indies' star on the horizon Odean Smith announced himself on the grand stage of the Indian Premier League as he blasted the Punjab Kings to a sensational five-wicket victory against the Royal Challengers Bangalore in Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium, on Sunday.

Smith's late flourish of 25 runs off just eight balls completely turned the tide in Punjab Kings' favour.

The Royal Challengers came undone despite a brilliant innings of 88 (57b, 3x4, 7x6) from new skipper Faf du Plessis and vital middle order contributions from Virat Kohli (41, 29b, 1x4, 2x6) and Dinesh Karthik (32, 14b, 3x4, 3x6).

A power-packed batting performance from the Punjab Kings' opening batsmen, the fluent Mayank Agarwal (32, 24b, 2x4, 2x6) and the vastly experienced Shikhar Dhawan (43, 29b, 5x4, 1x6) laid the platform for the Kings.

Sri Lankan import Bhanuka Rajapaksa's aggressive knock of 43 off 22 balls at a strike rate of 195 plus catapulted the Kings to the next level as they reached the business end of the game.

Rajapaksa slammed two fours



and six hits over the fence as he took the RCB bowlers to the cleaners especially Wanindu Hasaranga and Mohammad Siraj.

RCB's bowling was again their achilles' heel as it has been over the last many seasons as Siraj, Akash Deep and Hasaranga among the most expensive bowlers.

Siraj went for a whopping 59 runs in his stipulated four overs at an economy rate of 14.75 while Akash Deep conceded 38 runs in three overs and Hasaranga 40 runs off four overs.

Royal Challengers felt they had an opportunity when Liam Livingstone was out in the 15th over and the Punjab Kings were at 156/5.

However, the Odean Smith-Shahrukh Khan Show simply took the game away from RCB.

Smith was an absolute revelation as he made the most of being dropped in the 17th over by going ballistic in the 18th over as he smashed 25 runs with three huge sixes and a boundary.

Shahrukh Khan then wrapped up proceedings in the 19th over as the Punjab Kings earned a well-deserved victory.

BRIEF SCORES: Royal Challengers Bangalore: 205/2 in 20 overs (Du Plessis 88, Kohli 41, Karthik 32) lt to Punjab Kings: 208/5 in 19 overs (Dhawan 43, Rajapaksa 43, Smith 25 n.o., Shahrukh 24 n.o.)

Slashers claim Joyalukkas women's volleyball title



MUSCAT: Muscat Slashers edged Muscat Blazers 20-18, 20-17 in the final to claim the title in the first edition of women's volleyball tournament organised by Joyalukkas Exchange and Instant cash at Bausher Club indoor hall on March 25.

Sixteen teams took part in the one-day tournament that saw three preliminary rounds and one knockout round along with semifinals, third-place play-off and final.

The teams included players of different nationalities including Omanis national team team.

The event was supported by POLO & OWWA (Embassy of Philippines) and OFW.

The tournament was the concluding event in line with the Women's Month celebration by the Joyalukkas Exchange.

"We have conducted various activities at our branch level

across the Sultanate. The empowerment of women in all sections of the society is the main agenda by supporting women in various sports and games," a Joy Alukkas statement said.

Ahmed Faisal al Jahdhami, Secretary-General, Oman Golf Association, was the chief guest of the concluding ceremony who delivered the prices to the winners.

Anthony Jos, Managing Director Joyalukkas Exchange, was the special guest.

The event was graced by Gregorio T Abalos, Jr — Labor Attache Philippine Embassy, Nixon Baby — General Manager Joyalukkas Exchange, Nihlas Nourdheen — Country Head, Instant Cash, Mumthaz al Balushi, Omani sports person, Punnose Mathew, General Manager UAE Exchange.

Organising committee

spokesperson Ansar Shensthar, Manager Operations, said: This type of sports event will be continued to be organised by Joyalukkas Exchange to empower women in our society and for their socio-cultural development. This was also one of the biggest tournaments conducted by an exchange house in Oman."

In the semifinals, Muscat Blazers beat All Star 18-13 while Slashers prevailed over The Heat by the same margin.

The Heat finished as second runners-up in the tournament after beating All Star 18-15 in the play-off.

Among individual awards, Darb claimed the Most Valuable Player honour. Abby was the best setter, Apple became the best spiker and Maan was selected as the best server of the tournament.

Oman go-karting racer Shonal finishes overall third

MUSCAT: Oman-based go-karting racer Shonal Kunimal capped his season on a high when he clinched the runner-up spot (Micro Max category) in the ninth and final round of the 2021-2022 UAE Rotax Max Challenge at the Al Ain Raceway International Kart Circuit in Al Ain, UAE, recently.

The runner-up spot also secured the ten-year-old Indian School Ghubra student an overall third place in the championship standings.

The overall podium finish coupled with a second-place result in the concluding race of the highly-competitive season was a creditable performance from Shonal, who has been getting little support from teams or corporate sector.

Having met with success over the past four years, the talented go-karting racer had earlier grabbed a third place in the penultimate eighth round.

With only his aunt, Marsleen Qandeel, to cheer him on the final rounds, Shonal thanked his coach, Sanad al Rawahi, for guiding him through a zoom call.

It was the fourth successive podium finish for Shonal, and sixth in the season, underlying his consistency after the initial hiccups in the early rounds. Out of the six podiums he climbed, two were second-place finishes and rest were third.



Russian racer Maxim Bobreshov and favourite was crowned the overall champion while Greek racer Leonidas Peruzzi, who was involved in a close battle with Shonal, took the overall runner-up place.

After nine rounds, Maxim garnered 870 points while Leonidas secured 772. Shonal concluded the season with a total of 717 points.

In the final round of the season, Shonal started in a spectacular fashion to bag first place in the qualifying. However, a collision with another driver pushed him to sixth position in the pre-final races.

But, the Muscat-based racer displayed lot of grit and fighting spirit to bounce back from P6 to runner-up spot sending a clear signal that he

will be in contention in the coming season for the title.

Speaking after finishing runner-up and overall third, Shonal said, "It was a mixed experience in the final round. After a great qualifying, I had to settle for sixth place in pre-final.

"I was determined to fight hard till the last lap. A pep talk from my aunt Marsleen and coach Sanad helped me achieve the second place in the final race. I am happy to end the season with a good result. It will give me good confidence in the next season where my target will be to win races."

It may be mentioned that Shonal had achieved overall success in back-to-back seasons (2017-2018 and 2018-19) at the UAE Rotax Max Challenge in Bambino category.

Verstappen edge Leclerc in Saudi thriller

JEDDAH: World champion Max Verstappen bounced back from his Bahrain disappointment to steer his Red Bull to a thrilling victory ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc in Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old Dutchman, who failed to finish due to a fuel problem in the opening race, won by just half a second after the pair swapped positions in a tense battle through the final laps.

It was the closest race finish since the 2020 Italian Grand Prix.

Leclerc's Ferrari team-mate Carlos Sainz finished third ahead of Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull, the top four proving to be in a class of their own.

Mercedes new boy George Russell came home fifth ahead of Alpine's Esteban Ocon and McLaren's Lando Norris with Pierre Gasly taking eighth for AlphaTauri.

Kevin Magnussen finished ninth for Haas and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton 10th, rescuing some pride after starting 15th on a difficult weekend in the second Mercedes.

It was the 21st win of his career for Verstappen and, like Leclerc, he welcomed the success of the new era cars that have permitted closer racing and allowed drivers to recover and regain positions after being passed.

Leclerc congratulated his rival on his victory on their slow-down laps, but after two races remains the embryonic championship's early season leader by 12 points.

