

Austrian Minister lauds Oman Vision 2040

Dr Margarete Schrambock, Federal Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs in Austria, expressed her admiration over Oman Vision 2040 and its pillars. She said that the four main pillars of Oman Visions 2040, "People and Society", "Economy and Development", "Governance and Institutional Performance" and "Environment Sustainability", constitute a comprehensive roadmap for the future. **SEE P15**



P10

INDIA
START
BRIGHT IN
ASIA CUP



P13

1,000 MW SOLAR
PV SCHEMES
PLANNED IN AL
DAKHILIAH



P19

MEET THE WOMAN WHO
HELPED SET A SPEED
RECORD ON A CLASSIC
ALPINE SKI ROUTE



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Seetah bint Jalawi bin Saud bin Abdulaziz al Saud. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to King Salman, praying to Allah the Almighty to dwell the deceased in paradise and grant her family patience and fortitude.

HM CONDOLENCES TO BRAZIL PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent condolences to President Jair Bolsonaro of the Federative Republic of Brazil, on the death of his mother. His Majesty expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the president, his family and the friendly Brazilian people. — ONA

YEMEN

COALITION DENIES YEMEN AIR STRIKE

The coalition on Saturday denied carrying out an air strike on a prison in Yemen's fighter-held north that aid groups said killed at least 70 people, including migrants, women and children. Claims the military coalition ordered the raid, which reduced buildings to rubble and left rescuers scrambling for survivors with their bare hands, were "groundless", the alliance said.

INSIDE



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PLANS FOR WORLD'S NEXT LARGEST CITY ARE INCOMPLETE | P7



Sand being removed from Adam-Thamrait road.

Cold, dust storm grip Oman

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The cold wave and dust storm gripped most parts of the Sultanate of Oman, with motorists reporting low visibility in the affected areas.

In its repeated alerts, Oman Meteorology said, "The flow of clouds and dust over the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman may lead to sporadic rain, low horizontal visibility and a noticeable drop in temperatures."

While places like Yanqul and Izki reported temperatures below 10 degrees Celsius, the capital Muscat had maximum temperatures of 19 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 15 degrees Celsius.

"Hazy and clear skies over most of the governorates with moderate to strong wind causing dust rising over desert and open areas and noticeable drop in temperature", the forecast for Sunday said.

The dust winds continue to flow from the south of Iran to the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the Musandam Governorate, the report said.

The dusty situation will prevail for two days, and people who suffer from respiratory diseases and allergies must be careful, always wear masks and avoid travel unless necessary

WEATHER EXPERT

All through Friday night and early Saturday morning, the *Observer* received reports of strong winds, including in Muscat, rising water levels at Mina Sultan Qaboos Waterfront.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a weather expert said, "The dusty situation will prevail for two days, and people who suffer from respiratory diseases and allergies must be careful, always wear masks and avoid travel unless necessary."

Due to the rising dust amidst strong winds, motorists using

the Adam-Thamrait and Sinaw-Thamrait roads were urged to exercise caution and follow safety measures issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

SAND DUNES

According to Royal Oman Police, some places in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate were affected by the sand dunes on the Al Ashkharah Road towards Wilayat Mahout.

Places in the Al Wusta and Al Dakhiliyah governorates that were affected by the sand dunes on the Adam-Thamrait Road include Qarn al Alam, Seih al Zamaim, Al Khamkham, the Wilayat of Haima and part of Sinaw in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate on the road heading to Mahout.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) in the Al Wusta Governorate carried out a search and rescue operation for some tourists of German nationalities whose vehicle was stuck in a sand dune in the Wilayat of Mahout.

They were safely transferred to the nearest city.

ATTENDANCE 50% FROM TODAY

FRIDAY PRAYERS PAUSED

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee of Covid-19 reduced attendance in government offices to 50 per cent and halted Friday prayers after reviewing the pandemic situation in the Sultanate of Oman. The decisions will come into effect from Sunday for two weeks in view of the rising number of Omicron infections and hospitalisations across governorates. In its meeting on Friday, the Supreme Committee also decided to suspend all conferences and exhibitions.

Five daily prayers will be allowed in mosques with 50 per cent capacity in line with the procedures announced by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

The committee also suspended congregational activities and advised the organisers to hold them without audience. The participants/organisers must abide by the precautionary measures announced before, including showing proof of vaccination.



50% ATTENDANCE IN GOVT OFFICES



FRIDAY PRAYERS PAUSED FOR 2 WEEKS



50% CAPACITY IN MOSQUES FOR DAILY PRAYERS



50% CAPACITY IN SHOPS, OFFICES & MALLS



TAKE BOOSTER AFTER COMPLETING 2 DOSES

ADMIT ONLY VACCINATED

The Supreme Committee urged restaurants, cafeterias, commercial complexes, trade outlets and public halls to stick to 50 per cent capacity, admit only vaccinated visitors, observe physical distance and ensure face masks.

The Supreme Committee affirmed that it will review its decisions and the epidemiological

situation on a regular basis and implement new decisions.

It also urged all to take complete two doses of vaccinations and go for booster. The authorities concerned are urged to show no leniency in applying the precautionary measures, namely to ensure commitment to all measures at residences, workplace and public places. — ONA

A viral photo helps bring Syrian refugee family to Italy

SIENA, Italy: The award-winning photograph — of a man who had lost a leg in a bomb attack in Syria, hoisting into the air his son, born without limbs, another casualty of the country's civil war — went viral last year in Italy.

On Friday, Munzir El Nezzel, the man in the picture, and his son Mustafa arrived in Italy after a remarkable effort by the organisers of the Siena International Photo Awards, to

bring them and their family from Turkey, where they had fled after Syria.

"We are coming, thank you", 6-year-old Mustafa, smiling broadly, said in a video message recorded before he and his family — El Nezzel, the boy's mother and two sisters ages 1 and 4 — boarded a plane in Ankara, Turkey, on Thursday to fly to Italy. "We love Italia", he added.

The picture of Mustafa and his father, both with loving smiles,



which was taken in January 2021 by Turkish photographer Mehmet Aslan and called "Hardship of Life", was declared photo of the year at the Siena awards last year.

FUNDS RAISED

The emotional and shocking picture made headlines in Italy and spread internationally on social media, spurring the festival's organisers to take action and start a fundraising drive to

get treatment for father and son.

The festival's organisers contacted diplomats, hospitals, rehabilitation centres and the Catholic diocese in Siena to host the Syrian family, so that Mustafa and his father could get treatment and prosthetics.

Motivated by the success of the crowdfunding effort, the nonprofit that organises the photography festival decided to sponsor the Syrian family.

— *The New York Times*



Oman-Egypt Business Council holds meeting

MUSCAT: The Oman-Egypt Business Council held a meeting in the presence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Samih Shukri, Egyptian Foreign Minister, at Al Bustan Palace hotel on Saturday.

The meeting discussed topics related to enhancing economic relations, boosting trade exchange and investment between the two countries in the private sector.

In his opening speech, Engineer Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (OCCI), said that the chambers of commerce seek to benefit from the opportunities available in both countries by exchanging trade and business delegations to closely identify the available opportunities and the facilities provided.

Trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt amounted to over \$293 million at the end of 2021. In 2020, there were 744 Egyptian companies investing in Oman with a total invested capital exceeding \$1.856 billion. — ONA



EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVED



MUSCAT: Egyptian Foreign Minister Samih Shukri and his accompanying delegation have arrived here on a two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The guest was received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. — ONA

New speciality hospital opens in Muscat

MUSCAT: The specialised Arabi Ophthalmology, ENT and Dental Hospital was opened in Muscat Governorate, under the auspices of Shaikh Saba'a bin Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary-General of the Higher Committee for Celebrations, in the presence of Samih Shukri, Egyptian Foreign Minister and a number of Omani and Egyptian officials.

The secretary-general of the Higher Committee for Celebrations, affirmed that the hospital represents a qualitative addition to the private health sector in the Sultanate of Oman, and provides many medical services in the field of ophthalmology, ENT and dental treatment.

He added that the hospital reflects tireless efforts made by the authorities to promote investments in the country within the framework of the Sultanate of Oman's plans to achieve economic diversification and realise the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The hospital is located in Al Wattayah district of Muscat Governorate. It is a joint Oman-Egypt investment project.

— ONA



MoH warns of surge in Covid cases among the unvaccinated

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@vinot_nair

The number of Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate of Oman is expected to increase substantially in the coming days, said a senior health expert. Number analysis confirms an increase in Covid-19 infections during the coming period, Dr Amal bint Saif al Maani, Director of the Department of Prevention and Infection Control at the Ministry of Health, said in an interview.

She said that the Omicron is prevalent in the country and has the potential to form heart clots, especially in those who have not taken the third or booster dose. "These include children below 12 years of age as they have not yet been vaccinated."

The doctor said the positive rate for Omicron has increased to 25 out of every 100 tests conducted in some governorates.

"The booster dose will help reduce the complications and hospitalisation by 80 per cent."

Everyone, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases and are over the age of 60, must take the vaccine."

It may be noted that the country reported nearly 8,000 cases (7,934) last week, including six deaths.

The number of patients in the hospital went up from 88, including 11 in ICUs, at the start of the week to 125, including 12 in ICUs. The recovery rate also dropped to 95.5 per cent during the same period.

Expo 2020: Oman Post launches frankincense-themed stamps

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

To commemorate the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Dubai Expo 2020, Oman Post, a member of Asyad Group, has launched an exclusive new set of stamps. The Expo 2020 stamp collection features four unique artworks depicting the growth, harvest, trade, and use of frankincense, which is the key theme of the Oman Pavilion. Representing millennia of Omani trade and culture, frankincense has played a vital and varied role in the nation's development from ancient times to the present day.

Mohammed al Raisi, Senior Manager of Stamps & Collectibles at Oman Post, said, "We are delighted to create this special collection, paying tribute to frankincense, which is Oman's 'gift to the world' and an integral part of our rich culture, heritage and history. In addition to promoting our country as a must-visit destination, our goal at Oman Post is to showcase what makes Oman unique and infuse it into commemorative stamps that can be appreciated by all."

In addition to Oman Post's aspirations for global expansion of operations in postal and logistics



services, as well as e-commerce, the company is committed to delivering stamps that reflect on key domestic and international topics. The Expo 2020 stamp was available for sale during the World Stamp Exhibition at the Dubai Exhibition Center, where visitors were able to purchase a selection of other stamps and philatelic accessories such as stamp albums, binders, books and more.

Tender Notice

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

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
03/2022	Supply, Installation and Configuration of Endpoint Protection Solution	27 Jan 2022	10 Feb 2022	25 OMR

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 (90) 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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SalamAir plans flights to Masirah, Duqm



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

SalamAir has submitted a request to the authorities concerned for approval to operate domestic flights to Duqm in the Al Wusta Governorate and to Masirah in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, according to Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of the airline.

He said the volume of operations at SalamAir has begun to gradually improve as the company was able to transport more than one million passengers in 2021, with a load factor of 71, in 9,200 flights.

The company will receive in February a new Airbus new A321 aircraft, increasing the size of its fleet to eight aircraft, characterised by advanced technology that effectively contributes to reducing fuel consumption and carbon emissions.

“The new plane, which can accommodate 212 passengers and is equipped with luxurious seats, will contribute to achieving the company’s expansion plan during the next summer, especially as the company seeks to inaugurate more new stations in Eastern Europe, Central Asian countries, and Turkey,” the CEO

said.

He said the new stations will include Baku, Azerbaijan, Sarajevo in addition to Osh and Bishkek stations in Kyrgyzstan and Trabzon in Turkey, which continue throughout the year.

The company is also in the process of adding a third station in Turkey and another in Eastern Europe, which will be announced soon.

The company will seek to attract more tourists to the Sultanate of Oman to contribute to supporting the national economy as per Vision 2040.

“SalamAir was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, just like the rest of the airlines, but the company was able to change the method of its operations in line with the changes in the aviation market by operating charter flights and opening new stations, which helped not only reduce losses, but also achieve profits.”

As the company marks its 5th anniversary, Captain Mohamed Ahmed said: “January 30, 2022, marks a new chapter in the history of SalamAir, as we celebrate five years of glorious presence in the industry and drive our mission to uphold the spirit of Oman by delivering services that reflect the legendary hospitality of the country.”

CDAA contains fire in Al Maabela South

MUSCAT: The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Muscat Governorate managed to control a fire that erupted in a warehouse in Al Maabela South of the Wilayat of Seeb, on Saturday.

The CDAA’s operations centre acted immediately after they received a tip-off about the fire that engulfed a warehouse built with unstable materials in Al Maabela South.

When the firefighting teams arrived at the site, they found the flames spreading over the area due to active wind and the presence of flammable and unstable materials.

Firefighters from the CDAA centres in Muscat and Barka managed to put out the fire and no injuries were reported. — ONA



MoE clarifies on intl curricula for science, maths

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With social media rife with speculation on having the Cambridge curricula for science and mathematics students in the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a clarification.

In a statement, MoE said these curricula were accepted to meet the goals and priorities of Oman Vision 2040, the requirements of the labour market, and to meet the standards of students in science and mathematics on par with the international level, which will also enable them to compete with counterparts in international competitions and studies.

“The international curricula were selected following a clear vision, and as per statistics, more than 160 countries apply these curricula at the rate of 10,000 schools. Around 93 per cent of the graduates have been accepted into universities, of whom 70 per cent have been accepted into the top 500 universities in the

world that recognise Cambridge qualifications.”

Globally, more than 2,000 educational institutions, including the 20 best universities in the world, recognise the Cambridge curricula, which rely on scientific investigation and problem-solving methods, the statement said. Responses from parents have been cautious.

“These curricula can adversely affect the scoring ability of students and we just hope they get adequate guidance to take advantage of this new system,” said a parent of a tenth-grade student.

Badr, a parent, said, “Over issues with the education system cannot be just revamped with new curricula. In line with the requirements of Vision 2040, we hope the administrations will also take into account the other challenges facing the system.”

These curricula follow the spiral principle in presenting topics, where learning is spread over time rather than concentrated in shorter periods.

Before accepting the

These curricula were accepted to meet the goals and priorities of Oman Vision 2040

Cambridge curricula, MoE said it studied the experiences of bilingual private schools globally, in which the high level of achievement of their students and their excellence in two subjects (science and mathematics in particular) was evident. It had formed a committee of curricula specialists, educational supervisors and experts, which also launched awareness campaigns between 2017 and 2019.

The technical team also made sure to harmonise these curricula with the Omani identity, national and culture, customs, traditions, and principles of the Islamic religion, apart from training supervisors and teachers on the appropriate teaching methods and lesson planning.

The international study Timss 2019 that provides the best policy-relevant information to help improve mathematics and science teaching and learning, showed a significant improvement in results for the fourth grade compared to the Timss 2015 session, MoE said.

Timss 2019 included student, teacher, and school questionnaires and the Early Learning Survey (also called the “home questionnaire”) completed by students’ parents or caregivers. As for the sub-division of science subjects in the ninth and tenth grades, this was done after a study and based on the observations and opinions of the educational field that confirmed the need for a scientific approach with a specialised teacher in each branch.

It was also in response to the demands of specialists from the members of the community who believed that giving the student a deeper understanding of the science can only be achieved by subdividing this subject into its basic disciplines (physics, chemistry and biology).

What is on your adolescents’ plate?



DR NISMA HARIS

Just ask any adolescent these days what they love to eat, and it’s not astonishing to hear that burgers, pizzas, cakes and pastries are the love of their life. Food has been the comfort for mankind for ages and the delectability of food decides its consumption particularly when it comes to adolescents. So, talking of adolescence first, it is the transitioning period from childhood towards adulthood and thereby their eating habits are also transforming owing to the physiological processes that are ongoing through their bodies.

It is also the phase when they are very particular about themselves and this too influences their eating habits hugely. Whether they are eating too little, or too much or are being restrictive towards

certain foodstuffs, skipping meals or improperly spaced timings are some very crucial aspects of determining their nutritional status and overall well-being. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence is recognised as a period of high nutritional risk, as dietary habits develop during this phase of life and are strongly influenced by the environment. This includes the effects of socio-cultural, emotional and behavioural factors, as well as the fact that adolescents become more independent and begin to have access to foods that are not available at home.

