

The Sultanate of Oman's financial performance during the first quarter of this year, as characterised by a budget surplus of over RO 300 million for the quarter, affirms that a national economic recovery is well under way, according to a number of experts. Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, credited the brightening outlook to concerted government efforts, supported by buoyant international oil prices. **DETAILS ON P13**



P12

CHARLES LECLERC COMPLETES PRACTICE CLEAN SWEEP IN SPAIN



P13

OVER 1,000 INDUSTRIAL UNITS TO BE COVERED IN ANNUAL SURVEY



P20

MAKING A BUSINESS OUT OF PAINTING ANIMES ON EVERYDAY OBJECTS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO YEMEN LEADER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Rashad al Alimi, President of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him good health and long life and praying to Allah the Almighty to realise the aspirations and hopes of the friendly Yemeni people. — ONA

SYDNEY

ALBANESE CLAIMS AUSTRALIA POLL WIN

Australia's opposition leader Anthony Albanese claimed victory on Saturday in national elections. "The Australian people have voted for change. I am humbled by this victory," he told cheering supporters in Sydney after Prime Minister Scott Morrison conceded defeat. **DETAILS ON P6**



Iran President arrives on Monday

TO ENHANCE BILATERAL RELATIONS IN VARIOUS SPHERES

MUSCAT: Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, will pay a visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Monday.

This was stated in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court on Saturday reading as follows: "In reiteration of the good neighbourliness and advanced relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi will pay a visit to Oman this Monday (May 23).

"The visit reflects the Royal keenness attached by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to enhance bilateral relations in various spheres to serve their interests and aspirations. The visit will explore areas of cooperation between the two neighbouring countries.

"May the Almighty Allah grant the two wise leaderships success to serve their countries and the Islamic nation!" — ONA



Bound by historically deep-rooted ties

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran are bound by historically deep-rooted relations that were enhanced over the past 50 years by joint cooperation, mutual interests and good neighbourliness.

The forthcoming meeting of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik with President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of

Iran on Monday comes at a time the world is witnessing different regional and international events of concern to the region, both politically and economically. These issues require the exchange of views between the two countries in a manner that contributes to serving their interests, as well as the interests of the region.

Oman and Iran strive to achieve maximum benefit from economic cooperation and investment

opportunities, particularly in economic diversification sectors. Last year, commercial exchange between the two countries stood at \$1.336 billion.

The number of Iranian companies investing in Oman stood at 2,710, of which 1,163 invested at an ownership rate of 100 per cent and 1,547 operate as part of Omani-Iranian partnership. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

Efforts on to ensure wheat stocks

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkutttyp](#)

Allaying concerns about the availability of wheat in the market, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is taking all possible steps to ensure sufficient stocks.

This affirmation came from Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, during his meeting on Friday with merchants and entrepreneurs in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

"There are sufficient stocks of wheat, and the ministry has taken all necessary steps to ensure that it is available during the coming period," he said.

The minister said that the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik pays great attention to ameliorate the concerns arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic and the break in the supply chain.

TURN TO P3





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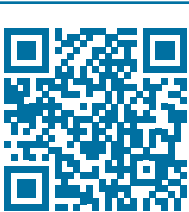
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FIRST VISIT BY AN
IRANIAN PRESIDENT
AFTER HIS MAJESTY
SULTAN HAITHAM BIN
TARIK ASCENDED TO
THE THRONE ON
JANUARY 11, 2020

OMAN-IRAN TIES BUILT
ON MUTUAL RESPECT,
COOPERATION AND
NON-INTERFERENCE

GOOD RELATIONS
BETWEEN MUSCAT
AND TEHRAN HAVE
CONTRIBUTED TO
RESOLVING A NUMBER
OF CONTEMPORARY
REGIONAL ISSUES

RAISI'S VISIT TO EXPAND OMAN-IRAN RELATIONS

SAMUEL
KUTTY
@samkuttvyp

THE RELATIONS between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which extend back to the ancient civilisations, are built on mutual respect, cooperation and non-interference. Monday's visit of President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to Oman is set to further cement the economic, political and diplomatic relations between the two countries. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will have talks with the President, and the two leaders are expected to discuss various international and regional issues of interest to the region at the political and economic levels.

The Iranian President will also have a meeting with Iranians residing in Oman and Omani businesses during his visit.

This is the first time an Iranian president is visiting Oman after His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik ascended to the throne on January 11, 2020. Oman's policy of maintaining relations with states, and not political systems, is evident in its relations with Iran. Oman realises the vital role Iran plays in the region and its effect on regional politics and stability.

The relations come within the context of Oman's independent approach to foreign policy matters, led by late Sultan Qaboos, who since coming to power in 1970 has managed to strike a balance between the interests of Oman's regional neighbours.

The good relations between Muscat and Tehran have contributed to

resolving a number of contemporary regional issues, as the two countries hold discussions on a regular basis.

On multiple occasions, the Omani government has endeavoured to reconcile relations between other GCC states and Iran.

Last Wednesday, His Majesty issued a Royal decree on his country's cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The decree calls for "the ratification of an agreement of cooperation between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on maritime transport, signed in Tehran on 8 December 2019."

Hossein Noushabadi, member of the Iranian Parliament's International Diplomacy and National Interests faction, said that the Iranian president's visit to Oman can play an important role in developing relations and expanding ties between Iran in the southern part of the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

STRATEGIC RELATIONS

"Thanks to the strategic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman and the joint management of the two countries in the Strait of Hormuz as the most important shipping, transportation and energy highway, strengthening and managing this issue can be very important during this visit," the senior parliamentarian said in an interview.

Last week, a delegation of 50 Iranian businessmen and those active in the economic sector paid a visit to Oman to help set the stage for the promotion of economic relations and trade between the two neighbours.

Referring to the visit, which is the first to be paid by an Iranian president in two years, Iran's Ambassador to Oman Ali Najafi said that the Islamic Republic of Iran supports Oman's constructive role in regional developments.

"Iranian government has a definite strategic approach for developing ties with neighbours, so Oman as Iran's neighbour in the southeast of the country can have an important position in the

policy on [relations with] neighbours," he said in an interview to Irna.

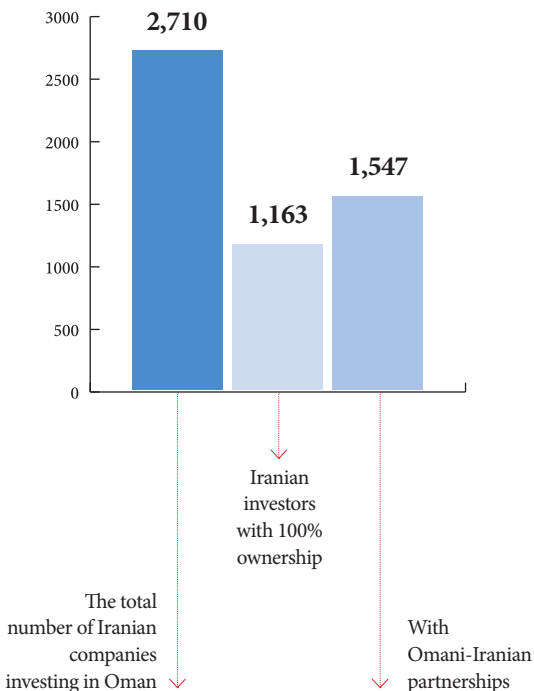
The head of the Trade Promotion Organisation of Iran, Alireza Peymanpak, who headed the trade delegation to Oman, said in his comments on his Twitter page said that Omani officials are determined to expand trade relations with Tehran at all levels.