"Of course, I am disappointed, but I enjoyed that race and I hope that we have more like that this season," he said.

"It should be like this always!" Verstappen said it had been very close and he had also revelled in the contest. "I just managed to get in front and to stay there, but it was a great race."

Perez made a perfect start from his first pole position at the 215th attempt as behind him Leclerc's move behind the Mexican only served to block his Ferrari team-mate Sainz and gift Verstappen a

FORMULE 1

2. Saudi Arabian Grand Prix

Jeddah circuit

March 27

1 Max Verstappen (NED)

1:24:19.293

25

Red Bull

at 0.549

2 Charles Leclerc (MON)

19

Ferrari

at 8.097

3 Carlos Sainz (ESP)

15

Ferrari

at 10.800

4 Sergio Pérez (MEX)

12

Red Bull

at 32.732

5 George Russell (GBR)

10

Mercedes

Driver standings

Leclerc (MON)

45

Sainz (ESP)

33

Verstappen (NED)

25

Russell (GBR)

22

Hamilton (GBR)

16

Teams

Ferrari

78

Mercedes

38

Red Bull

37

Alpine-Renault

16

Source: Formula1.com

AFP

free pass to third.

After a hot day, the temperature was 26 degrees Celsius when the lights went out with a reduced grid of 18 cars, Mick Schumacher missing after his huge crash for Haas in qualifying and Yuki Tsunoda following technical problems with his AlphaTauri on a warm-up lap.

Zhou Guanyu's aggression in a scrap to pass Alex Albon saw him run off the circuit, a move that earned him a five seconds penalty before, on lap 16, Perez pitted from the lead, re-joining third.

Within a lap, Nicholas Latifi crashed in his Williams at the widened exit of the final corner and a Virtual Safety Car (VSC), followed by a full Safety Car, was deployed - gifting both Ferrari men and Verstappen cheap pit-stops, Leclerc having ignored his team's call to "box to overtake".

It was desperately unlucky for Perez, who forcefully claimed third when Sainz emerged after from pitting.

Leclerc and Verstappen were trading fastest laps and running close.

FRUSTRATED

By lap 30, the Ferrari led by 1.6 seconds, leaving Sainz 5.2sec behind in third and Perez fourth, a further seven seconds adrift.

With 12 laps remaining, the hot conditions seemed to take their toll with a rash of retirements led by Fernando Alonso's Alpine, apparently with cooling problems.

Daniel Ricciardo followed, pulling his McLaren to a halt at the pit lane entry, as Valtteri Bottas abandoned his Alfa Romeo in the pits. This left 14 cars when the race continued on lap 41. Hamilton promptly pitted for new medium tyres, but re-joined 12th to begin another final charge as Verstappen fought Leclerc for the race lead.

The Dutchman passed him at the final corner on lap 42, only for Leclerc to respond. On lap 43, he tried again, but Leclerc hung on.

Verstappen passed him again on lap 47. It stayed that way for two laps, Leclerc probing to respond, but waved yellow flags following a clash between Lance Stroll and Albon, left him frustrated as they started the final lap. — AFP



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen raises the winner's trophy on the podium after the 2022 Saudi Arabia Formula One Grand Prix at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit. — AFP

Oman meet China in concluding game

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Oman will take on China in the concluding clash in Group B of the AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to Qatar on Tuesday.

The match will kick off at 8:00 pm at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Ahead of the match, "Red Warriors" confirmed finishing in the fourth place in the group with 11 points from nine games thanks to the last victory against Vietnam in Hanoi's My Dinh Stadium on Thursday.

China will miss the service of Wu in today's game as he received two yellow cards during the previous game against Saudi Arabia which ended in a 1-1 draw in Sharjah on Thursday.

China head coach, Li Xiaopeng, affirmed that they will depend on the attack side in the match and try to score an early goal. "We will try to improve our team's picture in this group. I instructed my players to show their top efforts and fight for the triumph result," he said. The head coach of the national football team, Branko Ivankovic, delivered his condolence to Ahmed al Khamisi in the beginning of the pre-press conference on Monday. "Our heartiest condolences to

Ahmed al Khamisi on death of his father. Thanks for his continuous top efforts towards the national team. Today's game will be the last fixture for the national team in the qualifiers. The match will be in home and in front of our fans. Our target is show top game and register positive result. We will miss Ahmed al Khamisi and will define the substitute soon. All the matches in the qualifiers are crucial and will eye on victory and the same is at Chinese side," the Croatian coach added.

The 68-year-old affirmed that despite difficulty of the game, we will seek for the triumph. "We fully understand the opponent's strength and respect them. However, our target is to win the game. I am proud with our players performance during the qualifiers despite to the results," he added.

The Croatian coach highlighted on the future's program of the national team. "There is a plan for the team and will stick it with the Fifa days. Our plan is to play strong matches during these days and this will support to develop technicality of players. A close follow up will take place with the associations to confirm these preparatory games. We may play in friendly tourney in Jordan in September in presence of Iraq team," he concluded.

Nizwa claim Ministry's B'ball Shield

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAR 28

Nizwa Club won the 12th edition of Ministry's Shield basketball championship 2022 at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Sunday.

The Al Dakhiliyah-based team beat Al Bashayer Club 69-61 in a thrilling final of the championship for the shield of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

With the triumph, Nizwa team players received the shield and a cash prize of RO 10,000 while runners-up, Al Bashayer, received silver medals and cash prize of RO 6,000. Muscat-based team Ahli Sidab finished in third place and collected RO 4,000 and bronze medals.

Nizwa started nicely by taking the first quarter 22-14. Nizwa prevailed over a fighting Al Bashayer in the second quarter at 19-17. Al Bashayer bounced back strongly in third quarter to win it 20-9. Nizwa confirmed their triumph in the last quarter taking it 19-10 and match by 69-61.

In the concluding ceremony,



chief guest Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), handed over the trophy and gold medals to Nizwa Club while Al Bashayer Club players received silver medals. The ceremony was attended by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association, besides officials and invitees.

EXCITING FINAL
The OOC chief said the final was exciting to watch.

"Basketball is one of exciting sports and we enjoyed watching an exciting match. Both sides showed top performance in the concluding game. Congratulations to Nizwa team and hard luck to Al Bashayer Club as they played a top game," he said.

Responding to an inquiry on

less clubs taking part in basketball competitions, Al Zuabir said: "We have taken note of this matter. This requires action from the newly elected board of directors of Oman Basketball Association. I am sure the OBA will make effort to solve this challenge. It is important to focus in the junior and youth categories as it will assist in generating more potential faces for the future national teams," he ended.

business

MUSCAT
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EXCHANGE
4,232.54



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$110.70
Brent Crude \$112.93
Light Crude \$109.13



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Oman crude dips to \$110.70/barrel



MUSCAT: The price of Oman crude (for May 2022 delivery) slid \$1.29 a barrel to reach \$110.70 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Monday.

Oil prices tumbled more than \$6 on Monday as fears over weaker fuel demand in China grew after financial hub Shanghai lockdown efforts to curb a surge in Covid-19 infections.

Brent crude futures slid as low as \$113.72 a barrel and were trading down \$5.97, or 4.9 per cent, at \$114.68 at 1212 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures hit a low of \$106.81 a barrel, and were down \$5.93, or 5.2 per cent, at \$107.97.

Both benchmark contracts rose 1.4 per cent on Friday, notching their first weekly gains in three weeks.

Key road to link Al Batinah carriageways

NEW LIFELINES: Ministry announced new roadbuilding programme

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Work has commenced on the dualisation of a key road that links Al Batinah Expressway with Al Batinah Highway at Liwa, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) announced here on Monday.