If we get into the reasoning how does all this start in the first place, for some adolescents it can be the consequence of unhealthy dietary practices since childhood days, and by this time it gets difficult to give up. In another instance, it can be due to the pressure from studies or exams that makes them so anxious that they don’t feel like eating healthy meals, and relishing the junk they treasure



becomes their only respite from the tremendous to-do tasks at school or other emotional issues. Moreover, the accessibility and pocket-friendly calorie-laden foodstuffs which are just a few swipes away are a major factor towards transitioning their food habits.

When they are devoid of balanced meals on a habitual basis, and most of the foods they

consume are from the energy-dense category (meaning high in calories and lacking in nutritional value) the outcome is obvious. They are more vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies such as vitamin A, vitamin D, folic acid, calcium, iron, or zinc deficiencies. If such unhealthier practices perpetuate, this can lead to major detrimental health consequences in adulthood. Obesity is on an

According to the WHO, adolescence is recognised as a period of high nutritional risk, as dietary habits develop during this phase of life and are strongly influenced by the environment

alarming rise and one of its major reasons is unhealthy childhood and adolescent food habits.

Due to the fact that adolescents are at such a raw stage of their lives, they can’t be forced strictly to implement and savour healthy home-cooked meals, unlike childhood days. They have their own distinct choices by now and it is not a smooth ride to convince them. Hence, what is the doorway to resolving their eating issues?

Since adolescents tend to follow the likes of their peers and love to spend most of their time with them, counselling regarding their dietary habits in group settings

will carry a powerful impact. This can be done in schools or colleges as workshops or webinars where they get to learn the role of healthy eating and how imperative it is in their mental and physical development. Needless to say, they need not give up their adorable junkies altogether but striking a balance between a balanced diet is the mantra.

As parents or guardians, we can get a bit trendy and innovative with the traditional meals that are more appealing to them keeping all the nutrients intact. It is also essential to develop a stronger connection with your teen and explain the value of wholesome meals to have better cognition and focus which is so needed to attain their goals and ambitions because what is on your adolescent’s plate matters!

The author is a General Physician, Content Creator, Health and Wellness Adviser. She is based in Salalah, and can be reached at www.healthyvows.com / dr.nisma.healthyvows@gmail.com



Go digital

FUTURE BELONGS TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

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With a journey that started with an e-mail to e-commerce, e-transaction to e-medicine and so on till today's e-pay, mankind is undoubtedly moving away from a traditional world towards a digital era where artificial intelligence (AI) and big data will dominate life.

Experts suggest those who have been doing any traditional jobs need to acclimatise with the changing world as no job would be exempt from digitalisation. Embrace e-life else he would be left behind in the rat race, echoing the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report issued in Davos.

Tariq al Barwani, Omani IT specialist, suggests that every future employee should be tech-savvy, seeds of which need to be planted today.

"Gone are the days where one needed to spend time and energy to get something done — be it running some errands from a local grocery store or paying ones utility bill or anything for that matter. Future belongs to digital people where everyone should know how to live in a virtual world", he said.

An online course report titled 'Industry Skills' published by online platform Coursera suggests that companies with cutting edge skills proficiencies saw better returns on their stock in 2020 than those with lagging skills proficiencies.

"Every single job of the future will have a digital element and the most desirable skills include cloud computing, cybersecurity, data analysis and software development", the report says.

Every country worldwide faces a skills gap, making upskilling workers vital. A visible difference is reported in the automotive sector, where skills are growing but not in the critical areas required. In terms of professional services companies, they are investing in virtual processes to supplement human interactions.

The pace of digitalisation undoubtedly owes a big thanks to the pandemic which has accelerated the growth of e-life on a global scale.

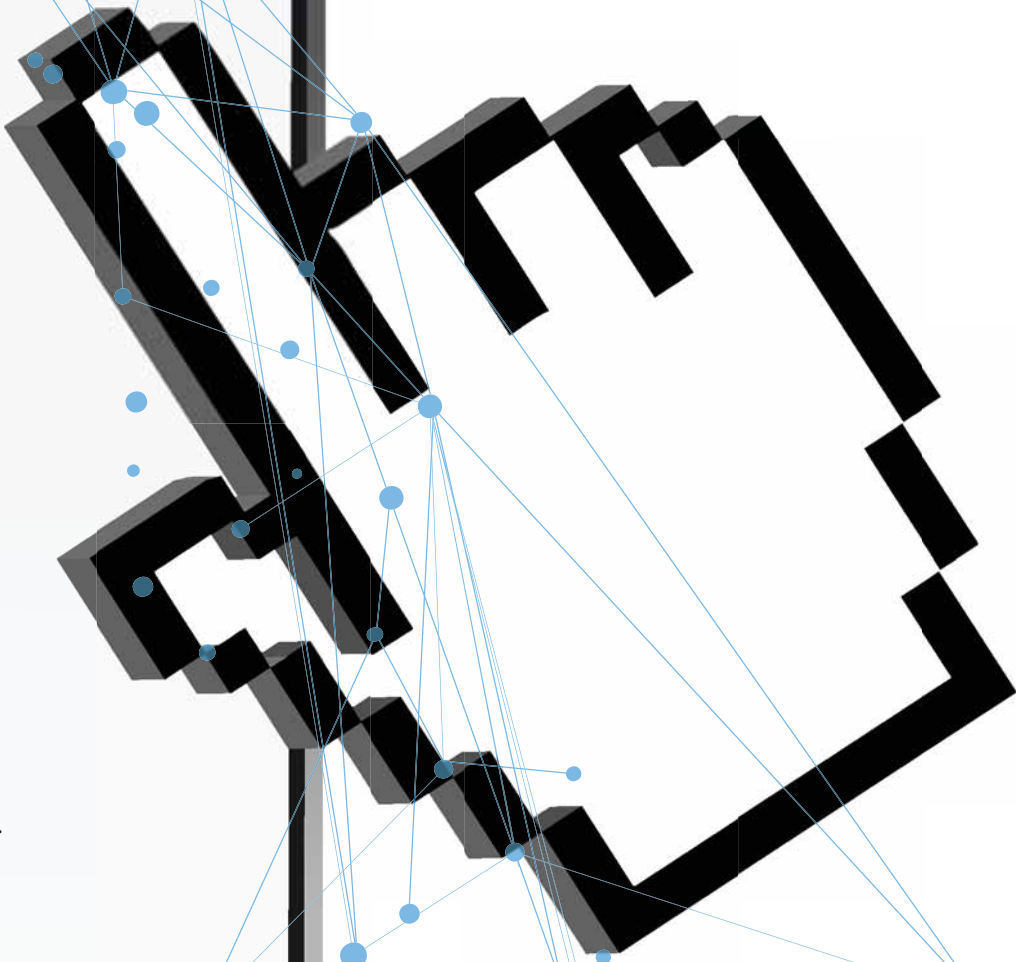
This report further says that a transformation in digitalisation that would have otherwise taken two years occurred in just two months during the pandemic.

According to Microsoft Data Science, by 2025, there will be 149 million new digital jobs in areas like privacy and trust, cybersecurity, data analysis, machine learning and AI, cloud and data roles, and software development. And the focus will be pivoting around critical skills, including cloud computing, cybersecurity, data analysis and software development.

The report has also unidentified some of the skilled jobs that would need the candidates to have a thorough e-knowledge to survive in the future world.

Share market, oil and gas, automotive sector, manufacturing, financial services industry, professional services, technology companies and last but not the least, the telecommunications industry, which is looking to maximise 5G growth opportunities, are some of the key sectors that would soon be completely digitised.

"Simply put, both digital transformation and the pandemic are combining to reshape our working arena. Just as newer variants of Covid-19 are continuing to pose threats, encouraging mankind to discover newer solutions, companies will have to find new ways to reskill and upskill their workers to increase innovation and keep hold of their competitive advantage."





Caution must be taken during strong winds

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Hazy and clear skies are to continue over most of the governorates with moderate to fresh wind causing dust to rise over desert and open areas and noticeable drop in temperature. There are chances of late night to early morning low-level clouds or fog patches over Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Al Wusta governorates.

Fishermen have been closely monitoring the marine weather forecast.

According to the Oman Met Office, cloud advection and dust over the Oman Sea coast and moderate to fresh wind are also expected to continue over most of the governorates. Also, there is a chance of dust rising over desert and open areas and a noticeable drop in temperature.

Over Oman Sea, the coastal wind will be northerly to northeasterly, light to moderate and occasionally fresh, and over the rest of the country, winds will be westerly to northwesterly moderate to fresh. Meanwhile, this may not be the best time to opt for an outing.

"I went to my home town but stayed indoors mainly because of the dust content in the air. For people with



asthma, this situation can create health issues. It is important to wear a mask or use a wet towel," said a resident from South Al Sharqiyah.

According to the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office, the northwesterly wind should ease down by the middle of this week.

"The open areas, especially the desert areas, experienced wind speed of 15 to 25 knots. The blowing of

dust continued in some places on Saturday too, but visibility has been getting better," said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

"The visibility at Muscat Airport is 6,000 metres (Saturday evening). The weather is hazy and dusty and will continue northwesterly, but the question is how strong it can be. On Sunday there is a chance for us to see the blueness of the sky. By January 25, we might be able to see the temperature coming back to normal," explained the weather expert.

Many households had to clear dust from home that had gathered in during the weekend of strong winds.

Driving should be careful, said Ahmed al Mahrouqi, a safety expert and instructor, "It took me 45 minutes to reach Izz from Adham where otherwise it should have

taken me just 25 minutes but I was driving at the speed of 60 to 75 km per hour.

Driving during strong wind can be dangerous and is not a joke. If stuck in strong winds, it is better to stop and drive when it is back to normal because strong winds can take control of your car if you are driving fast," advised Ahmed.

"If you are driving at 100 km per hour and you are facing a strong wind, it is easy for it to take the car. You have to be very careful," he urged.

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology
In AL Khuwair invites for the Following Project:

TENDER NO	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
3/2022/ MTCIT/ HQ-2	SUPPORT RENEWAL OF PKI SERVERS/NETWORK DEVICES AND REPLACE OUTDATED FIREWALLS	23/01/2022	03/02/2022	27/02/2022	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD IN SERVICE (EXCELLENT AND FIRST CLASS)	(25/-) TWENTY FIVE OMANI RIAL NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Secretariat General of Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by local bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) of the Tender value validity for (90) days, online on given website.

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- 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@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE

www.mtcit.gov.om

OMAN
DATAPARK

Procurement Department

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Data Park SAOC, (hereinafter referred to as 'ODP') announces the following Tender for local and international bidders:

Tender Ref.	Tender Title	Tender Fees	Start date for documents sale/ collection	Last date for documents sale/ collection	Last date for clarifications	Tender submission date
RFP#02-0122	Design, Supply, Install, Test, Commission, Maintain Data Center for Hosting Facility	50 OMR	23/01/2022	26/01/2022 before 2:00 PM	30/01/2022 before 2:00 PM	10/02/2022 before 2:00 PM

Instructions to Bidders:

- Any Clarification shall be emailed to the Contact Point before the Submission Date
- If applicable, site visit may be conducted to allow Bidders overviewing site conditions and share the proposal accordingly.
- Bidders are requested to submit their Technical and Commercial Bid on or before the Submission Date in sealed envelope along with a soft copy inside the sealed envelopes via USB to the physical address: (7th Floor, Zone 2, KOM4, Knowledge Oasis Muscat PO Box 35, PC 135 Rusayt, Sultanate of Oman)
- Technical and Commercial Bid shall be submitted in two separate envelopes.
- Any Bid received after the time and date mentioned in the Submission Date will be rejected automatically.
- ODP is not obliged to accept the lowest priced Proposal.

Tender collection: specialized companies may obtain Tender documents/ specifications from procurement department upon receipt of complete payment of tender fees, scanned copy of tender fee deposit receipt along with a copy of company registration certificate to Email: accounts@omandatapark.com provided with company name, tender ref. and contact person as a mandatory.

ODP Bank accounts details:
Account Name: Oman Data Park SAOC
Account No: 0614-50035765-0001
Name of bank: Meethaq Islamic Banking
Branch: SQU Meethaq branch
Swift Code: BMUSOMRXISL

For further clarification, all bidders shall be communicated with the Contact Point:
Malik Al Sagri- Procurement specialist| T: +968 24171194 E: Procurement@omandatapark.com

Artificial reef project scales new successes

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Launched in July 2021 by the Barr Al Jissah Resort Company, the Sultanate of Oman's most luxurious address, the artificial coral reef project has scaled new successes. The project aims to achieve sustainable development of marine life in Barr Al Jissah and the surrounding areas, improve bio-cover and biodiversity, and rehabilitate marine life. Given the extent of destruction of these reefs, the initiative will also raise awareness about the importance of maintaining the marine environment and its long-term sustainability.

Commenting on the project success, Firas Matraji , CEO of Barr Al Jissah Resort Company said, "The artificial reef project saw realisation through the cooperation of marine biologists and several local organisations. We have built several structures with artificial coral reefs, lowered them on to the seabed, and provided the right circumstances for them to thrive. We hope to create an adequate environment for the long-term survival of marine life and coral reefs in the waters of the Sultanate."

"We have collaborated with a group of expert divers to monitor the coral reefs on a regular basis. The goal of these trips is to guarantee that these reefs can continue to offer sustenance and habitat for other marine species. We also liaised with Shangri-La and Extra Divers to promote environmental awareness about this project and its importance in reducing the effects of overfishing, environmental pollution, and the irresponsible use of small boats, through communication with fishermen and the local community."

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة الإعلام
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Information

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2022	The Technical Fitout and Interior Decoration Works for MOI Auditorium	Excellent	3/2/2022	6/3/2022	150/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicate above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not accepted.
Note: The original bank guarantee should be submitted to the General Directorate Of Administrative And Financial Affairs, Project Deptment building at Ministry of information, if it **Requested**.
- The Ministry has the right to:
 - Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.
 - Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

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

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
2/2022	Maintenance work for Al Wafa Center at Al Suwaiq	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, which have construction contracting and maintenance activities, and are registered in the first class	Thursday 10-2-2022 02:00 PM	Wednesday 2-3-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at the **Tender Board** e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) , On Sunday 23/1/2022.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om



Political advisers to hold 4-way talks on Ukraine

MOSCOW: Political advisers from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany will hold “Normandy format” talks on eastern Ukraine in Paris on January 25, a source in Russian President Vladimir Putin’s administration said on Saturday.

Mykhailo Podolyak, adviser to Ukraine’s chief negotiator Andriy Yermak, confirmed that a meeting in Paris was planned but said a preliminary date had been set for January 26.

The planned talks come amid elevated tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Western countries are concerned by a Russia military build-up on the border and have warned of severe economic consequences if it invades its neighbour. Russia denies it plans to invade Ukraine but is demanding legally binding security guarantees from the United States and Nato.

The four-way Normandy format peace talks are aimed



People form a symbolic human chain on a bridge across the Dnieper river in Kyiv, to mark the Day of Unity of Ukraine. – AFP

at helping end a long-running conflict in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists.

Relations between Russia and Ukraine collapsed in 2014 after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine and Moscow-backed forces seized territory in the Donbass region that Kyiv wants back. Russia’s chief negotiator, Dmitry Kozak will take part in the talks from the Russian side, the source added. Kozak said earlier in January that the meeting would be held by the end of this month.

Meanwhile, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu has accepted an invitation to meet his British counterpart Ben Wallace to discuss the crisis on the Russia-Ukraine border, a senior UK defence source said Saturday.

“The Defence Secretary is glad that Russia has accepted the invitation to talk with his counterpart,” the source said.

“Given the last defence bilateral between our two countries took place in London in 2013, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu has offered to meet in Moscow instead,” added the source.

“The Secretary of State has been clear that he will explore all avenues to achieve stability and a resolution to the Ukraine crisis.”

Tens of thousands of Russian troops are massed on Ukraine’s border, along with an arsenal of tanks, fighting vehicles, artillery and missiles. Russia has denied it plans to invade but the White House believes an attack could now come “at any point”.

Britain’s Foreign Office on Saturday updated its travel advice to Ukraine in light of the crisis.