"We placed emphasis on developing transportation infrastructure to facilitate bilateral trade between the two countries. It was also decided to set up a joint working group on maritime transportation to conduct research studies to find technical solutions (to tackle the challenges in this regard)," Peymanpak was quoted as saying by the International Affairs Department of Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

The total number of Iranian companies investing in Oman is 2,710, including 1,163 Iranian investors with 100 per cent ownership and 1,547 with Omani-Iranian partnerships. The trade exchange last year amounted to \$1.336 billion.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has international borders with 13 countries. Iran shares a total of 5,894 km of land borders with its neighbours, including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan. It also has a total of 2,440 km of coastline, sharing maritime borders with 6 other countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Iranian companies investing in Oman



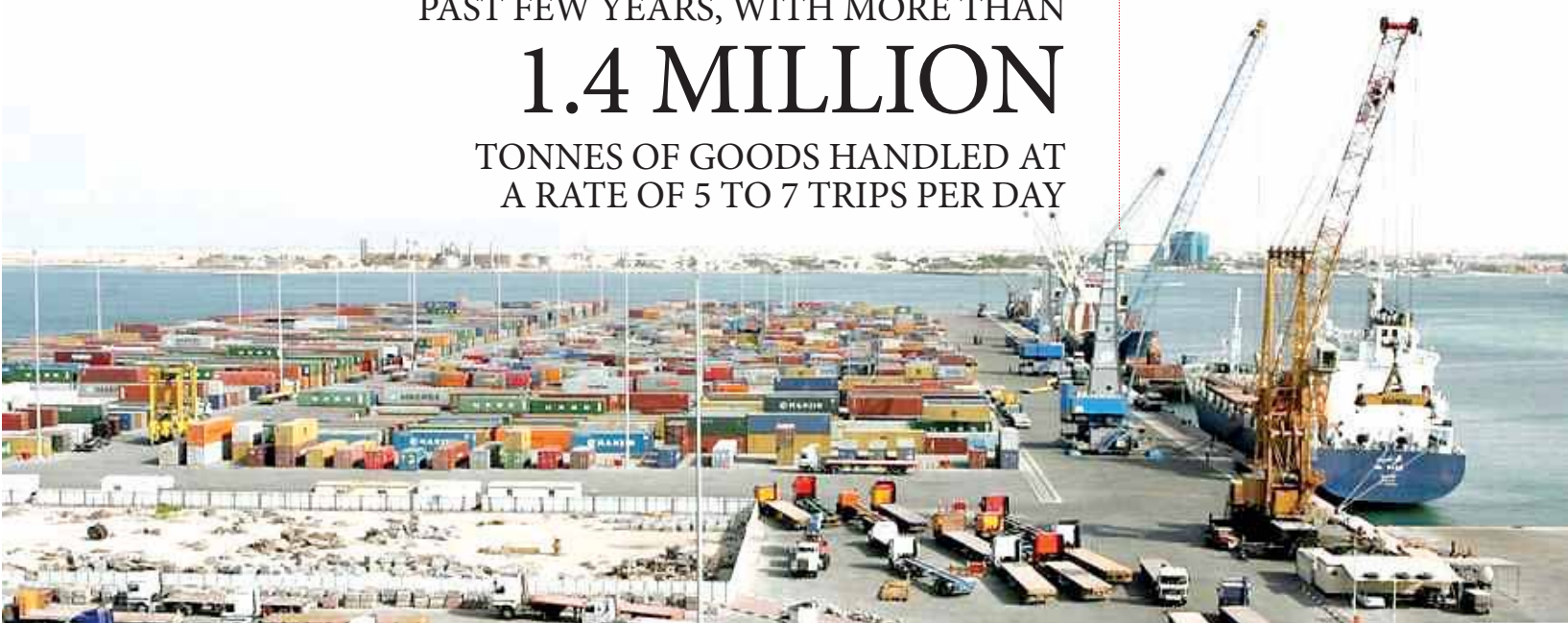
THE TRADE EXCHANGE
LAST YEAR AMOUNTED TO

\$1.336
BILLION

IMPORT AND EXPORT BETWEEN
OMANI AND IRANIAN PORTS OVER THE
PAST FEW YEARS, WITH MORE THAN

1.4 MILLION

TONNES OF GOODS HANDLED AT
A RATE OF 5 TO 7 TRIPS PER DAY





Syrian civilisations, Indian artefacts on show

MUSCAT: The National Museum on Saturday inaugurated the exhibition “Syria: the Cradle of Civilisations” in cooperation with the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus.

The National Museum also inaugurated the “Loaned Artefacts from the Republic of India” in cooperation with the Indian Embassy in Muscat, under the auspices of HH Sayyida Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) for International Cooperation and Deputy of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum.

Present at the inauguration ceremony were Dr Lubana Mushawah, Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman, officials and people interested in cultural and museum affairs.

After the inauguration, an official session of talks was held between the National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman and the Ministry of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, during which aspects of bilateral cooperation between the two friendly countries were discussed. Emphasis was also laid on the efforts of the two sides to develop the cultural and museum fields and strengthen bilateral relations between the two sides in a manner that contributes to achieving museum leadership.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said: “Preserving the Syrian heritage under the current exceptional circumstances constitutes an urgent necessity that should not be postponed due to the important role that the cultural factor plays in social reconstruction and sensing the identity. This ancient heritage is a civilisational heritage that belongs to all of humanity, transcending



the borders of Syria because of its exceptional historical, artistic, aesthetic and significance dimensions.”

The exhibition “Syria: Cradle of Civilisations” presents the first results of the humanitarian initiative adopted and sponsored by the National Museum in Oman in relation to the conservation and preservation of the Syrian cultural heritage that was damaged during the years of the crisis. The aforementioned initiative is the result of bilateral cooperation between the National Museum in Oman and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus, which dates back to 2018.

The exhibition illustrates a number of selected museum artefacts, including Roman and Byzantine copper coins and other coins dating back to the Umayyad, Abbasid, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman caliphates, stone statues, jars, pottery, arrowheads, and stone and bronze artefacts, all dating back to different eras and periods of time, namely; The Old and New Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Roman and Byzantine Empires, the Umayyad Caliphate Era, the Abbasid Caliphate Era, the Ayyubid State Era, the Mamluk Era, and the Ottoman Caliphate Era.

ARTEFACTS FROM INDIA
The National Museum in Oman

and the World Gallery presents artefacts loaned from the Republic of India, a book entitled “Tarikh-i-Kesari” that presents information on the history of Oman and Zanzibar, loaned from the National Museum in New Delhi, and an artwork of Al Mirani Fort in Muscat, loaned from the National Museum of Modern Art in New Delhi. The collection will be on display to all visitors until 30 June 2022. Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman, said: “The common historical ties between the peoples of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India extend over thousands of years. The artefacts loaned from India

reflect this common past and the continuous cooperation between the two countries.

“This inauguration is the first step after the pandemic. We look forward to more similar cooperation opportunities in the future, as there is a lot that can be shared between the two countries, not only historically but also culturally. We aspire to cooperate with the National Museum in establishing more exhibitions of many arts from India.”

The book “Tarikh-i-Kesari” by Muhammad Akbar Ali Khan, is a rare visual and written document on the era of the Princely states in India, with miniatures of their founders or current rulers, in

addition to the rulers whose states had close relations with the British Raj. The book was issued on 1 January, 1877 in Urdu and Hindi languages, with the support of “Anjamen Islamic Delhi” or the General Islamic Gathering, on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s assumption of the title “Empress of India”, which was announced in “Durbar Delhi” or the Court Gathering in Delhi.

The publication deals with the biographies of the rulers, Kings and Princes, including Sultan Thuwaini bin Said al Busaidy (ruled: 56-1866 CE), and Sultan Barghash bin Said al Busaidy (ruled: 70-1888 CE), including two unique miniature paintings of the two sultans, enumerating their exploits and their titles. It also reviews a detailed summary of Muscat and Zanzibar and their geographical location, sources of income for the two countries, and data about their armies.