The roughly 5.5km link road connects the new expressway with the existing highway at Liwa roundabout. The redesign and construction will be undertaken in accordance with the Oman Highway Design Manual, the ministry stated in a post.

When operational, the dualised link road will not only facilitate the smooth and easy flow of vehicles between the two arterial carriageways, but crucially, it will also reduce the potential for road accidents. On Sunday, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications



and Information Technology, outlined a sizable portfolio of road projects for design, construction and rehabilitation, including some that are proposed to be implemented in partnership with private players under the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model.

Notable is a proposal for the rehabilitation of the Al Batinah Highway – one of the country's oldest and biggest road projects –

WHEN OPERATIONAL, THE DUALISED LINK ROAD WILL NOT ONLY FACILITATE THE SMOOTH AND EASY FLOW OF VEHICLES BETWEEN THE TWO ARTERIAL CARRIAGEWAYS, BUT CRUCIALLY, IT WILL ALSO REDUCE THE POTENTIAL FOR ROAD ACCIDENTS.

from Barka to Khatmat Malaha.

In the south of the Sultanate of Oman, a feasibility study focusing on the first phase of a dedicated truck road from Thamrait to Salalah has commenced. The project, which will be undertaken on a PPP basis, envisions the installation of a toll system – potentially the first in the country. Another landmark road project under study is a coastal link that

will connect Dhalkout in the far southwest of Dhofar Governorate with Rakhyyout Wilayat before it runs eastward.

Another key road being weighed by the ministry is a blacktop that links Al Batinah governorates with Al Jabal al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. A possible carriageway linking Al Amerat and Al Tayeen is contemplated as well.

Oman Infrastructure Fund commits to ESG principles

SUSTAINABLE INVESTING: The principles of ESG are now applied at Rakiza Fund whenever any infrastructure projects are being screened for investment: COO

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



investing in the Fund, they (signalled to us) they are not coming in if we don't have an ESG policy," Rehab explained.

"We had to shift quickly from 'nice to have' to 'must-have' within no time. We had three months to understand the policy and start to implement in the Fund, which we did. We went through the entire process of understanding what exactly we are focusing on, given that we are in infrastructure, and we needed to localise the ESG concept to Oman as well. Eventually, we managed to have a policy and to implement it."

Top officials from the Central Bank of Oman and Capital Market Authority were among the panellists sharing their perspectives on the theme, 'Funding the Future: Exploring Sustainable Finance and ESG Investing'. Significantly, the principles of ESG are now applied at Rakiza Fund whenever any infrastructure projects are being screened

for investment, according to the Chief Operating Officer.

"We take into account the environmental aspects, the social impact (and on the) community and staff of the company, and how we govern the company. So we take stakes in a company and we start building a matrix for (the application of) ESG. The difference between responsible impact and ESG is that you integrate ESG with the objective to get financial returns out of ESG."

Rakiza Fund, set up in 2019, is co-managed by Oman Infrastructure Investment Management (OIM), a specialist infrastructure manager wholly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), and Equitix, a leading investor, developer and fund manager of core infrastructure assets in key international markets. London-based Equitix currently manages over \$10 billion worth of assets on behalf of long-term investors.

Earlier this year, Rakiza signed agreements to acquire a stake of over 31 per cent in Oman International Container Terminal (presently known as Hutchison Ports Sohar) at Sohar Port. Hutchison Ports Sohar – a joint venture of leading global port operator Hutchison Ports Holdings (HPH), the Omani government, and a number of prominent Omani and international investors – operates the container terminal at Sohar Port on a long-term concession.

TMK GIPI receives a group of graduates

TMK GIPI Gulf International Pipe Industry LLC has accepted a number of graduates from local and international universities and colleges for on-the-job-training programme, as part of the efforts made by the company to qualify national workforce to work in the sector of petroleum pipe production.

TMK GIPI's CEO, Sulaiman Al-Farsi has emphasised that the programme is the first of its kind launched by the company to train and qualify Omani graduates in the field of pipe quality inspection (NDT) so that they become capable of joining the labour market and working in the company's factory. This programme is also an addition to the government's efforts in the process of training and rehabilitating the Omani workforce, which in turn will positively contribute in supplying the local market of the technical specialties. The graduates will enter the on-job-training programme for a period of six months at the factory's headquarter in wilayat Suhar and located in The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). They will receive their final approval from Petroleum Development Oman LLC (PDO), which in turn supports this category of trainees in this field.

MBti wins TRAINEX Best Exhibitor Award



MUSCAT: Mohammed al Barwani Training Institute (MBti) received on Monday the Best Exhibitor Award at TRAINEX as part of the Global Higher Education Exhibition, which is taking place on March 27-29, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Receiving the award was Eng Salim al Harthy, CEO of MBPS, who said: “The institute holds over 21 years of training experience since its beginnings as an internal training centre for MB Group of Companies. Now, MBti has the capability to provide its technical experience and theoretical knowledge to many varied oil and gas clients.”

MBti aims, with its short and long courses, to prepare the next generation of oil and gas professionals for the field to the highest HSE and technical standards. To achieve this goal, MBti courses have been accredited by both PDO and the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL).

Bank Muscat announces Sayyarati Auto Finance offer for Ramadhan

MUSCAT: On the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadhan, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is excited to announce the attractive Sayyarati vehicle finance offer with some of the best rates available in Oman.

The exclusive offers on Sayyarati include a special discounted rate that starts at just 3.5 per cent for both new and used cars. The offer will be available from the beginning of Ramadhan till May 31 in line with the bank's customer-centric vision “To serve you better, everyday”.

Bank Muscat's Ramadhan Sayyarati offer, the easiest path to finance your dream car, features some of the lowest rates for auto finance and will prove to be of great advantage to customers looking forward to buying a new or pre-owned vehicle during the Holy Month. The highly competitive rates are available for a period up to 10 years along with free third-party insurance for used car financing.



The new Sayyarati offer will be available for Omanis working in government and semi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies. Expatriate residents working in government and semi-government organisations as well as Tier 1 companies can also make use of the offer to purchase a car of their choice.

With a fast turnaround time, absolutely no need for post-dated cheques and competitive interest rates on reducing balance, the feature-rich auto finance can be obtained within the shortest possible time from Sayyarati Centres and Bank

Muscat branches located across Oman. Loans up to RO 60,000 for Omanis will be offered for both new vehicles and used vehicles.

The documents needed to process the loan facility are minimal and include the buyer's ID card, salary assignment letter, quotation / car valuation from the approved valuator, driving license, Mulkiya (for pre-owned cars only) and seller's ID card (for pre-owned cars only). The monthly loan instalments for Sayyarati finance are automatically deducted from the customer's account once the mandate to do so is provided to the bank by the customer.

For the added convenience of customers during the Holy Month of Ramadhan, the bank's Sayyarati centres at Wattayah and Salalah will be open in the evenings too from 8 pm – 11 pm on all weekdays (and 8 pm – 11 pm only on Saturday).

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani (pictured), General Manager – Products, Bank

Muscat, said: “I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and wish our very best to all our valued customers during the Holy Month of Ramadhan. The bank has been greatly encouraged in the past by the positive customer feedback on its various services and facilities and continues to keep working to offer the best possible options for its customers.

We hope that by offering these very attractive auto finance options, customers will be able to realise their dreams of owning a car according to their individual needs and circumstances.

The Holy Month witnesses a lot of interest from customers to buy cars and benefit from the different offers available. Bank Muscat is also very keen to enhance cooperation and partnership with different car agencies to offer the best services possible. We encourage all our customers to enjoy the excellent benefits by availing this offer at any Bank Muscat branch or Sayyarati Centres at Wattayah and Salalah.”