The department now advises against all travel to two pro-Moscow separatist territories Donetsk and Lugansk, as well as Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.

— Reuters

Deadly fighting between IS, Kurdish forces in Syria

HASAKEH, Syria: Fighting raged for a third day on Saturday between the IS group and Kurdish forces in Syria after IS attacked a prison housing activists, with the violence killing nearly 90, a monitor said.

The assault on the Ghwayran prison in the northern city of Hasakeh is one of IS’s most significant since its “caliphate” was declared defeated in Syria nearly three years ago.

“At least 28 members of the Kurdish security forces, five civilians and 56 members of IS have been killed” in the violence, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

IS launched the attack on Thursday night against the prison housing at least 3,500 suspected members of the activist group, including some of its leaders, said the Observatory.

The activists “seized weapons they found” in the detention centre and freed several fellow IS fighters, said the Britain-based monitor, which relies on sources inside war-torn Syria for its information.

Hundreds of inmates had since been recaptured, but dozens were still believed to be on the loose, the Observatory said.



Syrians flee their homes in the Ghwayran neighbourhood in Hasakeh on the third day of fighting between IS group and Kurdish forces in Syria. – AFP

With the backing of US-led coalition aircraft, Kurdish security forces have encircled the prison and are battling to retake full control of surrounding neighbourhoods, which activists have used as a launching pad for their attacks.

The Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on Saturday said “fierce clashes” broke out in neighbourhoods north of Ghwayran, where it carried out raids and killed more than 20 IS fighters. It said it seized explosive belts, weapons and artillery held by activists.

The battles have triggered a civilian exodus from neighbourhoods around Ghwayran, with

families fleeing for a third consecutive day in the harsh winter cold as Kurdish forces closed in on IS targets. “Thousands have left their homes near the prison, fleeing to nearby areas where their relatives live,” Sheikhmous Ahmed, an official in the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration, said.

IS has carried out regular attacks against Kurdish and government targets in Syria since the rump of its once-sprawling proto-state was overrun in March 2019.

Most of their guerrilla attacks have been against military targets and oil installations in remote areas, but the Hasakeh prison break could mark a new phase in the group’s resurgence. — AFP

Coalition denies prison air strike

SAADA, Yemen: The coalition on Saturday denied carrying out an air strike on a prison in Yemen’s fighter-held north that aid groups said killed at least 70 people, including migrants, women and children. Claims the military coalition ordered the raid, which reduced buildings to rubble and left rescuers scrabbling for survivors with their bare hands, were “groundless”, the alliance said.

The attack, which coincided with a coalition strike on the Yemeni port of Hodeida that killed three children and knocked out the impoverished country’s Internet, was condemned by the United Nations secretary-general.

But “these claims adopted by the militia are baseless and unfounded”, said coalition spokesperson Turki al Malki, referring to Ansar Allah insurgents.

This week has witnessed a dramatic upswing in the conflict that has already killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions, creating what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The rebels seized the capital Sanaa in 2014, prompting the intervention — supported by the US, France and Britain — in March 2015. It was intended to last just a few weeks.

The latest violence in Yemen’s intractable, seven-year war came after the Ansar Allah on Monday claimed their first deadly attack on Abu Dhabi, capital of coalition partner the UAE. The Ansar Allah took the war into a new phase



Supporters of Ansar Allah demonstrate in Sanaa to denounce a reported air strike by the coalition on a prison in the country’s north. – AFP

by claiming the drone and missile attack that killed three people, the first deadly assault the UAE has acknowledged inside its borders and prompting threats of reprisals.

The Internet blackout, which went into its second day on Saturday according to web monitor NetBlocks, complicated rescue work and media reporting as information slowed to a trickle.

Unverified footage released by Ansar Allah revealed gruesome scenes at the bombed-out prison facility, as rescue workers scrambled to dig out bodies and mangled corpses were placed in piles.

Eight aid agencies operating

in Yemen said in a joint statement that the prison in Saada, the fighters’ home base, was used as a holding centre for migrants, who made up many of the casualties.

They said they were “horrified by the news that more than 70 people, including migrants, women and children, have been killed... in a blatant disregard for civilian lives”.

Hospitals were overwhelmed as hundreds of casualties flooded in, aid workers said.

“It is impossible to know how many people have been killed. It seems to have been a horrific act of violence,” said Ahmed Mahat, Doctors Without Borders’ head of mission in Yemen. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

HANOI

Poetic peace activist, master of mindfulness, dies

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Zen Buddhist monk, poet and peace activist who in the 1960s came to prominence as an opponent of the Vietnam War, died on Saturday aged 95 surrounded by his followers in the temple where his spiritual journey began.

“The International Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism announces that our beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh passed away peacefully at Tu Hieu Temple in Hue, Vietnam, at 00:00hrs on 22nd



January, 2022, at the age of 95,” said his official Twitter account.

His week-long funeral will be held at the temple in a quiet and peaceful manner, according to his followers.

BERLIN

German centre right elects Merkel critic as leader

Germany’s centre right opposition Christian Democrats elected Friedrich Merz, a critic of former Chancellor Angela Merkel, as their new leader by a huge majority.

Merkel left office in 2021 after 16 years in power and was succeeded by Social Democrat Olaf Scholz at the helm of a three-way coalition with the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats.

Electoral defeat left the Christian Democratic Union



(CDU) having to regroup and members gave their strong backing to Merz, a 66-year-old on the traditional right of the party, after twice rejecting him in recent years.

YANGON

Myanmar sentences lawmaker to death

A Myanmar military tribunal sentenced a member of Aung San Suu Kyi’s ousted party to death for terror offences, the junta said, ramping up a crackdown on the toppled leader’s party. The Southeast Asian country has been in chaos since the February coup, with more than 1,400 killed in a subsequent crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

Junta opponents — including allies of Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy — have gone into



hiding across the country, and “People’s Defence Forces” have sprung up across the country to take on the military. Phyto Zeyar Thaw, a member of the NLD arrested in November, was sentenced to death.

The plans for the world’s next largest city are incomplete



An aerial view of sprawl in Delhi.

This amorphous tangle of cities and districts is so sprawling that no canonical count of its population exists; estimates range from 30 million to 60 million

SARIKA BANSAL

Within eight years, Delhi is expected to surpass Tokyo to become the largest megalopolis in the world, making it the epicentre of a global phenomenon: Fifteen years ago, most of the world’s population lived in the countryside, and today, most live in cities.

The United Nations says two-thirds of people will live in urban areas by 2050. Delhi is one of the most extreme barometers of this transformation.

Every two decades or so since 1962, the official planning organisation of Delhi has developed a master plan intended to guide the future development of the city.

Last year marked the end of Delhi’s Master Plan for 2021, which was adopted in 2007 with hopes of “obliterating the slums, taming the traffic and importing a Manhattan-like skyline.” But architects, urban planners and other experts say Delhi’s plan has remained mostly on paper. Understanding Delhi’s present and future requires looking beyond the city proper, towards the complex ecosystem growing around it.

While the city of Delhi grew half as much as its planners were expecting — from 15 million to 19 million people — the megalopolis that has Delhi at its centre, known as the National Capital Region, has ballooned. This amorphous tangle of cities and districts is so sprawling that no canonical count of its population exists; estimates range from 30 million to 60 million. Neelanjan Sircar, a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research and co-editor of the book “Colossus: An Anatomy of Delhi”, said it took him and his colleagues a year to even define the region’s limits.

“If you look at night lights on satellite images, that is a good proxy for what urban India looks like, and that’s not as clear as what maps tell you”, said Rahul Mehrotra, founder and principal of RMA Architects. The “galaxy of settlements”

revealed by these night-time images, Mehrotra said, functions as a large conglomerate, including cities such as Gurgaon, 20 miles southwest of Delhi’s centre, and Noida, in the east, where glitzy high-rises and office complexes sit next to tin roofs and tarpaulin shelters.

The seemingly infinite sprawl of the region is the story of megacities around the world. People come and go across these messy boundaries, many looking to pick up work in the informal economy that pays most of Delhi’s workers. “We are bursting at the seams”, said Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director of the Population Foundation of India. “We have to plan for it and have better infrastructure.”

Today’s Delhi National Capital Region has already outstripped its ability to provide what Muttreja calls “social infrastructure that improves quality of life”: Clean air and water, sewage treatment, dignified housing and healthcare. The region contains seven of the 10 cities with the world’s worst air quality, according to 2020 data from IQAir, an air-quality technology company. How will the metropolis of the future cope with its exponential growth?

Delhi’s new draft Master Plan for 2041 envisions a megacity where unauthorised slums are razed and replaced with tall buildings with affordable housing units. It imagines a breathable metropolis with ample green space. It highlights the city’s economic potential as a startup hub and cultural capital. But much of Delhi’s evolution is driven by the vast part of its workforce that is informally employed, an estimated 70%. “Cities are basically job markets”, said Reuben Abraham, CEO of the IDFC Institute, a Mumbai-based think-tank. And when most of the jobs are informal — whether street vendors, cooks, waste pickers or construction workers — the area has to accommodate the daily flux of people moving between jobs and shelter, working out of homes and public spaces as well as offices and shops.

Conventional city planning as it has been practiced in

Delhi and elsewhere is antithetical to that dynamism, many experts say. In practice, some argue, “planning” in Delhi is a euphemism for the state deciding after the fact what construction is authorised and what is not, a process critics say lends itself to inequity, corruption and shortsightedness.

The National Capital Region “has been developed not out of planning, but out of ‘regularisation’”, said Krishna Menon, an architect and urban planner who helped formulate the 2007 Master Plan. “We don’t do pollution studies, traffic studies. People say, ‘Let’s just go out and build it, and deal with problems as they arise.’ That’s shooting first and asking questions later.” If the National Capital Region is to realize its lofty aspirations, close observers of its evolution say its governance must encompass the entire region and be inclusive of all residents. “You cannot solve slums by wiping them out and putting them far away”, Menon said. “That’s just curing the symptom.”

While the gravitational pull of the city may be the headline of Delhi’s evolution, its fortunes remain deeply tied to its surrounding region and the country as a whole.

Even as the megacity grows, connections to rural areas remain vital. A troubled agriculture sector still provides primary employment for 60 per cent of India’s people. Economic conditions, already difficult, worsened with two years of the pandemic, shaking the urban economy and sending numerous workers back to their home villages.

India is a young country, with two-thirds of its population under 35 years old. By mid-century, however, it could be approaching a population plateau. How that possibility might shape the largest city of the future is still unknown.

“The speed of population decline in India is staggering”, Abraham said. “Everyone is focused on the ‘up’ story. But that is reflective of India 20 years ago. What about the India 20 years from now? That’s the question we should be asking.”

Back to school, but still learning online

When Education Secretary Miguel Cardona appeared before Congress in September to promote the Biden administration’s stimulus funding for schools, he promised tutoring to help students make up missed learning as well as an end to instruction through screens.

“Not only as an educator, but as a father, I can tell you that learning in front of a computer is no substitute for in-person learning”, he said.

The stimulus bill, known as the American Rescue Plan, will send \$122 billion to schools over three years, and a sizable portion of that money will go towards tutoring. But because of labour shortages, the high cost of quality tutoring and the influence of a growing ed-tech industry, much of the tutoring will itself take place through a computer screen — and not always with a human on the other end.

For-profit companies and nonprofit groups are selling virtual tutoring services to school districts. Some programmes use live video to try to replicate in-person tutoring as closely as possible.

Others skip the human tutor and use artificial intelligence. And some are essentially instant-messaging services, with students and tutors randomly paired for brief typed chats, often organised around homework assignments.

Spending on virtual tutoring is explicitly allowed under federal stimulus guidelines, and the Education Department said quality remote tutoring can be a “great option for many students, as long as the tutoring addresses individual

students’ needs and produces strong educational outcomes.”

But the idea of online tutoring as a fix “confounds me”, said Laura Vaughan, a parent in Montgomery County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington that had some of the longest school closures in the nation. Her 13-year-old had a frustrating experience with both remote schooling and virtual tutoring. “Just watching my son trying to pay attention to virtual anything is hard”, she said.

The online tutoring field is fairly new, and many companies said they either did not have data proving their programme’s effectiveness or were still collecting it. Several pointed to small studies from Britain and Italy showing promising results.

But critics say online tutoring rarely matches up to in-person tutoring and that only a few such services replicate strategies that research has shown to be most effective: a paid, trained tutor who has a consistent personal relationship with a student sessions during the school day, so that students do not skip lessons, and at least three sessions per week.

“A key piece of tutoring is that social relationship with a caring adult”, said Amanda Neitzel, an assistant research scientist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Research and Reform in Education. “How can you build that in an online format?”

Her worry, she added, was that the federal tutoring push would amount to “an expensive disaster.”

Virtual tutoring is a big business opportunity for the

A key piece of tutoring is that social relationship with a caring adult. My worry is that the federal tutoring push would amount to ‘an expensive disaster’

AMANDA NEITZEL,
Assistant research scientist,
Johns Hopkins Center for Research
and Reform in Education

education technology sector. Investment in ed tech surged to \$3.2 billion in just the first half of 2021 from \$1.7 billion in all of 2019, according to market research from Reach Capital, a venture capital firm specialising in education.

Now some online tutoring startups are drawing half their new business from federal funds, according to James Kim, a partner at Reach. Districts typically pay \$1 to \$100 per student who will use tutoring services over the course of a year.

Ed-tech investors and entrepreneurs say the academic and social failures of remote school have little to do with the services these businesses are offering. They emphasise that their platforms are supposed to supplement in-person education, not supplant it, and that being able to get a tutor anytime, from anywhere, has benefits.

“Online tutoring is a one-on-one communication”, said Myles Hunter, CEO of TutorMe, which pairs students with tutors — mostly recent college graduates — over audio, video or instant messaging. “It’s not something where you’re trying to make sure 40 students don’t fall asleep watching a Zoom video for eight hours per day.”

Nevertheless, Kim, a former teacher, understood the doubts.

“I think the cynicism is justified”, he said. “I was pitched a lot of technology products that just didn’t have a place in my classroom. Especially during this pandemic, when there was a lot of money in this market, we saw folks looking to make a quick buck.”

Lonely yet not alone



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

Loneliness is a complex emotion experienced by people from different cultures and age groups and it is known to have a negative impact on our psychological well-being.

From a psychological point of view, loneliness is a state of mind where a person feels empty even when surrounded by people. Sometimes persons crave contact with others but their psychological state prevents them from doing so.

Loneliness can be caused by several reasons such as physical isolation some thing we all experienced in the past years when Covid-19 cases were high and many countries enforced lock downs.

The other factors included

losing a loved one due to divorce or death, or simply moving to a new country. People who are introverts and those with low self esteem may feel unworthy of other people’s company are more likely to experience loneliness.

So why should we worry about loneliness?

According to recent psychological studies, lonely people are more likely to develop a wide range of health problems such as stress, depression which can be severe enough to lead to suicide, alcohol and drug misuse.

Loneliness can also lead to worsening of Alzheimer’s, poor decision-making along with physical complications like heart

LONELY PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP A WIDE RANGE OF HEALTH PROBLEMS SUCH AS STRESS, DEPRESSION WHICH CAN BE SEVERE ENOUGH TO LEAD TO SUICIDE

disease and strokes.

In our society we often find elderly people are most likely to feel lonely especially those living in big cities where the traditional extended families are being replaced by small ones where both couple are working, their young children attending school so the

elderly person is left alone during the morning even when there is a housemaid who would be busy with house work and have minimal interaction with the older person.

Sometimes the elder person will be sitting silently with other family members who are busy interacting in their smart phone or using social media platforms.

This is one of the reasons why more elderly people are experiencing anxiety and depression and multiple physical symptoms which can reflect their negative mental state.

So what can we do to reduce loneliness?

If a younger person is feeling lonely then the best way is to

make connections with others, not just online but face to face, sometimes joining a cycling group or groups interested in hiking can be a good start, if you are less of the adventurous type then a book club could be a good choice.

Start with people you have more in common with you to help you feel more relaxed and at ease.

For an older person dealing with loneliness would often require expressing your feelings with other family members and suggesting to do things together say during the weekend or making an effort to meet people of your age for a coffee or a walk can help your feel less lonely.