The book says that the British government gave 21 gun-salute as a mark of respect and gesture of welcome to the Sultan of Muscat, Oman and the Sultan of Zanzibar, as they are independent rulers of two fully sovereign states. According to what came in this book, which confirms the long-standing history of the Omani political entity in its two parts Sultan Thuwaini bin Said al Busaidy is the only ruler in the Arabian Peninsula who has enjoyed these ceremonies without anyone else, according to what is stated in this book, which confirms the long-standing history of the Omani political entity in its two parts.

As for the oil painting, it embodies a view of Al Mirani Fort in Muscat by the British artist Thomas Daniel, which dates back to the period of the Al Busaid dynasty (1229 AH/1814 CE). The painting is on loan from the National Museum of Modern Art in New Delhi (Republic of India).

— ONA

■ FROM P1

Efforts on to ensure wheat stocks

“All possible measures are being taken to solve the damage caused to the economy in general and dealers and suppliers in particular,” he said during his meeting.

After a break in supply from Russia following its war with Ukraine, the Sultanate of Oman had signed agreements with three countries, including India and Australia, to import 160,000 tonnes of wheat.

But India, the world’s second-biggest wheat producer, last week banned wheat exports as a scorching heatwave in major wheat-growing states curtailed output, and domestic prices hit a record high.

Still, reports quoting Indian government officials indicate that the country may allow exports backed by already issued letters of credit and to countries that request supplies “to meet their food security needs.”

“About a dozen countries have reached out to the Ministry of External Affairs, seeking clarification on whether their requests for Indian wheat would be fulfilled,” the official was quoted as saying, adding, “the government kept open the option to export wheat as a tool of economic diplomacy.”

Omanis in Muttrah Souq



Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef said that the ministry favoured Omani nationals running the bustling Muttrah Souq

as is being done elsewhere in the traditional markets in the Sultanate of Oman. “The ministry believes that the shops in the historic Muttrah market should be run by citizens, just like in the rest of the traditional markets like the Nizwa Market in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate,” he said.

Since ancient times, the traditional marketplaces in the Sultanate of Oman have been much more than a place to do trade. In addition to being places for social gatherings, the souqs are the top tourist spots as well.

The total area of land planted with wheat in the 2020-2021 season in the Sultanate of Oman, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources, stood at 2,449 acres and produced 2,649 tonnes of wheat crop.

The meeting was attended

by Mohsen bin Khamis al Balushi, Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Busaidi, Deputy Wali of Muttrah, and members of the Majlis Ashshura and members of the Municipal Council.

Imports of tea touch RO 2.5 million

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The value of total imports of tea to the Sultanate of Oman until February 2022 amounted to RO 2.5 million, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Imports from the United Arab Emirates topped the list with RO 1.4 million, followed by the Republic of Kenya with RO 535,400 and then the Federal Republic of Tanzania with RO 328,600.

This coincides with the International Tea Day, which falls on May 21 each year.

The tea industry is a major source of income and export earnings for some countries. It provides employment opportunities as a labour-intensive sector in particularly remote and economically disadvantaged areas. Tea plays an important role in rural development, poverty reduction and food security in developing countries, as it is one of the most important cash crops. Tea has health benefits due to its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and weight loss benefits. It also has cultural significance in many societies.

In a report posted on its website, the United Nations said that it is expected that the global



consumption and production of tea will continue to rise during the next decade as a result of strong demand for it in developing and emerging countries. This will create new opportunities for rural income and improve food security in tea-producing countries.

Tea consumption has increased rapidly, particularly in China, India and other emerging economies, driven by rising incomes and increased efforts to diversify production to include speciality types such as herbal teas and tea blended with fruit flavours and other distinctive flavours.

The report notes that the increase in tea consumption is also due to increased awareness of its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and weight loss benefits. These

health benefits are the main driver of future consumption growth.

According to the report, global production of black tea is expected to rise annually by 2.2 per cent over the next decade to reach 4.4 million tonnes in 2027, reflecting significant increases in production in China, Kenya and Sri Lanka. In this way, China will reach production levels in Kenya, the world’s largest exporter of black tea.

Global production of green tea is also expected to rise faster by 7.5 per cent to 3.6 million tonnes in 2027, mainly driven by production levels in China, which is expected to double and rise from 1.5 million tonnes per year in 2015-2017 to 3.3 million tonnes in 2027.



PROTECTING THE BLUE WEALTH

**KAUSHALENDRA
SINGH**

[@patkaushal](#)

It is necessary to have a sustainable blue economy to guarantee a green future, and probably this is the right time to ‘talk for the blue’ to protect the ocean, which is facing multi-cornered threats due to human intervention.

Oceans, according to the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), are damaged every day by oil and gas drilling, pollution and industrial impacts. “Human activities are changing the ocean’s chemistry, destroying habitats and killing marine life,” says the international environmental advocacy group, calling for a healthy marine life, and intervention of the stakeholders to make the oceans safe from plastic pollution, and ocean acidification.

June 27 is not too far when marine experts would gather in Lisbon and make a repetitive clarion call to correct the human behaviour to protect the oceans. The five-day extensive conference will raise yet

another reminder aimed at saving the ocean and protect the future.

A recently concluded event in the Sultanate of Oman called for the safety of sharks. The national and international experts came out with valuable recommendations to protect the sea species, which means that the global concern is not only for shark, but also for all kinds of activities that harm the oceans and habitat of marine species in general. The event hosts were Oman’s Environment Authority and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (FAW).

Reiterating the country’s position on the issue, Suleiman bin Nasser al Akhzm, Director-General of Nature Conservation, said: “The Sultanate of Oman has adopted many policies, plans and

Oceans, according to the Natural Resources Defence Council, are damaged every day by oil and gas drilling, pollution and industrial impacts. Human activities are changing the ocean’s chemistry, destroying habitats and killing marine life

programmes to develop this sector and achieve sustainable development, in addition to implementing oversight operations that focus on implementing laws and legislation issued in this regard including monitoring fishing fleets, border crossings and companies.”

Such events are reminders for the human being, the best beneficiaries of nature’s resources, to stimulate sustainable habits based on innovative solutions of science, more environmentally friendly technologies, and the sustainable use of marine resources, protecting biodiversity and reducing pollution.

Oman’s history and culture are marked by a deep relationship with the sea, which has also determined its people’s open, available

and innovative character. The oceans have also been a reason for establishing commercial and economic initiatives and defining strategic relationships with other nations.

Oman’s coastline is extensive. With over 1,700 km, the country’s coastline is punctuated by various natural conditions and an exceptional climate, which always provides unique and unforgettable experiences. Because of these assets, the country can emerge as one of the global destinations for ocean-related issues.

Not to forget that the ocean plays a critical role in protecting the health of our planet, providing oxygen and food, functioning as the main climate regulator, absorbing excess carbon emissions and mitigating the impact of climate change. The resilience of marine ecosystems must be preserved, so ocean-based climate action, supported by political will and investment in technology, will allow the oceans to remain the main instrument in the fight against climate change.



NCNPS reviews tasks, achievements

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (NCNPS), which held its first meeting of the year, reviewed its course of action, terms of reference, and the available preventative and therapeutic programmes in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health and Chairman of the Committee, presided over the meeting.

The meeting introduced the NCNPS and reviewed its tasks and most prominent achievements. Furthermore, current situation of drug issue and the available services were addressed and assessed.

Various topics on the committee's affairs and specialisations were cited during the meeting.