MHD launches luxury automotive brand Hongqi

MUSCAT: MHD ACERE has announced the inauguration of the premium luxury automotive brand Hongqi. It marked the official entry of Hongqi into the promising Omani market, while introducing launch offers for local consumers this Ramadhan.

The official launching ceremony took place at Al Bustan Palace Hotel on March 27, 2022 and witnessed a large attendance of official and public figures.

Hongqi is the new definition of luxury. Every fine detail tells the story of prestige and opulence in a unique way, making Hongqi 'A Class of Its Own'. The different Hongqi models come with top-standard features that ensure an unprecedented experience to the driver.

Among the initial models which will be available for local customers in Oman are H5, HS5, HS7, the H9 and the technological wonder E-HS9. The Hongqi range of sedans and SUVs comes with powerful driving force, powerful start and perfect handling, equipped with the latest safety technology to guarantee a stable running through the toughest terrains.

The H5 is an extraordinary compact executive car, with exquisite and advanced appearance, perfect configuration and



powerful performance. The exterior and interior in this car collaborate to provide the ultimate luxury experience, featuring a stylish silhouette adorned with 'Wing of Hongqi' greeting light and the panoramic sunroof which offers an inspiration from nature into your private space.

This model offers thrilling performance with acceleration from 0 to 100 Km/h in 9.7 seconds only, enabled by the brilliant 196 HP and 320 Nm maximum torque producing 1.8 L Turbo engine.

The exterior of the H9 stunning sedan model from Hongqi, has the new iconic design language of the protruding red trim, which is an integral part of the model's

front face and the classic waterfall grill give this vehicle its flagship look.

The side profile will impress you with the flowing lines extending from the headlamps to the rear. For its interior, the H9 model boasts a new design concept called “oriental artistic conception”. It combines wood grain, leather and chrome-plated details, creating an impressive traditional atmosphere.

In contrast, the full LCD (liquid crystal display) instrument clusters and large centre console screen lend futuristic sense along with the 12-inch head-up display (HUD) and video-streaming rearview mirror.

NBO, Nepal Embassy to introduce remittance services

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) welcomed Somesh Thapa, Second Secretary at the Nepali Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, to its headquarters in Athaiba to reinforce the bank's commitment to supporting expatriate communities across the country and raise awareness of NBO's affordable international remittance services.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, “As part of our commitment to providing customers with convenient banking services, we understand that being able to provide for families and loved ones overseas is vital to so many communities.

In just three clicks using the award-winning NBO Mobile App,



customers can transfer funds quickly and safely, and see confirmation that the money has reached the recipients' account. We would also like to remind customers that they should only use officially-licensed transfer agents or approved apps from banks across Oman.”

NBO customers can easily send funds ranging from RO 5 to RO 7,500 directly from their account in a few simple steps using the NBO Mobile App and Lite Mobile app.

The app is available in various languages, including Arabic and English, with competitive exchange rates on every transfer. The first instant transfer is free, while subsequent transfers are priced at the low rate of just RO 1.5.

Lincoln Aviator now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own the luxurious Lincoln Aviator and avail service 5 years / 100,000 kms, 1 year registration and 3M window tint. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom.) The campaign is valid up to May 18, 2022.

The Lincoln Aviator is designed to enhance experiences with its thoughtful luxury, keen attention to details, power and technology. Aviator offers the kind of capability premium clients require in a three-row SUV, with available all-wheel drive. The standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine, paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission, it delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless

acceleration.

Lincoln Drive Modes' five signature settings – Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions – allow owners to further customise their driving experience, while a 10.1-inch standard configurable LCD instrument cluster confirms their choices with beautiful, easy-to-read dynamic graphics and prompts.

Aviator delivers a wealth of intuitive technologies designed to assist the driver while enhancing the overall experience of the journey. Right from the start, the Air Glide Suspension with Dynamic Lower Entry automatically lowers the vehicle to “greet” the driver, adding a new level of sophistication to Lincoln's



signature welcome lighting embrace. The convenience of this feature makes loading cargo easier as well.

The Aviator is also equipped with a technology that enables Aviator to “see” most potholes

or uneven pavement and immediately make suspension adjustments to keep the ride as smooth as possible.

Adaptive Suspension with Road Preview uses an advanced forward camera to constantly scan

the road, seamlessly adjusting the suspension as needed. All Lincoln vehicles come standard with a suite of driver-assist features known as Lincoln Co-Pilot360.

Traffic Jam Assist helps guide the vehicle using adaptive cruise control with stop-and-go, lane centring and traffic sign recognition, adjusting speed based on the information obtained.

Evasive Steer Assist offers assistance to the driver to help avoid a collision with a slower or stopped vehicle; it provides additional steering support when a collision cannot be avoided by braking alone.

Reverse Brake Assist can help stop the vehicle while backing up if Aviator's integrated rear sensors and camera

detect an obstacle at the rear. Active Park Assist 2.0 removes the stress from parking by taking over steering, shifting, braking and acceleration functions with the touch of a button to navigate parallel and perpendicular parking spaces with ease.

The boundless allure of flight has long inspired automotive design, and the all-new Lincoln Aviator takes that inspiration to the next level.

In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.lincolnoman.com, or www.facebook.com/lincolnoman or www.instagram.com/lincoln_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.



Omantel AGM approves cash dividend of 55 baisas per share

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) held its Annual General Assembly Meeting (AGM) at the company's HQ at Madinat Al Irfan on Sunday, under the chairmanship of Mulhim bin Bashir al Jarf, Chairman of Omantel Board of Directors. During the meeting, the shareholders approved a proposal to distribute cash dividends to registered shareholders as of March 27, 2022 at the rate of 55 baisas per share.

Omantel recorded a net profit, after adjusting for minority interest, at RO 67.1 million for the year ended December 31, 2021. Total revenue dipped 4.1 per cent to RO 2.408 billion in 2021, down from RO 2.511 billion in 2020. EBITDA for 2021 was also down 5.5 per cent to RO 970.3 million, from RO 1.026 billion in 2020.

Mulhim bin Bashir al Jarf, Omantel Chairman said, "Despite the challenging market conditions, increased competition and challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic at the local and international levels, Omantel Group achieved a good financial performance during 2021."

Omantel Group				
In RO Mn	Year To Date (Jan - Dec)			
	2021	2020	In Fig	%
Revenue	2,408.3	2,511.0	-102.7	-4.1%
EBITDA	970.3	1,026.3	-56.0	-5.5%
EBITDA %	40.3%	40.9%		
Profit for the period	233.6	229.0	4.6	2.0%
Net Profit %	9.7%	9.1%		
Attributable to Shareholders of the Company	67.1	66.9	0.1	0.2%
Non-controlling Interest	166.6	162.1	4.5	2.8%
Profit for the period	233.6	229.0	4.6	2.0%

"Zain Group, in which Omantel has a strategic stake, continued delivering good performance and growing its net profit despite decline in revenues and EBITDA. Zain Group achieved a net profit growth of 2 per cent compared to the same period in 2020. Moreover, the contribution of Omantel's subsidiaries in the Sultanate of Oman to the Group's revenues increased during the past year compared to the same period in 2020", he added.

"The Covid-19 outbreak continues to have a profound impact on the global and local economies as well as the telecom sector in specific. Following the acceleration of vaccination programmes, the expectation of a return to normal is growing and the domestic economy is expected to gradually return back into a

Domestic Performance				
In RO Mn	Year To Date (Jan - Dec)			
	2021	2020	In Fig	%
Revenue	533.4	533.1	-3.7	-0.3%
EBITDA	190.0	205.2	-15.2	-7.4%
EBITDA %	35.8%	38.5%		
Profit for the period	71.2	77.1	-4.1	-5.3%
Net Profit %	13.8%	14.5%		

growth scenario.