Cold War flashbacks in Russia-US talks

FRANCESCO FONTEMAGGI

Geneva, the neutral turf that was once host to so much Cold War bargaining, is again welcoming Russian and US officials to discuss missiles, nuclear arms and spheres of influence on the eve of a possible conflagration.

There is a heavy whiff of the 20th-century East-West power struggles in the Swiss capital, a flashback to the tense period between World War II and the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, when the fate of the world often appeared to hang in the balance.

The two rival camps are beginning to openly make the comparison themselves, even if observers note significant differences.

“What we’re having now we have is kind of a remake of the Cold War, Cold War 2.0,” Dmitri Polyansky, the Russian Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, said last month, putting the blame on the United States.

In Berlin, the city once split by a wall that became the emblem of the Cold War, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned that any Russian invasion of Ukraine, which Westerners fear could happen at any moment, would bring the world back to a time “when this continent, and this city, were divided in two... with the threat of all-out war hanging over everyone’s heads.”

The similarities are striking. Firstly, the geographical split is identical, with Moscow facing down the West.

Military, too, there is once again the risk that a local conflict fought by proxy forces could degenerate into a much larger and more direct confrontation of great powers.

And as in the heyday of the Cold War, the two powers have rallied their allies and defended their spheres of influence in a classic display of realpolitik bloc logic.

While the Americans suspect the Russians of wanting to use Belarus as a rear base for a potential offensive in Ukraine, Nato, the transatlantic alliance that the United States recently tried to redirect towards China, has rediscovered its raison d’être from the time of its founding in 1949, namely to defend non-Soviet Europe from a possible attack by Moscow. — AFP

THE TWO RIVAL CAMPS ARE BEGINNING TO OPENLY MAKE THE COMPARISON THEMSELVES, EVEN IF OBSERVERS NOTE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES



DAMIEN CAVE

The writer is *The New York Times* bureau chief in Sydney, Australia

How volcano severed Tonga from the world

SYDNEY: When the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcano erupted with colossal force at 5:10 pm local time on January 15, Soane Francis Siua, a Catholic seminary student in Fiji, heard a loud boom and tried to work out why the earth seemed to be rattling.

Thunderstorm? Earthquake? Cyclone? No, he quickly discovered: It was a volcano not far offshore from where he grew up in Tonga. He remembered being home when it erupted a few years ago. This time, based on what he could feel from 400 miles away, he suspected something far worse.

He called his mother on the main island, Tongatapu. She answered, offering a few details from a frightening scene. A tsunami warning. Thick clouds. A storm of black rocks pelting buildings, bouncing off cars like marbles on tile.

“It was all falling from the sky, and it freaked her out,” he said. “It was the first time she’d ever seen anything like that.”

Trying to keep calm, he promised to call again after relaying the news to his sisters in the United States. But that was it. He couldn’t get through to his mother again for almost a week.

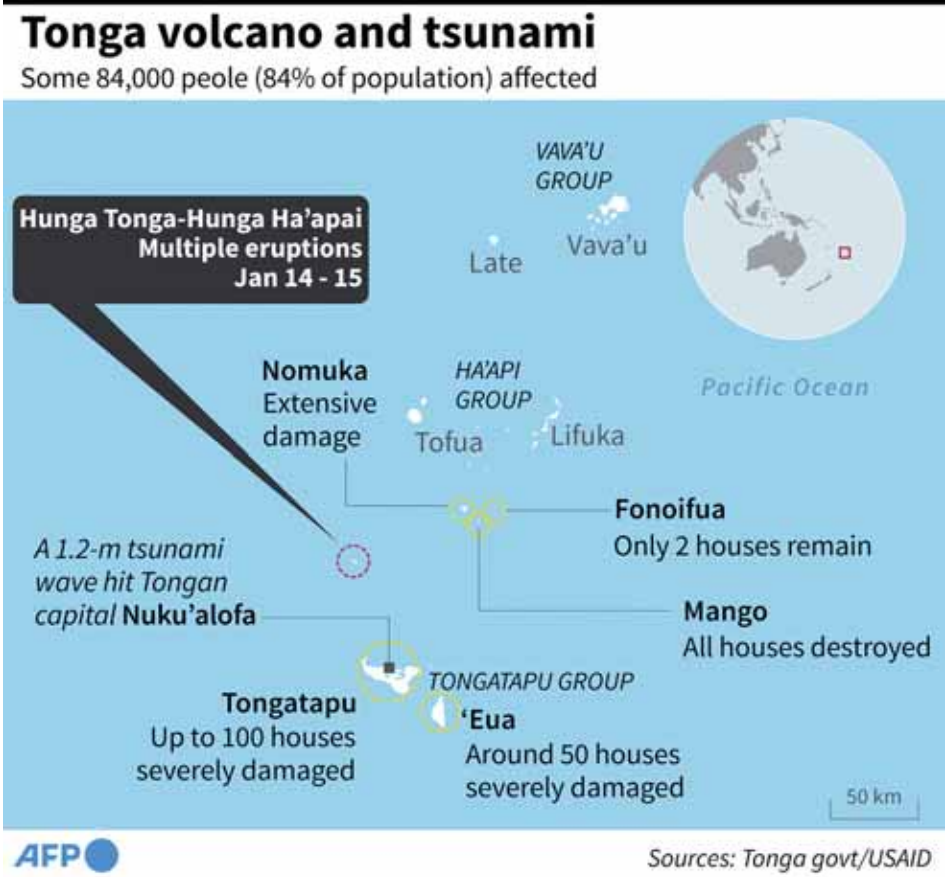
It was the same for tens of thousands of Tongans who live outside the remote Pacific kingdom. For about an hour, hints of what had been wrought by the world’s largest volcanic eruption in decades trickled out through phone calls and videos posted to social media. Then the lone undersea cable connecting Tonga to the world snapped, severed in the violent upheaval.

And with that came the disconnection that has defined the disaster so far. Even as the eruption’s scale spread far and wide — with a sonic boom heard as far away as Alaska, and surging surf killing two people and causing an oil spill in Peru — the human impact closest to the blast seemed to fade from view, defying the expectations of a hyper-connected age.

While the rest of the world was left to gawk and worry at the sight of a 300-mile-wide volcanic mushroom cloud captured by distant satellites, in Tonga there was barely any communication, just the visceral experience itself of the volcano and the tsunami that followed.

“I’ve dealt with a lot of these kinds of crises,” said Jonathan Veitch, the United Nations coordinator based in Fiji, who noted that it usually took a half-hour to account for UN staff after a disaster but took a full day in Tonga. “This one is a bit different.”

A week later, what happened on the



ground is only just now coming into view, mostly through clipped conversations over satellite phones dependent on clear skies. The portrait so far is a blurry landscape of destroyed property, narrow escapes and a bit-by-bit local cleanup, but it is clear that the human toll has yet to match the worst fears of people such as Siua.

So far, only three deaths have been reported. The most immediate worries concern drinking water tainted by ash and the risk of aid deliveries — which began on Thursday — bringing Covid-19 to a country that is coronavirus-free after locking its borders when the pandemic began.

But more than a week after the volcano erupted, the process of fully assessing the damage, never mind responding, is still moving with a pace from a pre-Internet age.

The challenge, perhaps, cannot be separated from geography. Tonga, a nation of about 170 islands that are roughly 1,400 miles northwest of New Zealand has always been hard to reach. It was first inhabited around 3,000 years ago, giving it a much shorter human history than Australia or other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

And that’s all on top of what can be found below: Tonga sits along the so-called Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates grind their way into earthquakes and islands that are still rising from the deep alongside deadly active volcanoes.

Hunga Tonga has been a source of

simmering fear for years. And it had been rumbling for weeks. The volcano sent up steam plumes and gases on December 29 and 30, and again on January 13.

“In 20/20 hindsight, these events were pointing to increasing gas pressures in the upper part of the volcano,” said Shane Cronin, a volcanologist at the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

The eruption nonetheless came as a surprise. The sound on January 15 was deafening and dizzying. Many people in Tonga have told relatives that it felt like a bomb went off right next to them, and then kept going off again and again.

“The first eruption, it was a big explosion,” Kofeola Marian Kupu, 40, a radio journalist in the capital, Nuku’alofa, said in an interview by phone. “Our ears started ringing. We couldn’t hear anything.”

Like many others, though, Kupu knew exactly what to do: flee.

With her mother, her husband, their three children and three of their cousins, they grabbed what they could and rushed for higher ground.

“We knew it was a live volcano erupting — we’d been warned,” she said. “When the explosion came, everyone just ran because they were expecting a tsunami.” The hurling up of magma from below sent a cloud of debris nearly 20 miles into the sky. Within a few minutes, rocks started falling with a pitter-patter that sounded like very heavy rain.

— *The New York Times*

Global warming is cool. Really!



Ray Petersen
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We can't wait for politicians and legislation to put the world to rights in terms of conservation and the environment, to influence us by their actions. The boot is on the other foot now, and we need to start acting responsibly, and making decisions that will influence them.

Climate change may or may not be a 'real' thing, but the reality is that if it is real, there is a real chance that we could be in real trouble, as a race, and a civilisation. The reality of course, is that it won't happen in our lifetime, that of our children, grandchildren, and even their children, but we do need to take the prospect of its reality, seriously. And really, I have never written a paragraph with so many reallys in it ever. Really!

We can ignore it, and maybe it will go away, and we can say "well yeah, it might happen, but it won't be that bad." Really? You live in a desert nation, which has one of the hottest climates in the world, averaging between 30 and 40 degrees annually, and one of the smallest rainfalls, around 100mls each year... that's nothing. Yet, you still put a roof on your houses so you won't get wet! Yes, I know... there are more holes in that argument than a colander, but it is an indication of the ebullient nature of the debate.

Ban Ki Moon, former secretary-general of the United Nations, makes a good point, saying, "We are the first generation to be able to put an end to poverty, and probably the last generation that can take steps to avoid the worst impact of climate change," and he is probably correct in saying how harshly history, as brief as it may be, will judge us if we fail to uphold our moral and historical responsibilities. I'm not a fan of the UN, as I think they have been a 'paper tiger' for too long, but in this... if he can back up those words with actions, it will be the greatest resurrection since Adam!

I don't think I've ever seen myself as any kind of an eco-warrior, bleeding heart greenie, or the like, mainly because I have always felt

I FEEL THAT IF I PICK UP MY OWN LITTER, RECYCLE MY OWN HOUSEHOLD WASTE, AND BUY RECYCLABLE GOODS, I CAN FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF, PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE AND INSPIRATION FOR OTHERS

that education and inspiration was the way forward, and that rather than parading myself as a dolphin-stroking, tree-hugging activist, I feel that if I pick up my own litter, recycle my own household waste, and buy recyclable goods, I can feel good about myself, provide an example and inspiration for others, and that's what I feel like my 'job' is.

I'm sure as heck not going to get on any soapbox and bellyache at people to change the way 'they' do things... I'm not going to be critical of others... or force them to come clean' about their environmental convictions, that's their business, and I don't feel like being an anarchist this week! I'm not even trying to 'shock' you, or you, or you guys, into changing your ways, but what I am trying to do is to show, or tell you, that 'saving the planet,' isn't that big of a deal, and will leave you with a feeling of 'goodness.'

I don't get smug about choosing plain-paks, pack-your-own foods, refillable bottles and the like, but I do actually feel good about myself without feeling saintly. I now check for recyclable packaging, recyclable goods, and have even stretched to clothing, as I found a couple of pair of trousers I liked last week, and chose the deal-breaker as the one made from recycled plastic bottles. I gave myself a mental pat on the back.

But truly, it would be nice, wouldn't it, if you and I, us and we, could convince the politicians and their ilk that we, their constituents, have concerns about our future... not our own, but our world's. We are using the Earth as if we have somewhere else to go when we've finished with it... Really?



HATS OFF BILLIE
Commander Billie Farrell salutes after becoming the commanding officer of the USS Constitution, the first woman to hold that position in the ship's 224-year history, in Boston, Massachusetts, US, on Saturday.
— Reuters

So you think you're a Covid expert (but are you?)

ALYSON KRUEGER

Lauren Terry, 23, thought she would know what to do if she contracted Covid-19. After all, she manages a lab in Tucson, Arizona, that processes Covid tests.

But when she developed symptoms on Christmas Eve, she quickly realised she had no inside information.

"I first tried to take whatever rapid tests I could get my hands on," Terry said. "I bought some over the counter. I got a free kit from my county library. A friend gave me a box. I think I tried five different brands." When they all turned up negative, she took a PCR test, but that too, was negative.

With clear symptoms, she didn't believe the results. So she turned to Twitter. "I was searching for the Omicron rapid test efficacy and trying to figure out what brand works on this variant and what doesn't and how long they take to produce results," she said. (The Food and Drug Administration has said that rapid antigen tests may be less sensitive to the Omicron variant but has not identified any specific tests that outright fail to detect it.) "I started seeing people on Twitter say they were having symptoms and only testing positive days later. I decided not to see anybody for the holidays when I read that."

She kept testing, and a few days after Christmas she received the result she had expected all along.

Though it's been almost two years since the onset of the pandemic, this phase can feel more confusing than its start, in March 2020. Even PCR tests, the gold standard, don't always detect every case, especially early in the course of infection, and there is some doubt among scientists about whether rapid antigen tests perform as well with omicron. And, the need for a 10-day isolation period was thrown into question after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that some people could leave their homes after only five days.

"The information is more confusing because the threat itself is more confusing," said David Abramson, who directs the Center for Public Health Disaster Science at the NYU School of Global Public Health. "We used to know there was a hurricane coming at us from 50 miles away. Now we have this storm that is not well defined that could maybe create flood or some wind damage, but there are so many uncertainties, and we just aren't sure."

Many people are now coming to their own conclusions about Covid and how they should behave. After not contracting the virus after multiple exposures, they may conclude they can take more risks. Or if they have Covid they may choose to stay in isolation longer than the CDC

recommends. And they aren't necessarily embracing conspiracy theories. People are forming opinions after reading mainstream news articles and tweets from public health researchers; they are looking at real-life experiences of people in their networks.

MANY PEOPLE ARE NOW COMING TO THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS ABOUT COVID AND HOW THEY SHOULD BEHAVE. AFTER NOT CONTRACTING THE VIRUS AFTER MULTIPLE EXPOSURES, THEY MAY CONCLUDE THEY CAN TAKE MORE RISKS. OR IF THEY HAVE COVID THEY MAY CHOOSE TO STAY IN ISOLATION LONGER THAN THE CDC RECOMMENDS

Still, this isn't the same as following scientifically tested advice from experts, Abramson said. "A lot of it is anecdotal, and to say, 'My brother-in-law did this and it worked for him, so I'm going to do it too,' that is a poor use of probabilistic thinking," he said.

And the people cobbling together their own guidance aren't always looking for shortcuts. Reagan Ross, 26, who lives in San Jose, California, and is completing her doctorate in the department of communication at Stanford University, was recently asked on a date.

She had been isolating for 13 days after getting the virus, longer than the CDC's guidelines, and no longer has any symptoms. But she decided she wouldn't go on the date until she gets a negative antigen test.

"Some of my family members think I'm crazy," she said. "But my date understands."

He is not interested in getting Covid."

Alexa Winter, 18, who works for Nordstrom Rack and lives in Minneapolis, wanted to stay home for the correct number of days, but she was confused about what that was after reading the CDC website. "I looked at the official CDC guidelines, but it was so muddled," she said. "I couldn't tell if it was five days or 10 days."

Abramson said the five-day guidance "has too much ambiguity." "I would have preferred much clearer guidance," he said.

Winter turned to other sources. "I asked people who I communicate with on Twitter who did lockdowns what they did and what they thought I should do," she said. "I asked my mom and dad what they thought. I asked friends of mine who had Covid before."

Vince Hulett, 35, who works in digital marketing and lives in Ballwin, Missouri, believes it is his combination of vaccines — two Pfizer shots and a Moderna booster — that has protected him against Covid thus far. He decided to get a different booster vaccine after reading early studies that suggest the mixture may offer more protection than getting three shots of the same vaccine.

When most of his family contracted Covid over Christmas, it only made him more confident in his decision.