It may be noted that the NCNPS was constituted by a Ministerial Decision No 78/2022 on March 27. The committee, chaired by the Minister of Health, has as its members: Assistant Inspector

The committee is entrusted with several tasks, including proposing the general national policy in the field of narcotics and psychotropic substances control to be adopted later by the Council of Ministers.

General of Police and Customs, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation's Under-Secretary for Occupational Training, MoH's Under-Secretary for Health Affairs, Ministry of Education's Under-Secretary for Education, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, in addition to the Under-Secretary of Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's Under-Secretary for Sports and Youth, as well the Under-Secretary of Ministry of Information, and the Brigadier General Director of Moral Guidance of Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces at the

Ministry of Defence.

The committee is entrusted with several tasks, including proposing the general national policy in the field of narcotics and psychotropic substances control to be adopted later by the Council of Ministers.

ILLEGAL USE OF DRUGS

Moreover, the committee entails the development of the prevention and treatment plans in the fight against the illegal use of narcotics and psychotropic substances and following up on their implementation. It further proposes draft laws, regulations and decisions related to drugs and psychotropic substances and coordinating cooperation between various governmental and non-governmental agencies in narcotics and psychotropic substances.

Moreover, the committee is conducting and supporting scientific and field studies and research in the field of narcotics and psychotropic substances, and exchanging regional and international experiences in the field.

UN body pats efforts to promote beekeeping

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The pro-active government strategies to encourage and promote beekeeping in the Sultanate of Oman came in for acclamation by a UN body.

On the occasion of the celebration of World Bee Day on May 20, the office of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations said that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has made innovative partnerships with the private sector in the field of beekeeping.

"This has led to the development of a system, implement programmes and initiatives to raise beekeeping standards as well as improve its quality and other value-added products," the UN body said. The International Day designated by the United Nations came to raise awareness of the importance of bees and pollinators and highlight their contribution to sustainable development and the threats they face.

The day was celebrated under the slogan "We are committed to protecting bees: Celebrating the diversity of bees and their breeding systems".

The ministry said that it pays special attention to the development of beekeeping through the implementation of many research, extension and development programmes and projects in all the wilayats.

"The ultimate goal of establishing this day is to strengthen measures to protect bees and other pollinators, which will greatly contribute to solving problems related to the global food supply and eradicating hunger in developing countries,"



On the occasion of the celebration of World Bee Day on May 20, the office of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations said that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has made innovative partnerships with the private sector in the field of beekeeping

the ministry said in a statement.

Besides being wild pollinators, bees play a key role in maintaining biodiversity, promoting sustainability and adapting to climate change.

About 75 per cent of the crops that produce fruit and seeds for human consumption in the world partially depend on pollinators for sustainable production.

The UN office pointed out

that beekeeping contributes to achieving many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and everyone has a role to play in rebuilding better for bees, rethinking how we relate to nature, and to enhance pollinators to encourage biodiversity and support food systems.

The profession of beekeeping is an important part of rural life around the world rather than just a hobby. On a small scale, they contribute significantly to strengthening rural communities and securing livelihoods.

Oman enjoys a long and storied tradition of beekeeping which dates back to the 17th century. Honey has traditionally been used by Omani families as a home remedy due to its nutritional value and potential health properties.

The country's agro-climatic conditions make it very suitable for beekeeping. As a result, the practice has been passed down for generations and continues to play an important role in maintaining Oman's biodiversity and ecosystems.

Oman takes part in 26th ALECSO session



TUNIS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Omani National Commission for Education, Science and Culture (ONCESC), took part in 26th session of the general conference of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), which was held at the ALECSO's headquarters in the Tunisian capital.

Oman's delegation was headed by Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Education Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Education and Vice-Chairman of ONCESC.

The session debated several topics including the organisation's programmes and activities, the draft Arab plan for education during emergencies and crises, the educational, scientific and cultural conditions in Jerusalem and occupied Palestine, and the appointment of directors in the organisation's departments. — ONA



MoH, WHO review flu surveillance system

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Directorate-General of Diseases Surveillance and Control (DGDSC), in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), has organised a training workshop on the Regional Influenza Surveillance System.

The workshop reviewed the existing sentinel surveillance system and discussed the need to have regular channels of

communication between the Ministry of Health, WHO Office and Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO).

The workshop also touched on the opportunities and challenges in adopting an integrated approach by Oman to be aligned with the global and regional roadmap for the integration of SARS-CoV2 and other respiratory viruses of epidemic and pandemic potential within the influenza sentinel surveillance system.

3 ISG students excel in poetry competition

MUSCAT: Three students from Indian School Al Ghubra have excelled in the International category of the 'Grow Your Buds Poetry Rendition Contest 2021' conducted by Motivational Strips, the world's most active forum under the aegis of a reputed educational group of India, Soundarya Educational Trust.

Seethalekshmi Kishore, Gouri Reghu and

Anika Govil, students of classes 9 and 8, achieved this feat by writing their own poetry and presenting them at the forum. They were declared winners from among more than 130 entries across the globe. On the occasion of Children's Day, Motivational Strips founder and noted author Shiju H Pallithazheth conducted this unique contest.





MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (13/2022)

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30/2022/MM/PA-7	Insurance of Muscat Municipality Properties	25/- OMR	12/06/2022	27/06/2022	30/06/2022

- Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.
- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.
- Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.**
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Website: www.mm.gov.om



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky delivers a speech during a press conference with Portugal's Prime Minister Antonio Costa (unseen) in Kyiv. — AFP

‘Diplomacy’ can end Ukraine war: Zelensky

KYIV: The Ukraine war can only be resolved through “diplomacy”, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday amid a deadlock in negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow.

“The end will be through diplomacy,” he told a Ukrainian television channel. The war “will be bloody, there will be fighting but will only definitively end through diplomacy”.

“Discussions between Ukraine and Russia will decidedly take place. Under what format I don’t know -- with intermediaries, without them, in a broader group, at presidential level,” he said.

“There are things that can only be reached at the negotiating table,” he said. “We want everything to return (to as it was before)” but “Russia does not want that”, he said, without elaborating.

The results of negotiations, which could have a variety of subjects “according to the timing

of the meeting”, would have to be “fair” for Ukraine, Zelensky stressed.

The president spoke of a document about security guarantees for his nation, saying it would be signed by “friends and partners of Ukraine, without Moscow”. A bilateral discussion would be held with Russia at the same time, he added.

He also recalled Kyiv’s absolute precondition for continuing talks that Russia does not kill Ukrainian troops who defended the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol.

Zelensky noted Russian troops “offered the possibility, found a way for these people to come out alive”, from Azovstal.

“The most important thing for me is to save the maximum number of people and soldiers.”

According to Moscow, 2,439 Ukrainians have surrendered at the plant since May 16, the final 500 on Friday. — AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPPN LEADER CLAIMS ELECTION VICTORY

SYDNEY: Australia’s opposition leader Anthony Albanese claimed victory on Saturday in national elections. “The Australian people have voted for change. I am humbled by this victory,” he told cheering supporters in Sydney after Prime Minister Scott Morrison conceded defeat.

Albanese vowed to make Australia a renewable energy “superpower”, give indigenous people a voice in national policy-making, and make equal opportunity for women a national priority.

Albanese recalled his childhood, brought up by a single mother in Sydney public housing.

“My mother dreamt of a better life for me. And I hope that my journey in life inspires Australians to reach for the stars,” the 59-year-old said. “I want Australia to continue to be a country that no matter where you live, who you worship, you would love, or what your last name is, that places no restrictions on your journey in life.”

Australian Prime Minister Morrison conceded defeat in national elections, saying it was a “difficult night” for his conservative government.

“Tonight I have spoken to the leader of the opposition and the incoming prime minister, Anthony Albanese, and I have congratulated him on his election victory,” Morrison said.