While it is hoped that the local economy will gradually return to achieving growth, the increased competition at the local market resulting from the entry of the third mobile operator, as well as cross-border competition through OTTPs, requires us to always be prepared for such changes", he concluded.

Talal bin Said al Maamari, Omantel Chief Executive Officer, said, "Omantel has implemented its new continues to be our primary tool to optimise value generation for both our customers and shareholders.

Shift Gear builds further

on the key transformation initiatives started under 'Omantel 3.0' and focuses on a number of key business enablers including Omantel's transition to a digital operator, building on the company's position and leveraging the Sultanate's of Oman strategic position as a global communications hub, in addition to exploring new areas of growth from new business opportunities, primarily in the ICT and value added services domain, while at the same time continuing to implement stringent controls in spending to assure the impact of Covid-19 is minimised while continuing to invest in essential strategic domains.

"Customer experience and innovation have been two main areas of focus for Omantel during 2021. We continued to launch several initiatives in this regard, including the launch of 5G for mobile devices, the expansion of the 5G for fixed and mobile networks and building an integrated system for innovation and technology entrepreneurship through the launch of Omantel Innovation Labs, Omantel's Innovation Oasis and the "E-Dukaan", the first unmanned store in the Middle East region", he added.



OPAL signs MoU to support Green Hydrogen Summit 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The 2nd Green Hydrogen Summit & Exhibition (GHSO2022) – Oman's signature forum spotlighting the nation's green energy ambitions – has secured the backing of a key industry stakeholder: Oman Society of Petroleum Services (OPAL).

GHSO2022, scheduled to be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat from December 5 to 7, is being organised by Muscat-based 'Birba Energy' under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. The event has garnered the support of a wide array of local and international energy companies and related players.

Recently, OPAL - the umbrella organisation for companies operating in Oman's pivotal energy industry – signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Birba Energy to lend its own formidable weight and prestige in the successful delivery of an impactful international green hydrogen summit and exhibition.

The MoU was signed by Abdulrahman al Yahyai, CEO – OPAL with Abdullah al Harthy, Chairman – Birba Energy. In a statement, Al Yahyai said that this year's event will build on the stellar success of the maiden Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) that was held late last year. "OPAL's collaboration with Birba Energy aligns with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's recent exhortations for the growth of a green hydrogen industry in Oman.

Additionally, the transition to a green energy future is also a key goal of Oman Vision 2040. Accordingly, OPAL will leverage its expansive reach within Oman and internationally to support the delivery of a truly world-class green hydrogen summit and exhibition later this year."

The overarching theme of the three-day summit is: 'Leading

the Energy Transition Strategy'. However, dedicated sessions distributed throughout the forum will seek to do a deep dive on a broad array of themes vital to the success of a future green hydrogen industry.

Key areas for discussion include Green Hydrogen Potentials, Opportunities & Challenges; Regulations and Policies; Certification; Emerging Technologies; Storage and Transportation Challenges; Green Hydrogen Financing and Projects/Investments Partnership; Renewable Energies at the Heart of Green Hydrogen Production; Water Resources for Green Hydrogen; and the Transition to a Green Hydrogen Society.

OPAL, as a key event partner, will strongly encourage its members to participate in the GHSO2022 as exhibitors and delegates, Al Yahyai said. "We will also reach out to many international energy-sector organisations and institutions that we have close ties with, to urge them to be part of this prestigious forum. We will encourage them to either depute high-level subject-matter experts as speakers or have a presence at the exhibition. OPAL is confident of making a substantive and impactful contribution to the overall success of this event."

Commending OPAL on its support, Birba Energy's Abdullah al Harthy stated: "OPAL's endorsement of GHSO2022, on top of the support already extended by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, promises to elevate the event to world-class standards. Birba Energy looks forward to working closely with OPAL and its executive team in rolling out a conference and exhibition that Oman can be truly proud of." For further details regarding registration, sponsorship, partnership and exhibition space, check out the dedicated website: greenhydrogensummitoman.com.

SME Authority and Lulu Group sign agreement



MUSCAT: The Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) signed an agreement with Lulu Group by virtue of which the Group provides marketing outlets for SMEs at its 28 stores scattered across the Omani governorates.

The agreement was signed by Abdulaziz al Raisi, Vice-President of SME Authority for SMEs Development, as a representative of the Authority and Shabeer KA, Regional Director of Lulu Group in the Sultanate of Oman Who represented the Group.

This move comes as part of the efforts exerted by Lulu Group to enable SMEs to market its products by offering them benefits and spaces at all its branches.

The Group provides this support without charging fees from the SMEs. It also share its marketing experience with these enterprises to help them increase their sales and gives feedback to help them in improving the quality and packaging of the SMEs' products. Additionally, the Group supports competitiveness between enterprises by offering

display shelves and spaces according to the sales achieved by each enterprise.

Following the signing of the agreement, Al Raisi commented: "This agreement highlights the efforts made by our Authority to support the SMEs and enable them to reach a wider range of consumers by offering them additional benefits and facilities to market their products and services as part of the Authority's corporate responsibility. Lulu Group has great potentials and wide spread through its branches

scattered across the Omani governorates. As such, the Group will provide entrepreneurs with more opportunities to display their products, which will surely result in an increase in their sales."

"SMEs Authority appreciates the efforts of Lulu Group to encourage entrepreneurs by offering them spaces at its branches and purchasing the products of local SMEs. This agreement lays a framework for the relationship between the Group and SMEs owners in a way that contribute to achieving the optimal benefit from the potentials of Lulu Group," he added.

For his part, Shabeer KA said: "This agreement embodies the role played by our Group to support the Omani products, encourage local entrepreneurs and bolster the efforts made by the government represented by the SMEs Authority in promoting serious entrepreneurs who wish to benefits from the available opportunities. Our Group deals with 50 enterprises and suppliers that fall under the category of SMEs."

Vodafone Oman brings 5G indoors with Ericsson system

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 28

Vodafone Oman and Ericsson have announced the deployment of a 5G indoor system at the Vodafone Experience Hub in Mall of Oman as well as the Vodafone Oman headquarters. Visitors at the Experience Hub can now enjoy speeds up to 600Mbps that allow for faster downloads, seamless browsing, low latency and streaming services.

The experience of up to 600Mbps speed is achieved with Radio Dot 4475 with

Indoor Radio Unit (IRU) 8848 using 5G New Radio (NR) Time Division Duplex (TDD) Band 41 along with Band 3 in data aggregation mode – the first in the Middle East for this specific band combination. Radio Dot 4475 with Indoor Radio Unit (IRU) 8848 are part of the Ericsson Indoor 5G portfolio.

Stelios Savvides, Technology Director at Vodafone Oman, says: "With so much time spent at home, offices, shopping malls or in airports, the quality of indoor 5G coverage is quickly becoming a must-have for our customers. Enhancing the in-



building user experience is a key priority for Vodafone Oman and the Ericsson 5G Radio Dot deployments at our flagship Experience Hub and our HQ offices are the first of many in this journey. We see the Ericsson Radio Dot System as the right solution to offer a superior indoor

experience to our valuable customers."

Radio Dot 4475, one of the smallest tri-band small cells and weighing just 1.5 kilogrammes, is a multi-band low-power radio transmitter with eight antenna elements. The IRU 8848 allows connections of up to eight next-generation Radio Dots in a single unit facilitating 5G and 4G deployment.