"I had a huge Covid outbreak in my family over Christmas. My dad and mom got it, my two daughters, my brother, his wife and their two kids," he said. He and his wife, he said, were among the few who didn't get it. "I 100 per cent think my vaccine combo protected me."

Syl Tang, a futurist, said almost everyone she knows has come to her with theories about what they think is happening right now in the pandemic.

"Everybody just wants to find a way to feel good about their choices and make sense about this world we live in right now," she said. — *The New York Times*.



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INDIA START BRIGHT IN ASIA CUP

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Defending champions India started their title defence in style with a 9-0 drubbing of Malaysia in the Women's Asia Cup hockey at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat on Friday night.

In an earlier Pool B match, China thrashed Thailand 6-1.

Ahead of the India match, the official opening of the tournament was presided over by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim bin Said al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in presence of Asian Hockey Federation CEO Dato Tayyab Ikram, Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Jumaa and other top officials.

The Royal Oman Police's all-women band performed an orchestra and the national anthem of the Sultanate of Oman.

Indian women, who narrowly missed a medal in Tokyo 2020 Olympics, slowly settled into the match and produced several attacks to the Malaysian penalty box.

Navneet Kaur, Vandana Katariya and Sharmila Devi scored two goals each while Deep Grace Ekka, Monika and Lalremsiami also found the target.

The big win enabled India to reach the top of Pool A with three points, leap-frogging Japan on goal difference.

Japan had started off with a 6-0 win over Singapore in the first match of Pool A.

Losing teams Singapore and Malaysia are third and fourth with no points.

India, ranked ninth in the world, were in good control of the match against World No 20 Malaysia.

250TH APPEARANCE

Vandana Katariya, making her 250th appearance for the Indian national team, struck in the eighth minute to score the first goal for the women in blue in the 10th edition of the Asia Cup.

After two minutes, Deep Grace Ekka doubled the lead with a low drag flick from a penalty corner.

Towards the end of the first quarter, Navneet Kaur made it 3-0 for India after beating Malaysian goalkeeper Siti Nassir through a firm hit from inside the circle.

In the second quarter, Malaysia defended with purpose.

However, Navneet Kaur continued to tick the scoreboard as her close-range drive made it 4-0.

India continued their dominance in the third quarter as well, by making constant forays in the Malaysian circle.

Vandana Katariya found the target from a rebound soon as India stormed to a 5-0 lead.

Then the Malaysia defence crumbled under pressure as Indian frontliners Lalremsiami and Monika hit back-to-back goals (38th and 40th minutes) to make it 7-0.



Photo by Faisal al Balushi

In the final quarter, Malaysia made some attempts at Indian goalmouth, but Indian goalkeeper and captain Savita Punia thwarted all attempts with ease.

Devi Sharmila made it 8-0 in the 46th minute and completed the scoreline with another brilliant field goal with one minute to go for the final whistle.

India will next meet Japan on Sunday.

CHINA MAKE INTENTIONS CLEAR

The Chinese women made their intentions clear with a clinical 6-1 win over Thailand to take the second spot in Pool B behind South Korea.

South Korea, who drubbed Singapore 7-0, took the top position on goal difference.

Jing Yong opened the scoring for China in the 13th minute with

a field goal as China led the first quarter 1-0.

Shumin Wang struck in the first minute of second quarter and Mengling Zhong scored in the last minute as China raised the lead to 3-0 at half-time.

Three minutes into the third quarter, Zhong found the target again when she converted a penalty corner.

China pressed ahead in the

fourth quarter too despite some whole-hearted efforts from the Thai frontline.

Xue Deng hit the target twice in a span of three minutes (48th and 51st) as China cushioned their lead to 6-0.

The Thai efforts for a consolation goal bore fruit in the last minute as Suwapat Konthong netted Thailand's first goal in the tournament.

Korea registers second victory, Japan crush Singapore

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Korea registered their second successive victory at the 2022 Women's Asia Cup as they defeated China 4-0 on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex for Pool B matches.

The triumph meant Korean women reached the sixth point and secured spot in the semis.

In earlier match on Friday, Korean women thrashed Indonesia 7-0 in the opening game of the 2022 Women's Asia Cup which is hosted in Muscat by Oman Hockey Association (OHA).

The Korean team managed to lead Pool B which feature also China and Thailand teams.

Defending champion, India, began the campaign at the 2022 Women's Asia Cup with sinking Malaysia 9-0 on Friday. With the large win, Indian women's team topping pool A with goals differences than Japan who have the same amount of points after

defeating Singapore 6-0.

It was a one-sided match as Korean women dominated the show against Indonesian players. Lee Seung Ju put Korea team ahead earlier in the first half in the fifth minute.

Kim Jiyun added the margin as she scored the second goal. Two minutes later, Baek Eeseul managed to register the third goal. The Korean seeking for more goals were continued as Lee Juyeon fund the net and netted the fourth goal in the 25th minute.

The fifth goal came through Baek Eeseul while Cheon Eunbi concluded the goal spree as she scored the sixth and seventh goal in the 53rd and 60th minutes respectively.

In the following match of the tournament, which act as qualifier for the 2022 FIH Hockey Women's World Cup, Japan registered a comfortable 6-0 win over Singapore on Friday for Pool A matches.

With the triumph, Japan



claimed first three points from their opening match in Pool A. Asai Yu opened the scoring for Japan in 14th minute while Oikawa Shihori showed top performance as she netted the second and third goals in 18th and 31st minutes respectively.

Caoch Jude Menezes' women continued domination as Amiru Shimada netted the fourth goal in the 33rd minute. The fifth goal scored by Asai Yu in the 55th minute while Oikawa Shihori completed the 6-0 margin through in the 55th minute. The head coach of Japan team, Jude Menezes, said post match the registered win is significant for the team.

"It is always great to start with victory in the opening game and thanks to the team players for good show. The team shaped very well during the fixture. We are expecting tough match in the forthcoming encounter against. We are gearing up for the next clash", former goalkeeper of Indian team ended.

Medvedev, Tsitsipas march into last 16 as Halep fires warning



Russia's Daniil Medvedev in action during his third round match against Netherlands' Botic van de Zandschulp. — Reuters



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates winning his third round match against France's Benoit Paire. — Reuters

MELBOURNE: World number two and title favourite Daniil Medvedev won over the Australian Open crowd on Saturday as he eased into the last 16 along with Stefanos Tsitsipas.

After the drama of Friday, when defending champion Naomi Osaka exited Melbourne in the third round, the women's seeds were also mostly untroubled on day six.

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka overcame the serving yips and Simona Halep was an emphatic winner, the former number one now playing self-described "dinosaur" Alize Cornet on Monday for a place in the quarterfinals.

Russia's Medvedev, the de facto men's top seed after the deportation of defending champion Novak Djokovic on the eve of the Grand Slam, said some fans at Melbourne Park had a "low IQ" after they booed him in his second-round victory over Australian showman Nick Kyrgios.

The reigning US Open champion needed four sets and a large dose of composure to see off Kyrgios and silence Rod Laver Arena, but it was altogether more comfortable as he dismissed unseeded Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp.

The 25-year-old Medvedev kept his cool in sweltering conditions on Margaret Court Arena to roll through 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 in 1hr 55min and faces American Maxime Cressy in the fourth round.

"I'll put it this way, it's easier to play a guy from the Netherlands than a guy from Australia in Australia in Melbourne," said Medvedev, who has a similar love-hate dynamic with the crowd in New York.

"Every good relationship must have its ups and downs so I think it's good, it's entertaining and it's real, there is some relationship going on."

Greek fourth seed Tsitsipas, who is chasing a maiden major, was also largely untroubled in a 6-3, 7-5, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 win over unseeded Frenchman Benoit Paire and plays American Taylor Fritz next.

Tsitsipas's serve was the foundation. He did not drop a service game despite losing a set and sent down 21 aces.

Medvedev and Tsitsipas, two of the generation coming up fast behind the "Big Three" of Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, could meet in the semifinals.

Felix Auger-Aliassime sent home the last Briton left standing

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka overcame the serving yips and Simona Halep was an emphatic winner, the former number one now playing self-described "dinosaur" Alize Cornet on Monday for a place in the quarterfinals

in singles, the 21-year-old Canadian thrashing Dan Evans 6-4, 6-1, 6-1.

Auger-Aliassime is regarded as a serious upcoming talent in men's tennis and warned his rivals that he was beginning to feel at home at the business end of majors.

"Now of course playing more and more Grand Slams and I have gone to semifinals (US Open last year), I feel more in my place," he said.

Another burgeoning talent, the 20-year-old Italian Jannik Sinner, defeated Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel in four sets and will play Australia's Alex de Minaur.

"What else can I ask for?"

In the women's draw, Halep swatted aside Danka Kovinic —

conqueror of US Open champion Emma Raducanu — 6-2, 6-1 in just 64 minutes to set up a date with Cornet of France.

The fit-again Halep came into the tournament full of confidence after her first title in 16 months earlier this month at a Melbourne warm-up event and was always in charge.

The 14th seed next meets unseeded Cornet, who celebrated her 32nd birthday by slugging it out with Slovenia's 29th seed Tamara Zidansek for a 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory.

The crowd serenaded her by singing happy birthday.

"It's definitely a very, very special victory being back in the second week 13 years after my first (time). It's quite special," she said.

"The day of my birthday, I mean, what else can I ask for?"

World number two Sabalenka overcame the serving problems that have been plaguing her early season, but still needed three sets to get past 31st seed Marketa Vondrousova.

The Belarusian had served 70 double faults in her previous four matches in 2022, and tallied 10 more even as she beat the Czech 4-6, 6-3, 6-1. She now meets unseeded Estonian veteran Kaia Kanepi.

Malan leads South Africa to ODI series win

PAARL, South Africa: Opener Janneman Malan scored 91 as South Africa chased down a victory target of 288 for a comfortable seven-wicket win over India and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series after the second One-Day International at Boland Park on Friday.

India chose to bat in sweltering conditions, with the mercury rising above 40 degrees Celsius for much of the day. The visitors posted 287 for six in their 50 overs, which looked a good total on a slow wicket that should have favoured them.

But South Africa paced their reply superbly, with Malan and fellow opener Quinton de Kock (78 from 66 balls) putting on 132 for the first wicket.

Malan, who now has three hundreds and three fifties in his 12 ODI innings, put on another 80 with captain Temba Bavuma (35) before he was bowled by Jasprit Bumrah, the ball deflecting onto the stumps off his elbow.

The home side, who won the first ODI by 31 runs, reached their target with 11 balls to spare.

"We are making mistakes, but it is a good learning for us, though it is not great to be

on the losing side two games in a row," India captain KL Rahul said at the post-match presentation.

"I don't think it was a pitch where they should have chased down 280 that easily, but they played really well."

Rishabh Pant led the Indian charge in their innings with an excellent 85 from 71 balls in which he played some sparkling shots all around the wicket before picking out long-on Aiden Markram off the bowling of wrist-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi (2-57).

He put on 115 for the third wicket with Rahul (55), which followed a duck by former skipper Virat Kohli, who could not follow up his half-century in the last game with another big score.

"We wanted to win the series, but we weren't expecting to do it after two games," Bavuma said.

"Not many people gave us a chance, but as a team we have a lot of self-belief and confidence, we believe in each other. We go out there and fight for one another."

The third and final match of the series will be played at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday. The results do not count towards the Cricket World Cup Super League.

— Reuters



South Africa's Janneman Malan plays a shot during the second ODI. — AFP

Oman Women whitewash Wanstead 3-0 to clinch series

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Oman Women whitewashed the touring UK side Wanstead Cricket Club, winning the third T20 game by 38 runs to clinch the series 3-0 here at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Opting to bowl first, Wanstead CC failed to restrict Oman to a small total. Priyanka Mendonca (30), Hina Javed (23) and Nayan Anil (20) were the hosts' main batters, Hina hitting the game's lone six. Laura Anna claimed 2 for 14.

Determined to make amends and end the tour on a winning note, Wanstead got off to a sound start, reaching 51 for 1 in 9 overs.

However, Oman fought back again, slowing the tourists down further before it became impossible to catch up with the required run rate.



Krishna Pradhan and Aneek Chakraborty of Maniz Azad

Though Wanstead crossed the 100-run mark for the first time in the series, it could still manage to score only 122 for 4 in 20 overs, a good 38 runs short of the target.



Oman Women's Team after winning the series

Yasmin Daswani (38 not out) and Saba Nasim (25) were again its top scorers.

Brief Scores: Oman Women's 160 for 6 in 20 overs (Priyanka

Mendonca 30 – 3x4, Hina Javed 23 – 1x6, Nayan Anil 20 – 3x4. Laura Anna 2-14) beat Wanstead Women's 122 for 4 in 20 overs (Yasmin Daswani 38 – 3x4, Saba Nasim 25 – 3x4) by 38 runs.

WINS FOR MANIZ AZAD, OHI

In the Oman Cricket League action, Maniz Azad defeated Bank Muscat while Douglas OHI trounced OCT Al Hail A by 6

wickets in B Division games on Friday.

Brief Scores (B Division):

Bank Muscat 186 for 9 in 30 overs (Osman al Zadjali 53 – 7x4, 1x6, Asghar Khan 36 – 3x4, 1x6, Aneek Chakraborty 4-25, Rehman Bhatt 2-23) lost to Maniz Azad International 190 for 4 in 24 overs (Krishna Pradhan 81 – 12x4, Muhammad Attique 43 – 5x4, 1x6, Adnan Ahamad 32 – 1x4, 1x6, Vinoth Thangavel 3-22) by 6 wickets.

Brief Scores (B Division):

Oct Al Hail 'A' 95 all out in 24.5 overs (Waleed Rahim 51 – 5x4, Shamsudheen Shareef 3-26, Murtaza Shah 3-14, Viplav Kumar 2-23) lost to Douglas OHI 97 for 3 in 12 overs (Shamsudheen Shareef 28 – 2x4, 2x6, Krishhang Srivastava 27 – 1x4, Santosh Vishwakarma 26 – 2x4, 1x6, Waleed Rahim 2-22) by 7 wickets.

Asia Lions bounce back

LIONS POST SIX-WICKET WIN OVER WORLD GIANTS

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 22

Upul Tharanga continued his sparkling form with bat as Asia Lions chased down a formidable total of 205 posted by World Giants to register their first win of the Legends League Cricket Oman 2022 tournament at Amerat Stadium on Friday night.

Sri Lankan pair of Tillakaratne Dilshan (52 from 32 balls) and Tharanga (63 from 43 balls) led the Asia Lions chase as World Giants bowlers found it difficult to stop the runs. Former England medium pacer Ryan Sidebottom gave away 46 runs in his 4 overs while former South African pacer Mornie Morkel returned decent figures of 2-38 in his four overs.

Asia Lions captain Misbah-ul-Haq expressed happiness to post their first win of the tournament.

“Credit to our players. We executed the plan perfectly to chase the big total. It’s a welcome win after missing out closely in the first match,” Misbah said.

Former Irish international Kevin O’Brien, who top-scored for World Giants with 95, said the pitch was very good to bat.

“It is a nice batting track. I got out trying for sixers in the final stages. Unfortunately, we couldn’t defend the total. We will come up strong in the next match,” he said.

Chasing a big score, Asia Lions never looked in trouble.

After a quick 14 from Kamran Akmal, the Lankan pair consolidated the Lions innings.

Both Dilshan and Tharanga got out after completing their half-centuries at crucial junctures.

Then, Mohammed Hafeez came up with a handy 13-ball 27 runs in the middle stage to keep up the run-rate. In the final stages, experienced skipper Misbah-ul-Haq (19) and Asghar Afghan (14) guided the team to a comfortable six-wicket victory with four balls to spare.

O’BRIEN HITS 95

The World Giants were sent in to bat after Asia Lions won the toss on a windy day at the Amerat Stadium. Kevin O’Brien struck a masterful 95 from 46 balls, which included seven boundaries

“Credit to our players. We executed the plan perfectly to chase the big total. It’s a welcome win after missing out closely in the first match

MISBAH-UL-HAQ

Asia Lions captain

and seven sixers. Another major contribution came from opener Phil Mustard who scored 28.

Opener Kevin Pietersen scored 14, Corey Anderson hit 18, Owais Shah chipped in with 14 and Albie Morkel sent the score past 200 with a seven-ball 17.