Labor will at least be able to form a minority government, but may also get enough votes for a



Australian Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese, accompanied by his partner Jodie Haydon, addresses Labour supporters after winning the 2022 general election in Sydney. — AFP

I want Australia to continue to be a country that no matter where you live, who you worship, you would love, or what your last name is, that places no restrictions on your journey in life

ANTHONY ALBANESE

Australia’s opposition leader

majority government, according to broadcaster ABC.

According to the preliminary figures, the party can count on at least 71 seats in the Senate, where

76 seats are necessary to reach the majority. The conservative coalition Morrison has only won 49 seats, according to the data.

More than 17 million people were called upon to vote on who will fill 151 seats in the lower house and half of the 78 seats in the Senate.

More than half of eligible voters cast ballots in advance, leaving about 8 million people to vote on Saturday, national broadcaster ABC reported citing the Australian Electoral Commission.

Voting is compulsory in Australia. The 2019 turnout was around 92 per cent. Elections take place every three years.

In the last election in 2019, the Liberals, who are in a coalition with the even more conservative Nationals and have been in power for almost a decade, had a surprise win after Labor was long expected

Australia vote

General Election
May 21, 2022

Anthony Albanese

“Albo”

Age: 59

Leader of the opposition
Labor Party (since 2019)

- Has run a “small target” campaign by keeping a focus on the government’s actions during Covid-19 and the “Black Summer” bushfires
- Has vowed to support a rise in minimum wages to keep up with the cost of living
- First elected to parliament in 1996, became a minister after Kevin Rudd’s 2007 election victory
- Raised by a single mother on a public housing estate in Sydney, first person in his family to go to university

AFP

to come out top.

The key topics in the election campaign were the economy, climate change and national security.

Many Australians see the climate crisis as a huge problem, especially after recent extreme flooding on the east coast.

The country has also suffered from other extreme weather events and climate-related disasters including severe bush fires, drought and coral bleaching in recent years. — AFP/dpa

Biden and S Korea’s Yoon signal expanded military drills

SEOUL: US President Joe Biden and South Korea’s new President Yoon Suk-yeol signalled on Saturday an expanded military presence in response to the “threat” from North Korea, while also offering to help the isolated regime face a Covid-19 outbreak.

After meeting in Seoul on Biden’s first trip to Asia as president, the two leaders said in a statement that “considering the evolving threat posed by” North Korea, they “agree to initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean peninsula”.

The possible beefing up of joint exercises comes in response to North Korea’s growing belligerence, with a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests this year as fears grow that Kim

Biden and Yoon extended an offer of help to Pyongyang, which has recently announced it is in the midst of a Covid-19 outbreak

Jong Un will order a nuclear test while Biden is in Asia.

Biden and Yoon also extended an offer of help to Pyongyang, which has recently announced it is in the midst of a Covid-19 outbreak, a rare admission of internal troubles.

The US-South Korea statement said the two presidents “express concern over the recent Covid-19



South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and US President Joe Biden arrive for a state dinner at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. — AFP

outbreak” and “are willing to work with the international community to provide assistance” to North Korea to help fight the virus.

On Saturday, North Korean state media reported nearly 2.5 million people had been sick with “fever” with 66 deaths as

the country “intensified” its anti-epidemic campaign.

Biden, while adding that he would not exclude a meeting with Kim if he were “sincere”, indicated the difficulty of dealing with the unpredictable dictator.

“We’ve offered vaccines, not only to North Korea but to China as well and we’re prepared to do that immediately,” Biden said at a press conference with Yoon. “We’ve got no response.”

For his part, Yoon stressed that the offer of Covid aid was according to “humanitarian principles, separate from political and military issues”.

According to Yoon, he and Biden “discussed whether we’d need to come up with various types of joint drills to prepare for a nuclear attack”. Talks are also

ongoing on ways to “coordinate with the US on the timely deployment of strategic assets when needed”, he said, reaffirming commitment to North Korea’s “complete denuclearisation”.

The strategic assets should include “fighter jets and missiles in a departure from the past when we only thought about the nuclear umbrella for deterrence”, he said.

Any such deployments, or a ramping up of US-South Korea joint military exercises, is likely to enrage Pyongyang, which views the drills as rehearsals for war.

Biden began his day by paying respects at Seoul National Cemetery, where soldiers killed defending South Korea, including many who fought alongside US troops in the Korean War, are buried. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BERLIN

Several hurt after powerful tornadoes hit Germany

Several people have been injured across Germany after a powerful storm and tornadoes hit the country. In the city of Paderborn, 43 people were injured, Mayor Michael Dreier said. Thirteen of them were seriously injured and a woman suffered life-threatening injuries.

She underwent surgery in a hospital in Bielefeld, some 50 kilometres away.

“She is somewhat better, but her life is still in danger,” senior police officer Ulrich Ettler said.



The German weather service confirmed on Saturday that three tornadoes hit parts of North Rhine Westphalia. Tornadoes were registered in Paderborn, Lippstadt and Lütmarsen. — dpa

SYLHET

Millions stranded as worst floods hit Bangladesh

Rivers in Bangladesh have burst their banks and caused the worst floods in the country’s northeast for nearly two decades, with about two million people marooned by rising waters. Floodwater rushing from India’s northeast breached a major embankment on the Barak River, inundating at least 100 villages at Zakiganj in Bangladesh, said Mosharraf Hossain, the chief government administrator of the Sylhet region. “Some two million people have been stranded by



floods so far,” he said, adding that at least 10 people have been killed this week. Experts say that climate change is increasing the likelihood of extreme weather events around the world. — AFP

BEIJING

Covid-negative Beijing residents on quarantine

Thousands of Covid-negative Beijing residents were relocated to quarantine hotels overnight due to a handful of infections, as the capital begins to take more extreme control measures resembling virus-hit Shanghai.

The Omicron variant has infected over 1,300 since late April, leading city restaurants, schools and tourist attractions to be closed indefinitely. China’s strategy to achieve zero Covid cases includes strict border closures, lengthy quarantines,



mass testing and rapid, targeted lockdowns. Over 13,000 residents of the locked-down Nanxinyuan residential compound in southeast Beijing were relocated to quarantine hotels. — AFP

Hello, I’m a journalist. Can we talk?



CALLIE HOLTERMANN

Michael Gold was on the downtown platform of the West Fourth Street subway station in Manhattan when he spotted Britney Spears across the tracks, heading uptown.

Mr Gold rushed over, introduced himself as a New York Times reporter and asked if she was available to talk. Then he asked the question that was really on his mind: “I love your costume. Can you tell me about it?”

Mr Gold was actually speaking to Logan Youngberg, who had dressed up for Halloween as Ms Spears during her 2001 MTV Video Music Awards performance, snake and all.

The costume made it into Mr Gold’s article documenting Halloween on the New York City subway.

“It was a really good Britney Spears,” Mr Gold said.

Every day, reporters at The New York Times have to persuade people, often total strangers, to open up and share their stories with millions of readers. Including people’s real experiences in an article can lend credence to the reporting.

Whether reporters are approaching people on the street or through cold calls, they often only have a few moments to make their pitch or build rapport — which makes a concise and compelling introduction all the more crucial.

“I start all conversations the same: name, this is what I do, this is who I report for,” said Sandra E Garcia, a reporter for the Styles desk. It is important that all those she interviews understand that their words could end up in the paper, she said.

Times reporters interviewed for this article all described a similar opening line, with slight variations based on the source, timeline and subject matter.

Emma Goldberg, a reporter for the Business desk, likes to ask how a person’s day is going before she shares what she’s working on, especially when she’s approaching people on the street. It is not always easy.

“It’s a little nerve-racking because you’re approaching someone who’s in a rush and isn’t super excited to talk to you,” said Ms Goldberg, who recently interviewed patrons at a BP station in Newark about rising gas prices. She assured sources that she had not singled them out; she was trying to talk to as many people as possible.