Wojciech Bajda, Vice-President and Head of Gulf Council Countries at Ericsson Middle East and Africa says: "Ericsson Radio Dot System is the industry-leading solution to significantly

improve indoor user experience. The solution enables Vodafone Oman to provide greatly improved service quality for indoor users for voice and data. As a strategic business partner to Vodafone Oman, we are committed to supporting them in providing the best user experience to consumers and enterprises."

Ericsson 5G Radio Dot System supports multi-technology, multi-band, multi-operator and unlicensed deployments, as well as software features such as 4x4 MIMO, Carrier Aggregation, and 256 QAM in TDD mid-bands and FDD bands.

Is America's economy entering a new normal?

JEANNA SMIALEK

The pandemic and now the war in Ukraine have altered how America's economy functions. While economists have spent months waiting for conditions to return to normal, they are beginning to wonder what "normal" will mean. Some of the changes are noticeable in everyday life: Work from home is more popular, burrito bowls and road trips cost more, and buying a car or a couch made overseas is harder.

But those are all symptoms of broader changes sweeping the economy — ones that could be a big deal for consumers, businesses and policymakers alike if they linger.

Consumer demand has been hot for months now, workers are desperately wanted, wages are climbing at a rapid clip and prices are rising at the fastest pace in four decades as vigorous buying clashes with roiled supply chains. Interest rates are expected to rise higher than they ever did in the 2010s as the Federal Reserve tries to rein in inflation.

History is full of big moments that have changed America's economic trajectory; the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Great Inflation of the 1970s and the Great Recession of 2008 are examples. It is too early to know for sure, but the changes happening today could prove to be the next one.

Economists have spent the past two years expecting many of the pandemic-era trends to prove temporary, but that has not yet been the case.

Forecasters predicted that rapid inflation would fade in 2021, only to have those expectations foiled as it accelerated instead. They thought workers would jump back into the labour market as schools reopened from pandemic shutdowns, but many remain on its sidelines. And they thought consumer spending would taper off as government pandemic relief checks faded into the rear view mirror. Shoppers have kept at it.

Now Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens to roil the global geopolitical order, yet another shock disrupting trade and the economic system. For Washington policymakers, Wall Street investors and academic economists, the surprises have added up to an economic mystery with potentially far-reaching consequences. The economy had spent decades churning out slow and steady growth clouded by weak demand, interest rates that were chronically flirting with rock bottom and tepid inflation. Some are wondering if, after repeated shocks, that



A FedEx worker delivers packages in New York . Global supply chains have not been able to keep up with demand.

paradigm could change.

"For the last quarter-century, we've had a perfect storm of disinflationary forces", Jerome Powell, the Fed chair, said in response to a question during a public appearance this week, noting that the old regime had been disrupted by a pandemic, a large spending and monetary policy response, and a war that was generating "untold" economic uncertainty. "As we come out the other side of that, the question is, what will be the nature of that economy?"

The Fed began to raise interest rates this month in a bid to cool the economy down and temper high inflation, and Powell made clear this week that the central bank planned to keep lifting them — perhaps aggressively. After a year of unpleasant price surprises, he said the Fed will set policy based what is happening, not on an expected return to the old reality.

"No one is sitting around the Fed, or anywhere else that I know of, just waiting for the old regime to come back", Powell said.

The pre-pandemic normal was one of chronically weak demand. The economy today faces the opposite issue: Demand has been supercharged, and the question is whether and when it will moderate. Before, globalisation had weighed down both pay and price increases because

production could be moved overseas if it grew expensive. Gaping inequality and an aging population both contributed to a build-up of savings stockpiles, and as money was held in safe assets rather than being put to more active use, it seemed to depress growth, inflation and interest rates across many advanced economies.

Then came the coronavirus. Governments around the world spent huge amounts of money to get workers and businesses through lockdowns; the United States spent about \$5 trillion.

The era of deficient demand abruptly ended, at least temporarily. The money, which is still chugging out into the US economy from consumer savings accounts and state and local coffers, helped to fuel strong buying as families snapped up goods like lawn mowers and refrigerators. Global supply chains could not keep up.

The combination pushed costs higher. As businesses discovered that they were able to raise prices without losing customers, they did so. And as workers saw their grocery and Seamless bills swelling, airfares climbing and kitchen renovations costing more, they began to ask their employers for more money.

Companies were rehiring as the economy reopened from the pandemic and to meet the burst in consumption, so labour was in high demand. Workers began

to win the raises they wanted or to leave for new jobs and higher pay. Some businesses began to pass rising labour costs along to customers in the form of higher prices.

The world of slow growth, moderate wage gains and low prices evaporated — at least temporarily. The question now is whether things will settle back down to their pre-pandemic pattern.

The argument for a return to pre-pandemic norms is straightforward: Supply chains will eventually catch up. Shoppers have a lot of money in savings accounts, but those stockpiles will eventually run out, and higher Fed interest rates will further slow spending.

As demand moderates, the logic goes, forces like population aging and rampant inequality will plunge advanced economies back into what many economists call "secular stagnation", a term coined to describe the economic malaise of the 1930s and revived by Harvard economist Lawrence Summers in the 2010s.

Fed officials mostly think that reversion will happen. Their estimates suggest low inflation and slow growth will be back within a few years and that interest rates will not have to rise above 3% to achieve that moderation. Market pricing also suggests inflation will slow with time, albeit to higher levels than investors expected in 2018 and 2019.

History is full of big moments that have changed America's economic trajectory; the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Great Inflation of the 1970s and the Great Recession of 2008 are examples. It is too early to know for sure, but the changes happening today could prove to be the next one.

European Union countries agree to jointly purchase gas

MONIKA PRONCZUK

European Union countries have agreed to jointly buy and store gas, hydrogen and liquefied natural gas to address the challenge of reducing energy dependence on Russia while protecting Europeans from spiraling energy costs. They stopped short of imposing a ceiling on energy prices, however.

European leaders announced the decision after a historic series of summits, when they met alongside Nato and the Group of 7 industrialised nations, and were joined by President Joe Biden with the intention of rallying allies against Russia.

Willing EU members can team up and jointly negotiate gas purchases, increasing their bargaining power with the hope of influencing energy prices. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, as well as countries of the western Balkans, can join the collective gas purchasing.

Storage capacity can be shared so that all EU nations are prepared with sufficient supplies for next winter. Leaders also endorsed a proposal by the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, to fill up 80% of their underground storage facilities by November and 90% by 2023, requiring mass purchases in the coming months. That would be a big jump from current storage levels, now about 25%, commission officials said.

75% of the global pipeline gas market was European. We will now use our collective bargaining power. Instead of outbidding each other and driving up prices, we will pool our demand.

URSULA VON DER LEYEN
PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen, the commission president, said 75% of the global pipeline gas market was European.

"We will now use our collective bargaining power", von der Leyen told reporters . "Instead of outbidding each other and driving up prices, we will pool our demand."

But the fiery, protracted debate over ways to wean the bloc off Russian imports underscored how contentious energy policy is for its members and demonstrated the limits of a joint response to the Russian aggression.

Although the bloc as a whole is heavily reliant on Russia — which provides nearly 40% of the EU's natural gas and more than 25% of its crude oil — the energy mixes and interests of individual countries vary.

Because of the pandemic demands, energy prices had already been spiralling out of control since October, and the bloc's vulnerability has been further exposed by the Russian war on Ukraine. Unlike the United States, Europe has refrained from an embargo on Russian gas and oil, although it has imposed other sweeping sanctions.