Sri Lankan medium pacer Nuwan Kulasekara impressed in bowling for Lions with 2 wickets for 17 in his four overs, which included a maiden.

Pakistan spinner Mohammad Hafeez took 2-32 in 3 overs.

Spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan was hit for 46 runs in his four overs. However, the Lankan spinner took the prize wicket of O’Brien, caught by Hafeez.

Fellow Lankan pacer Chaminda Vaas chipped in with 1-35 in his 3 overs, accounting for Pietersen in the third over.

Former Pakistan all-rounder Hafeez said it was a great feeling to watch the legends in action again.

“Personally, I felt very happy to watch the legends again. It was thrilling to see the likes of Muttiah Muralitharan, Kevin Pietersen, Mornie Morkel, Shoaib Akhtar and Irfan Pathan take to the field again. This tournament gives fans a great opportunity to watch the legends once again,” Hafeez said.

Brief scores: World Giants 205-7 in 20 overs (Kevin Pietersen 95, Phil Mustard 28; Nuwan Kulasekara 2-17, Mohammad Hafeez 2-32) lost to Asia Lions 209-4 in 19.2 overs (Tillakaratne Dilshan 52, Upul Tharanga 63, Mohammed Hafeez 27; Mornie Morkel 2-38)



Upul Tharanga of Asia Lions in action against World Giants. – LLC Photo

Pandya, Rahul to lead Ahmedabad, Lucknow IPL teams

NEW DELHI: All-rounder Hardik Pandya will lead Ahmedabad and batsman KL Rahul will captain Lucknow when the franchises make their debuts in the Indian Premier League (IPL) this year.

The 15th edition of the world’s richest Twenty20 league will be a 10-team affair with the inclusion of the two new franchises, who paid a combined \$1.71 billion to be part of the competition.

“I am looking forward to working with Hardik as a young and new captain,” Ahmedabad team mentor Gary Kirsten told Star Sports channel.

“I think he will be really motivated to come in and make a plan and show what he is capable of at this level of the game as a leader,” said the South African,



who coached India to their 2011 World Cup triumph on home soil.

Ahmedabad have also signed top Afghan spinner Rashid Khan and India opener Shubman Gill.

Top-order batsman Rahul, currently captaining India in the one-day leg of their South Africa tour in the absence of Rohit Sharma, will be in charge of



Lucknow in their inaugural season.

“I have been very impressed by KL’s not only batting and wicketkeeping abilities, but his leadership skills,” Lucknow owner

Sanjiv Goenka told the channel, adding that he has “everything it takes to succeed”. Lucknow have also picked Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis and Indian leg-

spinner Ravi Bishnoi.

All 10 franchises will look to strengthen their side in next month’s players’ auction in Bengaluru. Dates and venues of this year’s tournament have not been announced yet.

A total of 1,214 players, including 318 overseas cricketers from 18 countries, have signed up for the auction, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) said on Saturday.

Holders Chennai Super Kings have retained all-rounder Moeen Ali, while England team-mate Jos Buttler will be seen in Rajasthan Royals colours again. Kolkata Knight Riders have retained Sunil Narine and Andre Russell while fellow West Indian Kieron Pollard will continue to represent Mumbai Indians.

— Reuters



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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 22

The Ibri-2 Solar Power Project, set up with an investment of around RO 155 million, will be inaugurated tomorrow, January 24, 2022, at a ceremony to be presided over by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. The product of a Public-Private-Partnership (PPP), the 500 MW solar project is a further testament of the Sultanate of Oman's ability to attract foreign direct investment.

The partnership of ACWA Power of Saudi Arabia, Gulf Investment Corporation and the Alternative Energy Projects Company (AEPCC) has developed



the project on a Build-Own-Operate basis in the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Electricity output from the plant is committed to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) – part of Nama Group, under a long-term supply agreement.

At full capacity, the Ibri-2 Solar Project will generate enough power to meet the requirements of nearly 50,000 homes.

As a clean energy project, it will also annually reduce 340,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions that would otherwise be produced by a comparable natural gas based power plant.

In addition to generation carbon-free electricity for supply into the main electricity grid, the new project will contribute to socio-economic development in the governorate.

During the construction phase, a number of local firms benefited

from contracts procured through the project's In-Country Value (ICV) development programme. Several local start-ups are also supporting the venture during the operations phase.

Eng Yaqoub bin Said al Kiyumi, CEO – OPWP, said the project has been developed in line with strategic national objectives set out in Oman Vision 2040, particularly with regard to energy and environmental conservation, optimal utilisation of natural resources, local development and private sector engagement.

Ibri-2 Solar Power Project will also pave the way for the launch of other similar projects in the field of renewable energy, he said, noting that OWP is currently developing two solar power plants in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with a total capacity of 1,000 MW, in addition to wind power projects in South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates. — ONA

MoTCIT issues new guidelines affixing responsibility for carriage of goods



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has issued guidelines affixing the responsibilities of the different parties involved in the carriage of goods in accordance with the provisions of the Land Transport Law issued by Royal Decree 10/2016 and its executive regulations aimed at regulating logistics services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The guidelines set out protocols establishing the transfer of liability for the goods from the sender to the carrier — a move aimed at raising the quality of services and preserving the rights of all parties to a road transport contract.

The ministry has urged all carriers to comply with the specified guidelines by issuing a transport document for each transfer based on a proforma available on the www.naql.om transport platform, after ascertaining the safety and nature of the goods listed for carriage. — ONA

Green Energy Oman hub is world's 6th largest hydrogen project: IRENA

Energy transition:
Report welcomes Omani government's vision to support the growth of a 'hydrogen-centric society' by 2040

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

A mammoth green energy hub planned by OQ, the Sultanate of Oman's integrated energy group, has been placed sixth in a ranking of the world's Top 20 mega-scale green hydrogen projects.

Green Energy Oman (GEO) is proposed to be developed in Al Wusta Governorate by an international consortium comprising OQ, Intercontinental Energy (ICE) – billed as the world's largest hydrogen developer, and Enertech of Kuwait. At full capacity, it will be powered by 25 gigawatts (GW) of solar and wind generation capacity, enabling the production of 1.8 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen and 10 million tonnes of green ammonia.

Given its immense scale, the GEO has been ranked 6th in size in a listing of the world's largest green hydrogen schemes, compiled by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the Abu Dhabi based intergovernmental organisation that supports countries in their



1	HyDeal Ambition (67GW)	Western Europe
2	Unnamed (30GW)	Kazakhstan
3	Western Green Energy Hub (28GW)	Australia
4	AMAN (16GW)*	Mauritania
5	Asian Renewable Energy Hub (14GW)	Australia
6	Oman Green Energy Hub (14GW)*	Oman
7	AquaVentus (10GW)	Germany
8	North2 (10GW)	Netherlands
9	H2 Magallanes (8GW)	Chile
10	Beijing Jingneng (5GW)	China
11	Project Nour (5GW)*	Mauritania
12	HyEnergy Zero Carbon Hydrogen (4GW)*	Australia
13	Pacific solar Hydrogen (3.6GW)	Australia
14	Green Marlin (3.2GW)	Ireland
15	H2-Hub Gladstone (3GW)	Australia
16	Moolawatana Renewable Hydrogen Project (3GW)*	Australia
17	Murchison Renewable Hydrogen Project (3GW)	Australia
18	Unnamed (3GW)	Namibia
19	Base One (2GW)*	Brazil
20	Helios green Fuels Project (2GW)	Saudi Arabia

Note: Size refers to electrolyser capacity. Information based on announced plans.
a. Estimated electrolyser capacity based on a comparison with similar-sized schemes.

transition to a sustainable energy future.

With the exception of Saudi Arabia, which earns the 20th rank for its Helios Green Fuels Project, the Sultanate of Oman is

the only Middle Eastern country in IRENA's Top 20 index of mega-scale green hydrogen schemes.

Countries in Western Europe, South America Western and Southern Africa, besides

Kazakhstan, China and Australia feature in the top 20 list.

The biggest by far is HyDeal Ambition — an uber-scale 67 GW scheme promoted by a consortium of 30 leading developers for establishment in Spain. Australia is set to host a sizable array of mega-scale ventures, including the Western Green Energy Hub (28 GW) and Asian Renewable Energy Hub (14 GW).

IRENA's report, 'Geopolitics of the Energy Transformation: The Hydrogen Factor', spotlights some of the key countries that are at the forefront of the global green hydrogen revolution.

The Omani government's vision, the Agency says, is to support the growth of a

'hydrogen-centric society' within the next two decades. "Oman is preparing a national hydrogen strategy with the aim of establishing a hydrogen-centric society by 2040," IRENA noted in its report.

"It also plans to become a large-scale exporter of green hydrogen or green ammonia. Several gigawatt-scale projects have already been announced, all capitalising on the abundant solar and wind resources in the Al Wusta Governorate and eyeing the Arabian Sea port of Duqm for exports. The biggest of these projects will be powered by 25 GW of solar and wind."

The report welcomes the pathway charted by the Sultanate of Oman, among other countries notably Australia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to pivot away from fossil fuels towards clean hydrogen in a bid to diversify their economies.

To this end, countries like the Sultanate of Oman can "leverage established energy infrastructure, a skilled workforce and existing energy trade relations" in their transition efforts, it noted.

A Final Investment Decision (FID) to progress the multibillion dollar Green Energy Oman project is slated in early 2026. Implementation is envisioned over a 10-year period with expansions dictated by international demand for green energy.

Omani student teams win big in Shell NXplorers 2021

MUSCAT: Omani student teams, who rose to the challenge of Shell NXplorers 2021 and made home with wins in three categories through innovative solutions to environmental concerns, received the prestigious Global Recognition Awards at a virtual ceremony held recently. NXplorers is a Shell educational programme that introduces young people to complex and creative thinking that can lead to positive global change.

Omani participants won one gold, one silver and one bronze awards in three distinct categories: Fakhriya al Shaibani won the Silver Award as the 'Most Inspiring NXplorers Mentor'; Team Awaser from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate won Golden under the 'Outstanding NXplorers Student Team'; and 'My Palm Green Legacy' from Al Amal School won the Merit for 'Best NXplorers Project by a School Team'.

The virtual award ceremony, held on January 20, recognised and celebrated participants of Shell NXplorers from more than



20 countries, who came up with inspiring concepts and ideas to tackle global challenges related to food, water and energy.

It was a world-wide celebration of NXplorers participants, facilitators and mentors, who, over the course of the year, availed opportunities to develop skills, tools and techniques to become agents of change.

Speaking on the occasion, Jasim al Ajmi, Social Investment and Performance Manager at Oman Shell, stated: "For the 2021 edition of Shell NXplorers, we at Oman Shell worked together with the Ministry of Education and Engineering Village, our delivery partner, to

implement the programme in 22 solar schools across the country.

While we were amazed by the increase in the number of participants this year, despite the pandemic, we were also impressed by the diversity of ideas that the Omani student teams came up with. Over the years, our carefully developed educational programme has grown in strength and stature to touch the lives of so many young students.

Since its launch in the Sultanate of Oman, NXplorers has benefitted more than 1,400 students, and has equipped more than 60 science teachers and career advisers with the necessary information and

methods to nurture STEM thinking skills amongst students."

Dr Mayya al Azri, Director of the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympics, Ministry of Education, said, "On behalf of the Ministry of Education, I would like to salute all the participants for their tremendous efforts in the field of STEM and congratulate our winners for validating Oman's caliber in the global arena.

We are particularly overwhelmed by the interest demonstrated by our students to be a part of Shell NXplorers, which is predominately oriented towards STEM.

Most students perceive STEM programmes as difficult and challenging and are wary of the demands it places on their time and space. But the sheer number of participants is a clear indication of the popularity gained by NXplorers programme in inspiring the youth."

Fakhriya, who won the distinguished silver award, is a NX facilitator from the Ministry of Education (Al Amal School).



Bank Nizwa's wholesale banking unit posts strong growth

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa's Wholesale Banking Group recently hosted clients at an event attended by senior executives, business leaders, and business owners, from the Omani corporate world. Also present were Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer, R Narasimhan, General Manager — Wholesale Banking, and Khalid al Barwani, DGM — Wholesale Banking Group.

In his speech, Al Kayed, CEO, pointed out that the Islamic banking sector in Oman has seen phenomenal progress in the last few years and that it will continue to thrive on the back of continuous innovation in products and services, a keen focus on digitalisation and excellence in customer service levels.

The Bank's Wholesale Banking Division comprises 10 units that facilitate services to major business segments in SME, mid-corporate, large corporate, and Project Financing, in addition to dedicated support units with skill sets under treasury, transaction banking, advisory and investment banking, and Financial Institutions Group.

The Group also focuses on Government Businesses both for financing as well as for resources support. Bank Nizwa's Wholesale Banking Group also organises seminars in major business locations in order to enhance the knowledge of

clients in Islamic Products and structuring.

R Narasimhan said: "In the last 5 years the Bank's Wholesale Banking Unit has achieved average growth of 36 per cent per annum in both asset and liabilities with its portfolio growing exponentially from \$650 million in 2015 to \$4.25 billion by the end of November 2021."

In line with Bank Nizwa's growth strategy and contribution to the country's economic diversification goals, the Wholesale Banking Group concluded several unique financing structures including green financing, food security projects, Public Private Partnership model, infrastructure related project, tourism projects, projects of the aviation industry and core manufacturing industries like Steel, Cement, Plastics, Chemicals, Oil and Gas amongst other key sectors.

Bank Nizwa also offers tailor-made solutions to SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman. The trust placed in the bank's services is evident through a notable increase in its SME customer-base and business volume. The bank has a strong technology focus and is further upgrading its technology in state-of-the-art transaction banking platforms, including Supply Chain Finance, which will compliment SME customers by leveraging large and mid-corporate customers.

Go places with the exciting Kia Seltos SUV

MUSCAT: The Kia Seltos SUV is compact yet fun to drive and makes every drive fascinating. The Seltos with its sleek and stylish looks along with its impressive performance and fuel efficiency, is one of the popular models in the Kia range.

The Seltos combines forward-looking technical features, class-leading space and a suite of world-class safety features, and is powered by a highly-efficient Smartstream petrol engine.

It offers distinctive exterior design details, such as its long hood, a strong, character line on the front bumper, and sharp lines pressed into the bodywork. It also sports a wide 'tiger nose



grille', making the car instantly recognisable as a Kia, but with a difference.

Seltos is equipped with intricate and sharply designed full LED headlights and taillights, providing the car with

a commanding and confident presence on the road.

For daytime driving, the car also has LED daytime running lights and rear lamps, and 3D multi-layer indicators to make it clear exactly where the Seltos

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

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

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

MSX30 Index closes week lower, led by industrials

MUSCAT: The MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.73 per cent. All Sectors ended in red. The Industrial Index ended the lowest and was down by 2.20 per cent. Services Index and Financial Index was lower by 0.85 per cent and 0.50 per cent, respectively.

The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 1.59 per cent. A number of state-owned companies will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) this year, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of MSX said.

The proposed listing of new companies, he said, will support the levels of liquidity, increase the depth of the stock exchange and its investment attractiveness.

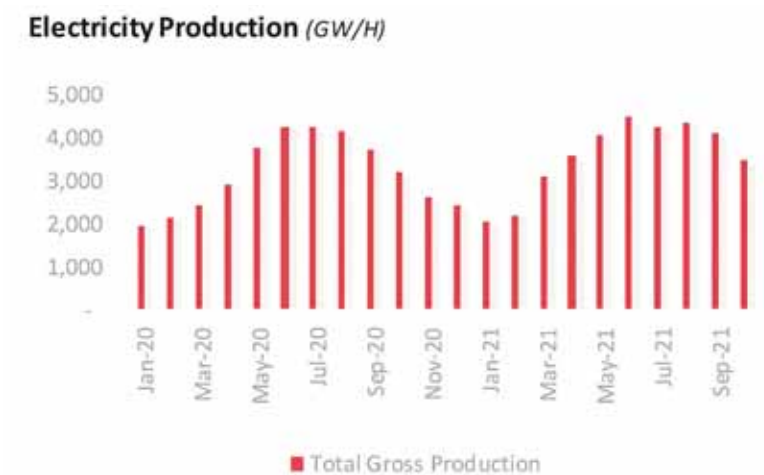
This is in addition to initiatives related to improving the infrastructural underpinnings of the stock market, the rollout of new investment tools, and upgrading the technological

features, among other projects, to improve the market's performance in all aspects ahead of the transformation of the stock exchange into a public joint stock company.