“What brought you here?” is the preferred opening for Reid J Epstein, a national politics reporter, when he is searching for voices in the crowd at a political event. He said the “basic and safe” question can elicit surprising responses.

In February, Epstein spoke to guests at a prom-themed Republican fund-raiser in Rock Springs, Wyo, where some of the state’s most active conservatives posed for photos with a cardboard cut-out of former president Donald J Trump. Several shared criticisms of the press with Mr Epstein, but were eager to talk about Wyoming’s congressional race.

“Even people who have the most hard-held grievances against the media and The Times will be polite and talk to



Catie Edmondson, left, a congressional reporter for The Times, with a group of reporters trying to get comments from Senator Joni Ernst, Republican of Iowa, in the Capitol in 2019.

you if you’re with them on their home turf somewhere,” Epstein said.

Of course, journalists are not always approaching strangers on the street or at an event. Oftentimes, a reporter is reaching out for a particular person’s voice.

Neil Vigdor, who spent three years as a breaking news reporter on The Times’s Express desk, said that introducing himself to sources after tragedies is one of the most delicate parts of his job. When calling someone who has lost a family member or a friend, he starts by saying, “I’m deeply sorry to be reaching out under these circumstances.” Then he asks to hear more about the person who died.

“You want to get these people’s voices and perspective into your story, but you’re trying not to do anything that is going to add to their trauma,” said Vigdor, who recently started new roles on the Politics and National desks. “It’s a real balancing act.”

Other sources may not be familiar with The Times. It is important, then, to communicate what it means to speak to an international news outlet.

Julie Turkewitz, The Times’s Andes bureau chief, often works in rural areas in South America. Last year, Ms Turkewitz travelled to La Paz, a coca farming village in Colombia that had been neglected by the government for years. Though many of the village’s residents were not familiar with The Times, Ms Turkewitz told them that if they chose to talk to her, their words might reach a large audience around the world.

The right opening line can set the tone for an interview — and start the process of building trust.

“There could be this power dynamic of a reporter coming in and shoving a recorder in people’s faces,” Ms Turkewitz said. “It’s really important for people to understand that it’s their choice that they want to tell the story.”

Monkeypox: A rare virus on the rise



DANIEL VICTOR

The rare monkeypox virus, usually confined mostly to Central and West Africa, has spread in unusual ways this year and among populations that have not been vulnerable in the past.

But while the transmissions have created some alarm among officials and infectious disease experts, and while a Covid-weary world is on high alert for new outbreaks, there are several reasons monkeypox is not being treated with the same level of concern as the coronavirus.

Here’s what to know about monkeypox and the risks it poses.

WHAT IS MONKEYPOX?

Monkeypox is a virus endemic in parts of Central and West Africa. It is a more benign version of smallpox. It was discovered in 1958, after outbreaks occurred in monkeys kept for research, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Monkeypox creates a rash that starts with flat red marks that become raised and filled with pus. Infected people will also have a fever and body aches.

Symptoms typically appear in six to 13 days but can take as long as three weeks after exposure. They can last for two to four weeks, with severe cases occurring more commonly among children, according to the World Health Organization.

The CDC says there is “no proven, safe treatment” for monkeypox, but the Food and Drug Administration

has approved the use of smallpox vaccines and antiviral treatments to control outbreaks.

HOW INFECTIOUS IS IT?

Typically it does not lead to major outbreaks — in most years there are just a handful of cases outside Africa, if any. The most severe outbreak in the US came in 2003, when dozens of cases were linked to exposure to infected prairie dogs and other pets. It was the first time there had been a monkeypox outbreak outside of Africa, according to the World Health Organization.

Within Africa, 11 countries have reported cases since 1970, when the first human case was identified in a 9-year-old boy in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nigeria has experienced a large outbreak, with more than 500 suspected cases and 200 confirmed cases since 2017, the WHO said.

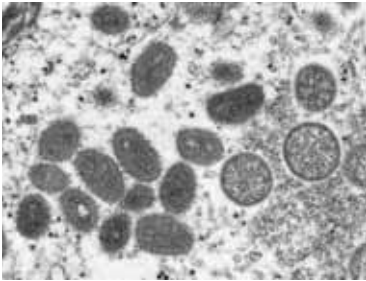
The virus can spread via body fluids, skin contact and respiratory droplets. The majority of cases this year have been in young men, many of whom self-identified.

HOW MANY CASES HAVE THERE BEEN THIS YEAR, AND WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN?

There have been 38 cases worldwide this year as of Thursday, including 37 with no history of travel to endemic countries, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Britain reported an additional 11 cases.

In the United States, the first case of 2022 was diagnosed in Massachusetts on Wednesday. The man had recently travelled to Canada, which has had two cases this year.

New York City health authorities said that they had tested two patients who were under investigation for possible monkeypox.



An undated electron microscopy image of mature monkeypox virions, left, and immature virions, right, from a sample of human skin associated with the 2003 outbreak of monkeypox in the US.

“One case has been ruled out, and another has been identified as positive for Orthopoxvirus, the family of viruses to which monkeypox belongs,” the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene said on Twitter. Confirmation for monkeypox was pending testing by the CDC, it said.

Europe has been hit harder. As of Thursday, Portugal had reported 17 cases; Spain has had seven; Belgium has had two; and France, Italy and Sweden have each had one.

Britain had reported nine cases as of Thursday, but Sajid Javid, Britain’s health secretary, said that the number had risen to 20. The WHO said on Thursday that the country’s infections appeared to be locally acquired, but “the extent of local transmission is unclear at this stage and there is the possibility of identification of further cases.”

None of the infected people have died, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

HOW IS THE CURRENT OUTBREAK DIFFERENT?

This is the first time that chains of transmission were reported in Europe without links to West or Central Africa, according to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control. The agency also said this year’s cases included the first that have been reported among men.

SHOULD I BE WORRIED?

The likelihood of the virus being spread during contact is high, but the risk of transmission from other forms of close contact is low, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control said.

The symptoms are typically mild, and most people recover within weeks, but the virus has had a fatality rate of about 3.3 per cent in Nigeria, with children, young adults and immunocompromised people most susceptible.

Mind the generation gap



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

When teaching medical students I can't help noticing the differences between their ways of doing things from how we used to do it back when I was a student a few years ago. I often stop myself from saying "when I was a student we used to do so and so," because I remember how I did not like it when my teachers said the same phrase. I remember when I was a young doctor training in the UK I used to go to the hospital on Saturday morning to do my "on call duty" and leave on Monday morning to do a clinic at another hospital till 5 pm. If my senior was "kind" he or she would let me leave at 3 pm otherwise I have to stay the full working day. This system was tiring and we often wonder if it made us "better doctors" or was it basically covering the work duty which allowed the hospital to save on employing less doctors.