A coalition of southern European nations, led by Spain and Italy, advocated capping energy prices across the bloc, arguing that such a measure would protect households and companies. But the Netherlands and Germany strongly opposed that idea, which they said would distort market dynamics and ultimately benefit

Russian energy producers. On Friday, European leaders agreed to continue discussing if and how short-term measures such as price controls could be effective.

Earlier, the US announced that it would help the bloc secure an additional 15 billion cubic metres of liquefied natural gas by year's end.

Most of the gas that the bloc needs to fill up its storage is liquefied natural gas, but its global production is limited and spoken for. In the past months, the commission has been reaching out to several gas producers — including the US, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Nigeria and Egypt — and importers like Japan and South Korea to see whether they could redirect some of their supplies to Europe.

"The market is tight", said Simone Tagliapietra of Bruegel, an economic think tank in Brussels. "We learned from the pandemic that when the European Union moves together, it can be much more efficient than individual countries", he added, referring to the bloc's joint purchase of Covid-19 vaccines.

In the short-term, Europe will have to compete with other buyers around the world, including China, and if its member nations move together, they will have more bargaining power, experts said.

"We are effectively in a war economy", Tagliapietra said. "Politics is taking over many economic decisions. In extraordinary times, we need extraordinary measures."

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Busy little hands making 'Lama Sweet'

Lama's ambition was great, as she always wanted to produce ice creams in large quantities and have her own platform to deliver her products... **P20**

READ



Busy Little Hands: Food Play! Activities for Preschoolers

by Amy Palanjan

Preschoolers learn how to prepare their own food with activities that foster fun in the kitchen and promote healthy eating habits.

LIFESTYLE

Hair today, art tomorrow: Filipino salon owner uses own hair to create portraits

EVERY FEW MONTHS WHEN Jesstoni Garcia takes electric clippers to his head, he's not just giving himself a haircut, he's also harvesting art materials.

Using a thin brush and clear, sticky resin, the co-owner of a Manila hair salon sprinkles these collected strands and clippings on a blank white canvas, taking two to five hours to arrange them into striking images of musicians and actors.

The 32-year-old's main job as a seaman involves spending up

to eight months a year on cruise ships, and lacking adequate art supplies like paint and sketchpads at sea, Garcia in 2021 turned to using his own hair to create images. He started with self-portraits and eventually moved on to depicting celebrities.

Away at sea much of the time, rather than in his salon, he uses only his own hair, sometimes shaving his sideburns when he needs extra material.

— Reuters





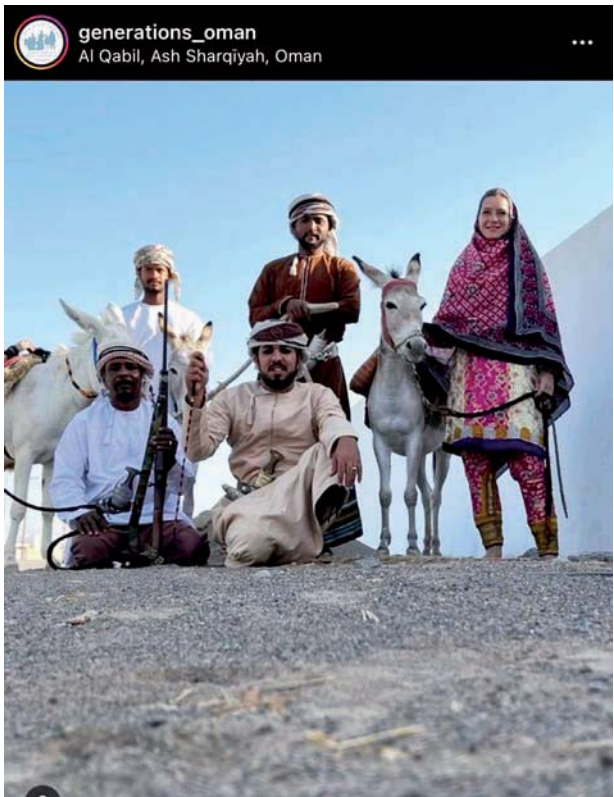
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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Music takes centre stage at Oscars gala



PRODUCERS OF THE OSCARS, arguably the most prestigious prizes of the entertainment awards circuit, on Sunday turned to music's top names including Beyonce, Billie Eilish and Megan Thee Stallion to drum up ailing ratings.

The 94th annual gala honouring the best in films opened from the tennis courts of Compton, where Beyonce delivered a rousing rendition of her nominated power ballad "Be Alive," from the film "King Richard," a sports drama about how the father of legends Venus and Serena Williams coached them to greatness.

And Megan Thee Stallion dialed up the heat in Hollywood's Dolby Theatre, spitting fire with a guest rap as part of a colourful performance of "We Don't Talk About Bruno," the viral hit from Disney's "Encanto."

It was an interesting choice considering the Academy snubbed that song, the film's most popular, from the nomination pool.

But it was part of the organisation's master plan to resuscitate the once highly rated show to its numbers of yesteryear.

The show's producers controversially pre-taped the presentation of awards including best score and best sound, editing in the winners' acceptance speeches in a perceived snub that drew ire in the weeks before A-listers walked the carpet.

The move didn't shorten the notoriously long broadcast, instead granting the extra space to the musical performances and comedy sketches from hosts Amy Schumer, Wanda Sykes and Regina Hall.

Eilish takes home Oscar

The extra focus on pop's juggernauts at times gave the show a feeling of Grammys Lite, one week before the party celebrating the music industry's best is due to take over Las Vegas.

Top Grammy nominee Billie Eilish belted out a stirring rendition of "No Time to Die," her theme written for the James Bond film of the same name, which ultimately took home the Oscar for best original song.

"Oh my gosh, this is so unbelievable, I could scream," said Eilish, accepting her trophy alongside her brother and collaborator, Finneas O'Connell, who provided haunting piano chords as Eilish sang.

It was a clean sweep for the sibling duo, who also won a Grammy and Golden Globe for the moody ballad.

The Colombian crooner Sebastian Yatra performed the heartfelt, dreamy track "Dos Oruguitas" — "Two Caterpillars" in Spanish — from "Encanto," which was also Oscar-nominated.

Producers crafted an elaborate set, with Yatra delivering a breathy version of the song in a lush forested scene accompanied by acoustic guitars.

Country music queen Reba McEntire later sang "Somehow You Do," as performers including Travis Barker and Sheila E formed an all-star band behind her. — **AFP**

SPECIES

Ukraine's biggest zoo caught in the crossfire



THE MYKOLAIV ZOO bills itself as the best in Ukraine, but now the 4,000 wild animals it holds are trapped in a whole new sense, with Russian rockets landing among them.

As air raid sirens wail across the city, which holds a key river crossing Russian troops need to pursue their push towards Ukraine's top Black Sea port of Odessa, a leopard brushes nervously against the bars of his cage.

It is difficult to tell whether the Amur leopard, "the rarest subspecies" of the big cat, is rattled by the piercing sound or the unusual sight of strangers, more than three weeks after the zoo was closed to visitors, said zoologist Viktor Dyakonov.

The first rocket that landed on the zoo, on February 27, tore up the walkway between the tiger and polar bear enclosures, and is now on display in the muse-

um of the zoo founded more than 120 years ago. No one was wounded, neither among the staff nor the animals.

But the episode was "very stressful", with a tank battle 600 metres (650 yards) from the zoo, said the museum's director, Volodymyr Topchyi.

Since then, three more rockets have landed in the zoo, including one in an aviary.

The other two landed near the zoo's administrative offices and staff said they were cluster munitions the Russians call the Uragan or "Hurricane".