A key goal is to upgrade the stock exchange into a leading player that garners favourable ratings from international rating agencies.

To achieve this goal, work will be done to raise the liquidity of listed shares, raise market values, and focus on facilitating the entry of foreign investments and activating some trading features such as short selling, lending and borrowing of securities, and other initiatives that enable the Stock Exchange to be featured on global indices.

Sohar International, a leading bank in Oman, has signed recently an agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources to extend RO19 million



(\$49 million) worth of financing to the Wash-hi Majazah mining project. Al Hadeetha Resources a joint venture between Alara Resources, Al Hadeetha and Al Tasnim, is the first international joint venture company that has been awarded a copper mining licence in Oman for the Wash-hi Majazah project.

Located in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah, the Wash-hi Majazah copper deposit has been evaluated under JORC standards for over 16 million tonnes of copper resources and 10 million tonnes of mineable reserves.

With equity contribution of RO8 million bringing up the total valuation of the project at

approximately RO 27 million, Wash-hi Majazah project will generate cash flows of RO 200 million for a period of 10 years.

Sohar International Bank receives approval from CBO to commence due diligence for merger with Bank Nizwa.

Further to the disclosure made by Sohar International Bank on November 23, 2021 regarding its expression of intentions to merge with Bank Nizwa SAOG, subject to regulatory and shareholders' approvals.

The Board of Directors of Sohar International said it received approval from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) for its application to go ahead with the due diligence process with respect to the proposed merger, on January 18, 2022.

Inflation in the Sultanate of Oman further increased in November after a sharp rise in

prices for transportation and fish and seafood products during the month.

The Sultanate's inflation rate — which is based on the consumer price index (CPI) — increased to 3.56 per cent in November 2021 from 3.35 per cent recorded in the previous month, according to CPI data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The annual inflation rate in November was at its highest level since 2011.

The Sultanate's consumer prices in November inched up 0.12 per cent compared to October prices, the data showed.

An increase in inflation rate was expected this year after the implementation of value-added tax (VAT) in April. Rising commodities prices globally have also contributed to the higher inflation in recent months.

Courtesy: U-Capital



A man walks by in front of Shell company logos at an exhibition in the new Shell Technology Centre Bangalore in Bangalore, India, in this file photo. — AFP

Shell officially changes name

LONDON: Shell officially changed its name on Friday, ditching “Royal Dutch”, which has been part of its identity since 1907, following plans to scrap its dual share structure and move its head office from the Netherlands to Britain.

“Shell announced the Board’s decision to change its name to Shell plc on December 20, 2021. This change has now taken effect”, Shell said in a filing. The London and Amsterdam stock exchanges will reflect the name change on January 25 while the New York Stock Exchange will follow on January 31.

The change will not affect share ownership and the A shares and B shares will remain unchanged for the time being, Shell said. The shares are planned to be assimilated into a single line of ordinary shares on January 29.

Shell announced in November it would scrap its dual share structure and move its head office to London from The Hague, pushed away by Dutch taxes and facing climate pressure in court as the energy giant shifts from oil and gas. — **Reuters**

Austria eager to explore clean energy cooperation with Sultanate of Oman

GROWTH ASPIRATIONS: Bilateral trade currently stands at around RO 75 million annually

MUSCAT: Dr Margarete Schramböck, Federal Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs in Austria, says her government is keen to explore and develop cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman in renewable energy resources and green hydrogen, in addition to deepening bilateral economic relations.

Speaking to Oman News Agency, the Austrian minister describes bilateral relations as deep and long lasting. She pointed out that relations between the two countries have been growing particularly after the reopening of the Austrian Embassy in Muscat two years ago.

“We are focusing now in setting up new projects in the economic areas that would contribute to augmenting the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Austria”, said the Minister.

She explained that her recent visit to the Sultanate of Oman aimed at promoting bilateral relations and cooperation towards wider horizons, noting that she discussed with the Omani side various topics of mutual interest, such as cooperation in renewable energy and green hydrogen technologies.



In this context she said, “Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Oman and Austria were determined to promote their relations.

There are many promising sectors in which we can cooperate. Austria needs green energy and it looks for new resources and partners. We have discussed with the Omani side the possibility of signing a memorandum of understanding in this field.”

In the interview, Dr Schramböck praised the Vision 2040 blueprint for the country’s long-term economic development. She said the four main pillars of Oman Vision 2040, “People and Society”, “Economy and Development”, “Governance and Institutional Performance”

We are focusing now in setting up new projects in the economic areas that would contribute to augmenting the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Austria

DR MARGARETE SCHRAMBÖCK

Federal Minister for Digital and Economic Affairs

and “Environment Sustainability”, constitute a comprehensive roadmap for the future.

She pointed out that Austria has a similar roadmap, titled ‘Austria 2040’, which is broadly in line with the Omani vision, particularly with regard to the environment.

Commenting on the National Programme of Digital Economy, which was approved by the Council of Ministers last October, the Austrian Minister said: “I am very pleased that the digital economy tops the priorities of the Omani government. This field is the key for a prosperous economic future and we look forward to cooperating with Oman in this area to adopt the best practices.”

She further added that during her visit, she presented the Austrian experience in honing the skills of students in school and then in university to prepare them for the labour market.

Austria adopts a dual-learning system, said the minister, pointing out that this system enables students to study a particular subject and at the same time they work at a specialised company to sharpen their skills in that profession.

Underlining the importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Dr Schramböck said, “My country has devised a strategy in this field with the participation of many companies and institutions. This strategy is on the process of implementation and we are keen to present it for the Omani side so we can cooperate in this important area.”

Both countries, she said, have agreed to devise a mechanism to boost bilateral relations. This mechanism will be established through the formation of specialised working groups and intensifying joint visits and communication between officials of the two countries.

Bilateral trade between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Austria amounted to about RO 75 million. As many as 31 Austrian companies have investments in the Sultanate of Oman in many fields. — **ONA**

Yellen rebrands Biden economic agenda as ‘modern supply-side economics’

WASHINGTON: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen rebranded the Biden administration’s economic agenda as “modern supply-side economics”, using a Reagan-era phrase favoured by Republicans to assert that Democrats’ spending plans will boost the US economy’s productive capacity.

Yellen said in a speech to the World Economic Forum that rather than tax cuts and deregulation, her modernised version seeks to increase labour supply and improve infrastructure, education and research to boost potential US growth and ease inflationary pressures.

“Our new approach is far more promising than the old supply-side economics, which I see as having been a failed strategy for increasing growth”, Yellen said.

“Significant tax cuts on capital have not achieved their promised gains. And deregulation has a



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen addresses the US Conference of Mayors meeting in Washington. — **Reuters**

similarly poor track record in general and with respect to environmental policies — especially so with respect to curbing CO2 emissions.”

Yellen did not announce any policy shifts as she introduced the concept, which suggests it may be a new tactic to persuade Americans and moderate Democrats in Congress to support the “Build Back

Better” social spending and climate investment plan, which stalled in December.

The new nomenclature emphasises the administration’s efforts to expand the US workforce — a sentiment echoed by President Joe Biden in a speech to mayors — and increase productivity, forces that could help quell inflationary pressures while supporting a stronger growth rate.

The administration is trying to blunt the political fallout from high inflation that hit 7% last month amid labor, housing and goods shortages, the biggest annual increase in nearly 40 years, and counter claims that further spending would fuel further inflation.

Yellen’s vision of “supply-side economics” would differ greatly from the “Reaganomics” version that burst into the mainstream in the 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan as president. — **Reuters**

Intel’s \$20 bn Ohio factory could become world’s largest chip plant

WASHINGTON: Intel Corp said it would invest up to \$100 billion to build potentially the world’s largest chip-making complex in Ohio, looking to boost capacity as a global shortage of semiconductors affects everything from smartphones to cars.

The move is part of Chief Executive Officer Pat Gelsinger’s strategy to restore Intel’s dominance in chip making and reduce America’s reliance on Asian manufacturing hubs, which have a tight hold on the market.

An initial \$20 billion investment — the largest in Ohio’s history — on a 1,000-acre site in New Albany will create 3,000 jobs, Gelsinger said.



An Intel chip is displayed at an Intel news conference during the 2020 CES in Las Vegas, Nevada. — **Reuters**

That could grow to \$100 billion with eight total fabrication plants and would be the largest investment on record in Ohio, he said.

Dubbed the silicon heartland, it could become “the largest semiconductor manufacturing location on

the planet”, he said.

While chipmakers are scrambling to boost output, Intel’s plans for new factories will not alleviate the current supply crunch, because such complexes take years to build. Gelsinger reiterated he expected the chip shortages to persist into 2023.

To dramatically increase chip production in the US, the Biden administration aims to persuade Congress to approve \$52 billion in subsidy funding. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Friday the House of Representatives would soon introduce a bill on competitiveness to help bolster semiconductor investment and supply chains. — **Reuters**

Sri Lanka inflation hits record 14% as food crisis worsens

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka consumer prices shot up a record 14 per cent in December, surpassing a previous high of 11.1 from a month earlier, official figures showed on Saturday as food and fuel shortages worsen.

Senior ministers warned parliament earlier in the week of a growing food crisis with rice harvests due in March expected to be drastically lower after an agrochemical import ban last year saw farmers abandoning more than 30 per cent of agricultural land.

The island’s tourism-dependent

economy has been hammered by the pandemic with the government imposing broad import restrictions to avert a foreign exchange crisis, triggering a shortage of essential goods.

The Census and Statistics Department said year-on-year inflation in December was the highest since the National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) was established in 2015.

It said food inflation also hit a record 21.5 per cent, up from 16.9 per cent in November and 7.5 per cent a year ago. The use of substandard organic



A vendor sells dried fish at a market in Colombo. — **AFP**

fertiliser and pesticides has sharply reduced vegetable and fruit crop yields.

After intense farmer protests, the government lifted its agrochemical import ban in October, but banks are still short of dollars to finance imports.

Supermarkets have been rationing milk powder, sugar, lentils and other essentials for months with a top official warning last month of more restrictions to feed those most in need.

But agriculture ministry secretary Udith Jayasinghe was sacked hours after calling for a

formal rationing scheme to ensure that mothers, the elderly and the sick could be fed in the months ahead.

Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves have tanked since President Gotabaya Rajapaksa took office in 2019, going from \$7.5 billion to \$3.1 billion at the end of December.

The current figure is enough to finance less than two months of imports. International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka over fears of default on its \$35 billion foreign debt. The government has insisted it can meet the obligations. — **AFP**

Sabre-rattling over Ukraine hits bank investors

Russian bank investors are feeling the pain from sabre-rattling over Ukraine. US President Joe Biden has vowed to punish the country's lenders if his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin invades. State-backed lenders like Sberbank and VTB don't depend on foreign funding and can count on government support. Yet tumbling stock prices suggest shareholders can still get crushed.

The United States says it has prepared a package of sanctions if Russia breaches Ukraine's border.

The most far-reaching financial penalty would be to block Russian banks from dealing in dollars. The risk of such sanctions, however, is that they would cut European countries off from much-needed Russian gas, because European lenders which dealt with Russian counterparts would also be at risk of repercussions.

A less onerous punishment would be for Washington to ban Americans from holding debt or equity issued by Russian state lenders.

The Kremlin has been bolstering its defences against financial penalties. Its central bank now has around \$630 billion in foreign exchange and gold reserves, while the country's National Wealth Fund is worth almost \$200 billion.

Its two biggest banks are also robust: Sberbank and VTB have more deposits than loans, meaning they aren't dependent on external funding, and are reasonably capitalised. That limits the impact of existing restrictions, which cut these and several other banks off from issuing new equity or anything other than very short-term debt in the United States.

Still, these protections haven't cushioned investors from a slump triggered by the standoff between Nato and the Kremlin. Sberbank shares are down 20 per cent so far this year.

VTB shares have lost 10 per cent of their value in 2022. The difference is probably due to Sberbank's bigger international investor base.

The most recent filings show non-Russians held 47 per cent of the bank's shares, compared with just 15 per cent at VTB, according to Refinitiv. — Reuters

Its central bank now has around \$630 billion in foreign exchange and gold reserves, while the country's National Wealth Fund is worth almost \$200 billion



NOT SO STEEL ECONOMY

A steel worker stands a mid of emitting sparks of raw iron from a blast furnace at Germany's largest steel factory in Duisburg. The German government will cut its economic growth forecast for this year to 3.6 per cent from its October estimate of 4.1 per cent. The new government predicts inflation to reach 3.3 per cent on average this year, after it soared to 3.1 per cent in 2021 from 0.5 per cent a year earlier and is still forecasting core inflation, excluding food and energy prices, to run at 2.5 per cent in 2022.

— Reuters

Property flipping: 5 things to know



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BEHIND THIS GLITTERY IMAGE, THERE IS A LOT OF WORK, NUMBERS AND DUST TO GO THROUGH

Flipping properties sounds like a fun business, either for a side income, or as a retirement project. The idea of cherry picking undervalued properties from the market and turn them into masterpiece is fascinating to say the least. But behind this glittery image, there is a lot of work, numbers and dust to go through.

Let us list the rookie mistakes that are seldom discussed on the reality shows, where all they want to portrait are successful flips.

- 1. Location is still the most important single factor
- 2. Find a balance between affordable and cheap
- 3. Work only with the best professionals
- 4. Be extremely meticulous when listing the items to fix
- 5. Be patient

An important lesson to learn is that even properties in bad shape, when located in premium locations, retain their value.

Similarly, a hidden jewel in a dangerous neighbourhood, is worth less than its potential value.

Location is inescapable. Properties

cannot be moved. A good habit before committing on a property is to have multiple viewing, during the week and in the weekend, in the morning, in the afternoon, and even at night. A neighbourhood might change drastically during the day.

For novices, there is a natural strong temptation to buy a cheap property, just because they can afford it. Don't do it. In the largest majority of cases, a cheap property is just a honest representation of its value. Bear in mind that the under-priced hidden gems are always a minority.

A tiny minority in fact. Unless the seller is in a mad rush to sell a good property at a low price, most of the times all properties are marketed at their fair valuation.

Flipping properties requires extraordinary speed of execution. Many flippers buy properties on mortgage, thus from the moment they receive the key, the clock starts ticking.

Every month spent renovating, reduces the potential profit to be made. A friend of mine in the US told me that his second property flipped turned into a nightmare.

The contractor was irresponsible for 4 months after being appointed, and after

that was working slowly.

My friend had to pay his loan for 11 months before he could flip the house at a loss. This part could deserve a column by itself. Especially if we include under the professionals, not only the contractors, but also the property agents, architects, etc.

Another important matter is to double and triple check every single item on the list of fixes needed. Thinking that anything could be fixed without a plan, is recipe for disaster. Small items are harder to spot than structural changes, and they might turn out to be the most tedious to fix.

Lastly, be patient. Fixing a house is something that — when we do not do it as a business — we are willing to take our own sweet time. But due to the nature of the properties flipping business, everything must be done fast.

When rushing, many things can go wrong. It is crucial to keep your mind focused on the final goal, especially because you will be dealing with people.

The extra hours that a contractor might be willing to work to make sure that everything works smoothly, could mean the difference between a profit and a loss.

The futility of unconditional debt support



ANNE O KRUEGER

The author is Senior Research Professor of International Economics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Development at Stanford University

Although the pandemic has caused upheavals and hardship around the world, it has fallen particularly hard on low- and middle-income countries.

Vaccine availability has been far more limited in LMICs than in rich countries, and the refrigeration facilities needed to store the most effective vaccines are severely limited.

In many LMICs, healthcare workers are scarce, the facilities for treating Covid-19 patients are inadequate, and public-health systems are poorly organised, funded and administered.

Nor are the difficulties limited to health. In many LMICs, poor economic-policy choices have led to inflation, fiscal deficits, balance-of-payments difficulties and heavy debt-servicing obligations.