This system was scrapped a few years later and doctors now are granted a day off after their 24 hours on call. Yet when it was first introduced we were 'professionally jealous' that we did not have the same privilege when we were in training. It is funny how we grow up to be similar-to some extent-to those around us, being parents or teachers, basically any one we consider a father figure. The fact is that we often learn by observing what others do, not just what they tell us to do, this is how role models play a role in including others around them, but this is not completely a passive process. I mean we don't just become sponge absorbing everything around us but we do make a choice on what to adopt. This is how what is now called social influencers affect people's behaviour by simply triggering the

'PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT GENERATIONS SOMETIMES CRITICISE EACH OTHER'S OPINIONS AND WAY OF LIFE, LET'S GET TOGETHER AND HAVE MUTUAL RESPECT AND SUPPORT'

person's "needs and desires", be it for being loved by others or considered "cool and savvy" or belonging to a group regardless of the values of that group. This is why people now "want" things more than they "need" them, and this is why some people are still unhappy despite being rich and living a life of luxury. Experts in psychology and social science talk about the generation gap which exist in many cultures,

where the older generation consider the younger generation to lack psychological strength, "a snow flake" that melt under the smallest amount of pressure. On the other hand the younger generation believe the elders to be "stubborn," holding to old ideas and believes, sticking to others opinions rather than following their passion. Such beliefs and attitudes towards the others are not helpful as they only create conflict and deprive each generation from learning and supporting the other. There are no doubts that the older generation had to some degree a tough life when education and other basic life needs were limited and only available for a small group of the society, namely those who had money while the rest of society lived on the basics, many were working for daily wages. Some had to migrate to other countries looking for jobs so they

could provide for their family, leaving their wives behind to bring up the children with little emotional support from the husband. These difficulties may have made that generation "tough skin" or not in touch with their emotions, yet they have accumulated a good amount of experiences that can be useful for the younger generations to learn from. So what can we do to narrow this generation gap? I personally believe we should start by respecting each other's values and way of life and trying to be less judgmental, which is not always easy. Try to understand the other person's background and the life events they experienced and how that shaped their thoughts and attitude. Finally, remember to have "adult conversations" without rushing to humiliate the others or make them less respectful.

Graffiti brings Benin's walls alive with treasures from past

On a blue and yellow background, the graffiti artist retouches a spray-painted image of the half-shark statue of King Behanzin, one of the stolen treasures returned to Benin by France late last year. The image is just one by 26 local and international graffiti artists who have created a mural depicting Benin's history and culture stretching more than one kilometre along a wall in Benin's main city of Cotonou. Their objective is to eventually create the largest mural fresco in the world as part of a festival under the theme of "New Benin". "To create the Benin of the future, we must keep the Benin of the past in our sight," said Laurenson Djihouessi, known by his artist name Mr Stone, who is the festival promoter. Many of the graffiti artists have chosen to represent the restored treasures, which were stolen by French colonial forces and returned to Cotonou this year after negotiations with Paris. The artefacts have been on display for the first time in Benin since February in a historical exhibition at the presidential palace, located a few hundred metres from the mural. "There, the audience comes to the art, but here the art comes to the audience," said Stone, whose images pay homage to the Amazons, the elite, all-female soldiers of the Kingdom of Dahomey, one of Benin's kingdoms before French colonisation. The artist said he wanted to place the Beninese woman "at the heart of action and development", for them to be the "Amazon of modern times". But it is not only the royal history of Benin's past that is painted on the fresco that attracts dozens of passers-by. Supported by the Claudine Talon Foundation, run by the First Lady of Benin, and the Ministry of Culture, the wall also highlights recent achievements in the West African country. There are cranes symbolising the reform of Cotonou's port and agricultural machinery, a reference to the modernisation of the agricultural sector. Images of roads are meant to show part of the infrastructure projects touted by President Patrice Talon as one of his successes. Since his first election in 2015, Talon has launched dozens of projects in what he calls a campaign to set his nation on the path to development. While the economy may have been modernised, Benin's opposition says the country's democracy has also suffered under Talon's rule. — AFP

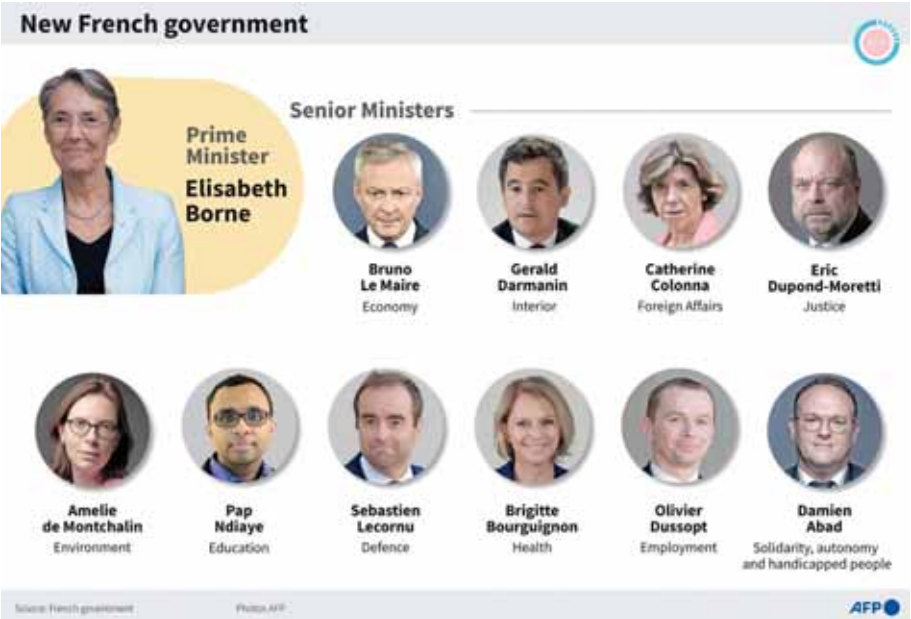


AURELIEN BREEDEN

The writer is a reporter at NYT Paris bureau, where he covers France

France's new cabinet mixes fresh and familiar, hinting at Macron's priorities

France announced a new government on Friday that mixed veteran politicians from President Emmanuel Macron's prior administration with surprise newcomers in key ministries, as Macron hopes to soothe a fractured country while continuing to reform it for his second term. The announcement came just weeks before crucial elections that will determine control over Parliament, and several days after Mr. Macron, seeking to woo voters on the left, nominated Elisabeth Borne, a former labour and environment minister, as prime minister — only the second woman to occupy that position in France. "It's a gender-equal, balanced government, between those who were already ministers these past few years and new figures who were picked because they were competent and committed," Borne told the TF1 television broadcaster after Friday's announcement. Many names were familiar as Macron's chief of staff, standing on the front steps of the Élysée Palace, listed the 14 men and 13 women who are now part of the new government. Including Borne, the cabinet is evenly split among men and women. The number of veterans staying on, who included a mix of figures from the left and the right, were a sign that Mr. Macron wanted a measure of stability, with fewer political novices than in 2017. Bruno Le Maire, a stalwart of Macron's first term who has been economy and finance minister since 2017, kept his job. So did Gérard Darmanin, the tough-talking interior minister who became a symbol of Macron's shift rightward on issues like security and immigration. Many ministers were shuffled from one portfolio to another. But other names — or their absence — came as more of a surprise. Jean-Yves Le Drian, a well-known figure after a decade as France's defence minister and then foreign minister, was replaced by Catherine Colonna, a



respected career diplomat. Colonna handled bickering with Britain over Brexit as France's ambassador in London and was the spokeswoman for President Jacques Chirac in the early 2000s, at the height of a Franco-American spat over the war in Iraq. Now she will have to contend with the instability and uncertainty provoked by the war in Ukraine. One of the starkest changes came from the education ministry, where MACRON'S NEWLY ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT COMBINES CONTINUITY WITH CHANGE, AS FIRST-TERM VETERANS WERE JOINED BY NEWCOMERS IN TOP POSITIONS Jean-Michel Blanquer — who argued vocally over his years there that American concepts on race, gender, post-colonialism and "wokism" were tearing France apart — was replaced by Pap Ndiaye, a prominent academic of Senegalese and French descent who studied for several years in the United States and who led efforts to establish Black studies as a discipline in France. "I am a pure product of Republican

meritocracy, of which schools are a pillar," Ndiaye said in a speech at the ministry. France's far-right swiftly lashed out against him. Marine Le Pen, who lost to Mr. Macron in last month's presidential elections, said on Twitter that Ndiaye was "the last stone" of France's "deconstruction". In contrast, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of the far-left France Unbowed movement, praised Ndiaye as a "great intellectual" but had little good to say about the rest of the government, accusing it at a news conference of failing to live up to Macron's vow that his second term would be more attuned to social justice and environmental issues than his first. "And so it will be the worst, that is to say continuity," said Mélenchon, who hopes that the parliamentary elections in June will propel a left-wing coalition to victory, forcing Mr. Macron to name him prime minister, a situation most political analysts deem unlikely. Other government newcomers included Rima Abdul-Malak, who was appointed culture minister after several years as Macron's adviser on cultural issues, and Amélie Oudéa-Castéra, formerly the managing director of the French tennis federation, who was appointed sports minister at a key time for France, which is hosting the 2024 Summer Olympics. — The New York Times

Don't think less of yourself, but of yourself, less!