The United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned the use of cluster munitions by Russian forces, particularly in north-eastern Ukraine, a type of weapon that is banned by the 2008 Oslo Convention which Moscow never signed.

Cluster munitions spread explosive

bomblets over a wide area, making them an imprecise weapon that can cause extensive injuries among civilians.

As many of the bomblets don't explode upon impact, they can cause death and mutilation among civilians long after hostilities are over.

Too risky to evacuate

Of the some 400 species present in the zoo, nearly half are on the international red list of threatened species, according to Topchyi, the zoo's director.

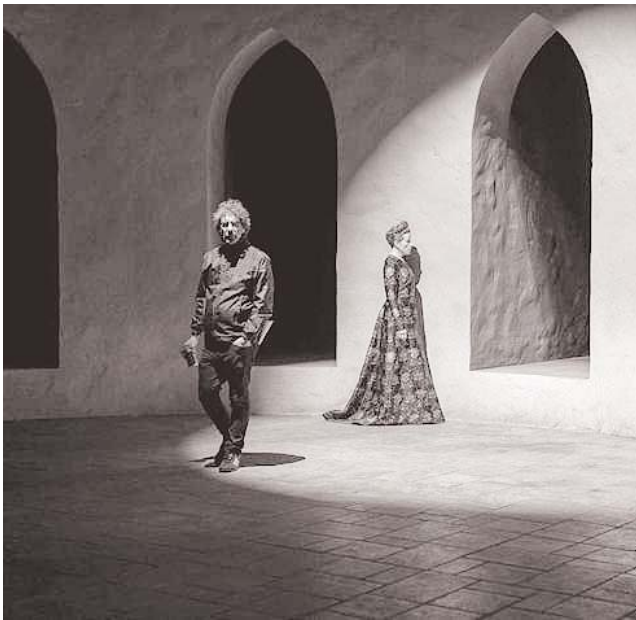
But their evacuation via the bridge across the Buh river to territory held by Ukrainian forces is not feasible, he said.

"There aren't enough vehicles to transport the animals and the only road towards Odessa is clogged with traffic," said Topchyi.

"And it's still very cold. If we take the giraffes, the elephants and the hippopotamuses ... there's a risk they won't survive," he added. — **AFP**

FASHION

How black and white became Hollywood's favourite new colour



BLACK-AND-WHITE IS THE HOT new trend in Hollywood, where directors of Oscars-contending films such as "Belfast" and "The Tragedy of Macbeth" are embracing monochrome for its storytelling power.

Kenneth Branagh's childhood drama and Joel Coen's Shakespeare adaptation are among a batch of recent acclaimed movies shot either entirely or mainly without colour, as film-makers seek to tap into the medium's inherent sense of historical authenticity and humanising intimacy.

"Colour allows you brilliantly to describe people, but black-and-white allows you to feel people," Branagh said of his deeply personal drama about violence in 1960s Northern Ireland, which is up for seven Oscars on Sunday including best picture.

While a "sweeping landscape of a desert or a mountain range" can be made epic by colour, "an epic dimension of black-and-white photography, on a massive screen, is the human face."

The choice "makes for a poetic dimension to things that can otherwise seem a little banal," he told AFP.

Meanwhile, "Tragedy of Macbeth" cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel told *The New York Times* the effect was "meant to bring theatricality" and give the film a timeless quality. Its star Denzel Washington is in the running for best actor.

Monochrome movies have of course continued to exist since they fell out of mainstream favour during the 1950s, when cheaper colour technology enabled more directors to emulate the bright tones that had dazzled audiences years earlier in "The Wizard of Oz" and "Gone with the Wind." In 2012, "The Artist" — a film that was not just black-and-white but also silent — won best picture at the Oscars, while the likes of "Roma" and "Mank" have won Oscars for best cinematography more recently.

But this year's colourless contingent has grown.

"We all got together... it was a DGA (Directors Guild of America) meeting," joked Mike Mills, whose family drama "C'mon C'mon" starring Joaquin Phoenix also comes in grayscale, and was nominated at this month's BAFTAs.

"I love black-and-white. I'm super pretentious. I watch a lot of black-and-white films — they're my heroes' films, right? I just adore them," Mills said.

In "Passing" — whose star Ruth Negga has been nominated for a batch of awards, winning at the Film Independent Spirit Awards earlier this month — the format is used to tackle the issue of racism. Rebecca Hall's directorial debut explores "racial passing," as two childhood friends of mixed racial heritage have a chance encounter in 1920s New York while both are pretending to be white.

"It wasn't just a stylistic choice. I felt that it was a conceptual choice — to make a film about colourism... that drains the colour out of it," Hall said at its Sundance film festival premiere. — **AFP**



Busy little hands making 'Lama Sweet'

By Ruqaya al Kindi
Photos by Khalil al Hasani

Cooking is one of the hobbies in which a child discovers how things are working together. Lama, the owner of the "Lama Sweet" brand, who is 11 years old, has been practicing her passion in making ice creams since she was around 4 years old, and she is now producing the first luxury gelato ice cream made in the Sultanate of Oman.

"As a child at the age of four, I was looking for anything in the kitchen that would lead to a similar result to the shape of the ice cream that I love. I used school paints to add a colour to the ice cream, and I used strawberry soap to add smell. I used to freeze it and serve it in the evening to my family," Lama said.

Lama's mother was observing her daughter's passion and insistence, so she bought the right ingredients including milk, cocoa and others, as Lama added, "So I started learning from YouTube how to make ice creams and then make small quantities for sale."

Lama's ambition was great, as she always wanted to produce ice creams in large quantities and have her own platform to deliver her products, but, "No one knew about me and I did not find a buyer other than family members and acquaintances. For people to know me, I recorded a video to introduce myself and my business. I called myself 'The little business lady'," Lama shared.

The video has reached people and luckily the Honourable Lady also, who generously, as a sweet gesture, bought all the day's quantity of ice cream. She also gifted me high-tech ice cream machines and the raw materials for making ice creams. The Honourable Lady has ordered authorities to set up a safe working place for me. "The team fixed the electrical connections and put the machine in the right place, as it is large and needs a special place and special connections."

Lama also had training in high-end production where, as she pointed out, "The team trained me extensively to professionally make premium gelato ice creams and gave me instructions on the materials to be used, and I got facilities to provide it from France and Germany. From here the beginning was completely different."

Lama, later on, worked on developing her workplace, which is based at home. "I provided two large refrigerators in addition to the previous one. I also bought four large automatic mixer machines; as I had previously relied on manual mixers. But for large production it was necessary to provide some machinery that facilitated the work," Lama noted.

One of the happy moments when Lama felt her success was recognised was when her project was being honoured as the best product made in the Sultanate of Oman at the Omani Women's Day ceremony held last year by Alizz Islamic Bank in cooperation with ShangriLa Resort for Omani Women Entrepreneurs.

There are many ice cream shops in the Sultanate of Oman, but this is what makes "Lama Sweet" ice creams special. "I am making the first luxurious Omani gelato ice cream, as the ice cream goes through stages in the preparation of heating, mixing, condensing and freezing and not like the regular ice cream that uses ready-made powder mixed with water," she explains.

"I have different flavours like dates with nuts, mango passion, raspberry, strawberry, coffee, karak, pineapple, berry passion, oreo, cocoa, lotus, red velvet and pistachio. Fruit ice cream is made of 100 per cent natural ingredients," she added.

Lama, currently, works from home and promotes her work through her Instagram account @lama_sweet2011, and she has a delivery service in Muscat. In future, Lama aspires to continue serving her customers with love and pleasure through a store that carries her brand.