While some financing has been forthcoming from individual high-income countries, international financial institutions and NGOs, it has not been enough.

Moreover, many LMICs would be in severe economic difficulty even without the pandemic.

In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has defied the consensus of almost all economists (not to mention common sense) by insisting that high interest rates cause inflation.

As a result, interest rates are more than 16 percentage points below the recently reported inflation-rate of 30 per cent, foreign-currency debt is high and rising, and the proportion of Turks in poverty is increasing sharply.

Among the many other countries running into economic trouble are Bolivia, Ghana, Madagascar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Zambia. In these cases, Covid-19 has been putting extra pressure on government finances; but it also seems to have provided an excuse for higher fiscal expenditures on other items.

In normal times, a crisis-afflicted country that cannot borrow from private lenders will approach the IMF.

Government authorities and IMF officials will then consult and develop a plan for the country to address its problems by altering economic policies, restructuring unsustainable debts and borrowing funds to maintain the provision of basic supplies (such as imports of food, medicine, fuel and essential intermediate goods).

Many who advocate financial support for LMICs assume that external financial relief will be directed to the desired expenditure categories — such as healthcare and assistance for the poor, in the case of a pandemic.

But such assistance cannot provide sustained relief unless it is accompanied by reforms to the policies that led to excessive expenditures in the first place.

Sri Lanka is a case in point. The country's economy was performing reasonably well under a reform programme until 2019. But then a new government (actually, the 'new' president is the younger brother of an ousted authoritarian ruler) came to power

and threw caution to the winds, slashing taxes (and thus revenues) while also increasing expenditures.

The country's debt-to-GDP ratio quickly rose to 110 per cent, and interest payments climbed to 70 per cent of total government revenue. A significant portion of the debt is owed to China.

And that was all before the pandemic. When Covid-19 struck, tourism revenues and workers' remittances fell sharply — driving up inflation and the fiscal and current-account deficits even further. Incomes fell, pushing an estimated 500,000 Sri Lankans into poverty as of 2021.

Worse, the country is now experiencing shortages of essential items — including agricultural products, following a poor harvest this year.

The harvest was weak because the government abruptly banned all imports of fertiliser and pesticides during May 2021 in a misguided effort to address the current-account deficit. This policy was not reversed until late

November, by which point farmers were unable to buy sufficient supplies.

Nonetheless, the Sri Lankan government has steadfastly refused to approach the IMF and insists that there will be no debt restructuring. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has asked China to postpone Sri Lanka's scheduled debt service; but it is unclear whether the Chinese have agreed, or on what terms.

Even if the Chinese do provide financial support, Sri Lanka's economy will be unable to resume normal functioning until its leaders have addressed the underlying macroeconomic problems and introduced measures to alleviate the burden of debt service.

In Sri Lanka and other countries confronting similar crises, the situation demands a combination of appropriate economic-policy changes, a debt-restructuring arrangement, and lending sufficient to sustain essential imports.

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features



READ

The book cover for 'Crying in H Mart' by Michelle Zauner is red with white text. It features a stylized illustration of a person's head and shoulders, with long, dark hair. The title 'CRYING IN H MART' is prominently displayed in white, with 'A MEMOIR' in smaller text below it. The author's name 'MICHELLE ZAUNER' is at the bottom.

CRYING IN H MART
BY MICHELLE ZAUNER

The daughter of a Korean mother and Jewish-American father, and leader of the indie rock project Japanese Breakfast, describes creating her own identity after losing her mother to cancer.

By Ruqaya Al Kindi

Every year, over a million sea-birds die, about 100,000 marine mammals and turtles perish while countless fishes are lost to plastic waste. It is estimated that by 2050, 99 per cent of seabirds would have already ingested plastic, according to the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company or “be’ah.”

“The idea behind the anthropomorphic fish came about as an embodiment of the most important marine element that people feed on whether in Oman and abroad and while they are of great

importance to humans, they suffer from environmental pollution caused by accumulated waste in the oceans and seas,” said Anwer al Kanbashi, Social Outreach and Community Engagement Officer at be’ah company.

“This model was made using approximately 1,000 automotive oil cans, 170 pieces of spent plastic tubes, 850kg of scrap metal, and the fishing nets collected from the Omani beaches. All these materials were used with respect and to adhere to the principle of recycling,” shared Abdul Karim al Rawahi, one of the artists who worked on the model.

The anthropomorphic fish, he added, reflects the idea of the suffering of the marine environment. It is,

also, an indirect message that the deaths of marine animals are due to the wrong behaviours of human beings.

He said, “It is considered as a rarity in the artistic field formed entirely from scrap and recycled materials. The most difficult challenge we faced to complete the work is the enormity of the work and the selection of materials with high accuracy, as the dimensions of the work are height: 370cm, width: 700cm and depth: 230cm.”

The artists Youssef and Abdul Karim al Rawahi, as Anwer shared, worked for six consecutive months in cooperation with be’ah company (the main supporter of the project) by drawing the prototype,

agreeing on the materials used, and then assembling it and turning it into a completed masterpiece through the development of the initial model of the fish.

“The initial model of the fish was placed in the Wilayat of Sur with the launch of the first edition of the “Oman Deserve” campaign in 2019. The current version of the model is placed in Muscat in conjunction with the Omani Environment Day, January 8, to deliver the message to the largest number of people, and it will be moved to several different locations in the Sultanate of Oman in the coming months to deliver the message to different groups,” Anwer pointed out.

The “Oman Deserves” campaign aimed to reinforce the importance of stopping the random throwing of waste in tourist places through direct and indirect awareness. In addition to the fish model, a set of grilling equipment was placed that was made by reusing damaged materials in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in Jabal Al Akhdhar.

“The aim of this equipment is to motivate tourists to use it and avoid wrong grilling and throwing barbecue waste in tourist areas, in addition, to help creative Omani youth to devise practical solutions from the surrounding environment that contribute to preserving environment for future generations,” Anwer said.



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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Dior Homme swings romantic with embellished men's looks at Paris Fashion Week



DIOR HOMME TOOK to the catwalk with a lineup of embellished men's looks, offering a romantic take on tailoring for one of the major shows of Paris fashion week.

Fashion industry events have remained subdued due to the recent surge in coronavirus cases, which kept many international visitors from attending, but the Dior show drew crowds of onlookers to the Place de la Concorde angling for a view of the celebrity arrivals, who included Naomi Campbell.

Inside the temporary venue, models strode down a replica of the ornate Pont Alexandre bridge in grey Birkenstocks and sequined derbies, showcasing the designs drawn up by Dior men's artistic director Kim Jones.

"I wanted to look at the archive, at the purity of the beginnings of the house, at its original impulse," said Jones, who dedicated the show to fashion journalist Andre Leon Talley, who died on Tuesday.

Drawing on silhouettes from early collections of the 75-year-old label, which belongs to LVMH, the designer tweaked the house's famously feminine bar jacket offering a version for men.

He brightened the lineup's muted palette of grey, beige and ivory tones with embroidered lily-of-the-valley flower patterns and shimmering patches of sequins, applying them to sweaters and sleek puffer jackets.

Finishing the looks, models wore trim berets that matched their outfits. The house's hat designer, Stephen Jones, accompanied the designer for his post-show bow, when a burst of sunlight was projected onto the backdrop of a grey, Paris skyline. — **Reuters**

CULTURE

Lebanese museum returns artefacts from Syria's ancient city of Palmyra



FIVE ROMAN artefacts from the ancient city of Palmyra, a site damaged during Syria's decade-long conflict, were returned to Damascus on Thursday by a private Lebanese museum where they had been on display since 2018.

The limestone statues and carved funerary stones dating from the Roman second and third centuries AD were returned at the initiative of a private Lebanese collector, Syrian antiquities chief Mohamed Nazir Awad said at a handover ceremony hosted by Lebanon's National Museum in Beirut.

The collector, Jawad Adra, acquired them from European auction houses before Syria's war began in 2011, Awad said, describing his actions as "a generous initiative".

The pieces, which had been on display at the Nabu Museum in northern Lebanon, were returning to "their original homeland", the Syrian official added.



Syria's Ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdul Karim, said talks were under way to arrange the return of other artefacts from the National Museum in Beirut to Syria.

During the Syrian conflict, the site of

Palmyra, one of the most important cultural centres in the ancient world, fell under the control of the Islamic State group, which blew up some of its major monuments, including the Arch of Triumph.

—**Reuters**

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
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Troy: Fall of a City

THE MINI-SERIES SERIES *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018) is much different from the movie *Troy* that came out in 2004.

The movie was loaded with beautiful stars yet never did justice to the original myth. The series though is based on the Greek myths and not on Homer's Iliad, which means that it covers more aspects that could be new to viewers familiar with the general story.

The series starts with Paris (Louis Hunter) who's a shepherd that discovers by chance that he's Prince Alexander, the lost son of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy. As an infant, Prince Alexander was kidnapped by a wolf and saved by Agelaus the shepherd who raised him as his own and named him Paris.

This is the story known at the court - told by his parents - but it's a far cry from the truth. Prince Alexander accompanies the envoy heading to Sparta to learn the art of diplomacy and politics. However, he manages to seduce King Menelaus's wife Helen and she elopes with him to Troy. When Menelaus finds out about her flight, he seeks the help of his brother King Agamemnon of Mycenae, who raises an army that has the best warriors of ancient Greece including Odysseus of Ithaca and Achilles and his Myrmidons. They set sail to Troy and lay a ten years siege that ends with the Trojan horse ruse that marks the fall of the great city.

But where does the Greek mythology come in? To start with, Paris's story is told as a whole: why was he abandoned as an infant, how his encounter with the Greek goddesses — Hera, Athena and Aphrodite — ultimately lead to meeting Helen. Also, the sacrifice of Iphigenia — Agamemnon's daughter — before setting sails to Troy and the involvement of the Amazon warriors in the war, both stories not known to many. In almost all eight episodes, the three Goddesses along with Zeus walk among humans and are witnessed by a few — even Artemis and Hermes were in a few scenes — which was innovative.

The choice of male actors playing different roles was more successful than that of the female cast. Louis Hunter who plays Paris did a good job impersonating the tormented Paris; torn between his love for Helen and the doom he's bringing his family as a consequence. The choice of a black Achilles (David Gyasi) and a black Zeus (Hakeem Kae-Kazim) was fascinating. Both actors excelled in their roles, especially Gyasi who plays a contemplating Achilles troubled by the futility of this war and the glory it lacks. As well as the choice for the three kings — especially Odysseus — who's cunning yet humane. As for the female cast, Helen (Bella Dane) was a bit cold for the role, although she embodies a true feminist living in the ancient world: rejecting female oppression practised in ancient Greece and enjoying gender equality practised in her new city.

The actress playing Andromache — Hector's wife — wasn't any better, having a long face the whole series and rarely smiling, which takes an effort, to be honest.

Unlike Aimee-Ffion Edwards who plays Casandra, the only female cast perfecting the role of the disturbed seer. Generally speaking, the series is interesting and entertaining, despite having no Greek elements whatsoever (even the location: Cape Town!). However, it has a few flaws such as the baker's boy who never ages during the ten years of war and when Odysseus asks Achilles if he misses the Adrenaline of fights. Nevertheless, the production is grand and convincing in all aspects: cinematography, costumes, make-up and set decoration. Available on Netflix. For history and Greek mythology fans.

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



Meet the Woman Who Helped Set a Speed Record on a Classic Alpine Ski Route

VALENTINE FABRE HAS no reason to doubt her abilities in the mountains. The 45-year-old Frenchwoman helped her country earn two world championships in ski mountaineering, a high-adrenaline endurance sport that involves sprinting up and racing down mountains on skis. She is also a military-trained doctor with a focus on high-mountain medicine, and a resident of the French Alps for 20 years.

But when Fabre first started to consider her most recent challenge, she really wasn't sure she could do it. Her goal was to set a women's speed record on one of the most storied multiday ski routes in the Alps: the Haute Route, which winds up and down more than 26,000 feet of mountainous landscape and across more than 65 miles of glaciers and remote alpine passes to connect Chamonix, where Fabre lives, to Zermatt in neighbouring Switzerland.

It is a route that has a special meaning for Fabre, beyond its near-mythic status among mountaineers. In 2010, her husband, Laurent Fabre, was part of the team that set a new men's speed record on the Haute Route, completing the itinerary — which takes most experienced skiers six or seven days to do — in just 20 hours, 28 minutes. Two years later,



Laurent Fabre, who worked as a high mountain guide, died in a climbing accident outside of Chamonix. Valentine Fabre was on call at the hospital when she got the news.

In April, almost nine years after her husband's death, Fabre — alongside her American teammate Hillary

Gerardi — established a women's speed record on the Haute Route with a time of 26 hours, 21 minutes. Fabre credits Gerardi's enthusiasm for giving her the push she needed to take on the challenge, which was documented in a 34-minute film released in September.

I reached Fabre at her

home in Chamonix a few days before Christmas. She described what it felt like to set the record, why she hopes someone will break it soon, and how — even though she grew up near Paris — she always knew she would make her home in the mountains.

Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

It's a ski route that connects the two capitals of French and Swiss mountaineering, Chamonix and Zermatt, going through the high mountains and over glaciers. The itinerary we took was 107 kilometres long (about 66 miles), with 8,100 metres (26,500 feet) of positive elevation gain. There are several variations, but we took the pretty classic high route. Back in the 19th century, I think it was a big challenge — people wanted to connect these two cities, which they first did by foot, groping their way through the valleys, looking for the best way. The route was done on skis for the first time in 1903, and I'm lucky enough to have had access to the photo album that documents that first expedition. They managed to bring along a camera that weighed nearly 42 pounds, and they took some incredible photos. I think it took them about two or three weeks.

— *The New York Times*

He Lost Fingers in an Accident. Now It's Inspiring His Art



IT WAS A HOT DAY on Oscawana Lake. John Powers hosed down the dog, then started on some woodworking chores outside his lakeside cottage home in the Hudson Valley.

When Powers is stationed at a table saw, he's usually making artwork. For his practice, he crafts small blocks that he assembles into otherworldly geometric sculptures. The futuristic objects he shows at galleries can comprise hundreds or thousands of pieces, like digital drawings rendered in real life. But on May 19, Powers was cutting decorative caps for the fence: a handyman task to please his wife, maybe

order to produce seemingly factory-made objects that remain inimitably his own. But every single component is the product of precision and control.

In the weeks after the accident, Powers endured surgeries, including one to restore the severed thumb, then another to remove it again, after the digit mummified and died.

In the months since the accident, the artist gradually returned to his practice. The first piece that he built was a most-miniature coffin for his recovered thumb, which he buried in his yard in a ceremony attended by friends. "Under My Thumb" played. A gallows



impress the neighbour.

He was four or so cuts in. Then something went wrong. The block kicked back and struck him in the face. The motion dragged his left hand through the saw's thirsty blade. One bad cut at a tool he'd relied on for 30 years.

In a flash Powers lost his ring finger and thumb. His index and middle fingers were nearly destroyed. A grueling delay awaited, as the first ambulance to carry him from the scene stalled out on a hill near his Putnam County home.

When he finally arrived at the operating room, he pleaded to hospital attendants. "I'm an artist. This is part of me, this is integral. Like, hey man, I'm not a flake, I work in a way that's closer to what you do."

For Powers — who trained in creating realistic bronze statues before he turned to abstract forms — the injury threatened his career. The injury also revealed a paradox. Over decades, he has refined a process to hide his considerable craft, the artist's touch, so to speak, in

humour has guided Powers' recovery. A tiny grave marks the spot.

His next project is more elusive. Through physical therapy, he is remapping the territory between his mind and his hand. He has grappled with ghostly sensations, similar to phantom limb pain, mysteries in texture and perception. He has fought to keep doubt at bay.

This project also involves enlisting other sculptors to design custom prosthetics. These will take the form of wearable attachments that will fit over his "th" and "fi" — how he describes the residual lower digits remaining on his hand. These may be purely aesthetic, even ornamental or bizarre. For people living with disability, the possibilities unlocked by digital fabrication are wide open. For Powers, it's a problem to solve through art.

This project, the artist says — referring broadly to recovery and reorienting, in his practice and his body — is the most important work he has done yet.

— *The New York Times*