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

I don't know that there is too much to really concern the population currently, even though the price of oil has dropped a little, as the market still looks remarkably settled given the volatility of global politics.

If you add the return to traditional education delivery, a significant dilution of the effects of the global pandemic, the possibility of new, farsighted employment initiatives, the success of the Sultanate of Oman's Expo pavilion in the United Arab Emirates, a return to full operational capacity at the Muscat International Airport and the consequent boost to the tourism sector, things don't look too bad at all. In fact, better than 'not too bad,' considering where the nation was a year ago.

Those who look at life with a 'glass half full,' window on the world must have been tearing their hair out for the last couple of years, while the 'doom and gloom merchants,' the 'glass half empty' mob were having a 'field day.' Now however, it appears that yin has rediscovered yang, and dissimilitude can once more step back into the spider's web of academia and thesauruses. Smiles are reappearing, laughter is being heard, and there is 'joy to the world' all over again.

Amidst the euphoria however, a word of wisdom to the younger generation, the twenty-somethings, who will look to make their way, in their world, quickly. No, not quickly, but too quickly, and while it will be your world one day, that day is not yet upon us. Why? Because youth may well be the gift of nature, but maturity is the gift of age and experience, a work of art. Mona Lisa wears that smile because she 'knows stuff,' that the Kardashians never could.

You are the generation of this time, but don't confuse that reality with any impression that this is your world, not yet. From real, community, society, national, global, and universal perspectives, you have hardly learned to walk, let alone to run, and yet there is an alarming sense of frustration, born of a misplaced sense of entitlement, becoming apparent on social media, on the part of young people, relatively new to the workforce, dissatisfied with their lot!

What you must acknowledge is that while the new technologies have enhanced most work practices, there is still significant human element learning to be embraced in task recognition, task competency, task completion, communications, interactions, and accountability. These are the things that the young tend to dismiss out-of-hand, saying, "Yeah, I'll be okay, I'll pick that up as I go," yet they rarely ever do. These are the keys to embracing a 'workplace culture,' and you get this wrong at your peril.

Joseph L Badaracco is a Professor of Business Ethics at the Harvard School of Business, and he writes, "Workplace culture within which personal and professional development are most likely to thrive, is an environment that gives people the chance, or even pushes them, to try new activities, take on new challenges, and build on their experiences." That's the way it should be. Let your deeds define you, rather than your social media moaning.

"I've been stuck at this desk for two years, and I'm going nowhere, I wish I was appreciated more," is just the kind of wet, almost idle complaint on the socials that gets the 'mature' generation's 'backs up!' Two years is hardly time to have worked out who everyone else is in an organisation, let alone what they do, let alone where their work fits into the 'big picture.'

Grandfathers had lifelong objectives, fathers have had work-life objectives, please youngsters, don't fall into the trap of having any entitlement to position, until you can handle the responsibility, the accountability, and the level of respect you can offer your peers and supervisors. Better still, come early, leave late, be happy, be awesome, and be reliable. Young people always start anew, thinking they can always do better... hmmmmmmmmmm.

Before you go chasing the managers desk, or the chairman's office... you have a fair few hoops to jump through yet!



BEAUTY ON THE WALLS!

An artist paints a wall mural in Mumbai, India, on Saturday.
- AFP

The global hunger crisis is here



Seta Tutundjian

The writer is a founder and CEO of Thriving Solutions, is a member of the High-Level Expert Group to assess the need for the International Platform for Food Systems Science and a co-leader of the global Food is Never Waste initiative

Global food prices are soaring. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Food Price Index – which covers a basket of basic food commodities (cereals, meat, dairy, vegetable oils, and sugar) – reached an all-time high of 159.7 in March, up from 141.1 the previous month. While it declined slightly in April, to 158.5, ongoing developments – not least Russia's war in Ukraine – are set to keep driving prices to new highs, with devastating implications for global hunger.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the fragility and dysfunctionality of the world's food systems, with movement restrictions and supply-chain disruptions driving up prices, damaging rural livelihoods, and exacerbating food insecurity, especially for the poor. Now, the war in Ukraine is compounding these challenges, because both sides are major exporters of food, fuel, and fertiliser.

Moreover, climate change poses an even larger threat to global food security. Already, extreme weather like heatwaves, floods, and prolonged droughts has triggered shocks to agricultural production and food availability. As temperatures rise, these shocks will become increasingly frequent and powerful. If global warming crosses the 1.5° Celsius threshold (relative to Earth's pre-industrial temperature), they are likely to become catastrophic.

As the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report shows, avoiding the threshold will require immediate and drastic action. But mitigation is only part of the challenge. Large-scale investments in adaptation will also be needed to protect vulnerable communities from the warming that is already locked in.

Even under the most optimistic mitigation scenario, global warming is expected to hit the 1.5°C threshold in a decade, before receding. This will result in shifts in climatic zones, rising sea levels, and disruptions to the water cycle that increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather. Beyond raising economic and health risks, the resulting disruptions to food and water supplies are likely to drive social and

political upheaval, fuelling a vicious cycle of poverty, hunger, instability, and even conflict, accompanied by sharp rise in migration.

A more resilient, sustainable, and equitable food system must be a pillar of any climate mitigation or adaptation agenda. But the barriers to building such a system should not be underestimated, especially for countries and regions where soil is poor, land has little agricultural value, other natural resources, such as water, are limited or degraded, and socioeconomic conditions are difficult.

Given the low productivity of their agricultural land, such marginal

A MORE RESILIENT, SUSTAINABLE, AND EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM MUST BE A PILLAR OF ANY CLIMATE MITIGATION OR ADAPTATION AGENDA. BUT THE BARRIERS TO BUILDING ONE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED, ESPECIALLY FOR COUNTRIES AND REGIONS WHERE SOIL IS POOR, LAND HAS LITTLE AGRICULTURAL VALUE, AND OTHER NATURAL RESOURCES, SUCH AS WATER, ARE LIMITED OR DEGRADED

environments are unable to support the sustainable production of sufficient food to meet local people's nutritional needs. In fact, while marginal environments are home to less than 25 per cent of the global population – an estimated 1.7 billion people – they account for 70 per cent of the world's poor and most of its malnourished.

Poverty and hunger can lead farmers to overuse fragile environmental resources in order to ensure their short-term survival, even at the cost of long-term depletion of their lands and impoverishment of their households and communities. Those living in remote

areas with minimal infrastructure, few alternative economic opportunities, and limited market access are particularly likely to make such choices.

Given this, countries with significant marginal lands rely on food imports – in some cases for more than 80 per cent of their needs. But pandemic- and war-related disruptions, together with the price increases they have fuelled, have shown just how vulnerable such countries are. According to the FAO's State of Food and Agriculture 2021 report, an additional 161 million people were affected by hunger in 2020, compared with 2019. And the World Food Program is now cautioning that the combination of conflict, Covid, the climate crisis, and rising costs has pushed 44 million people in 38 countries to the edge of famine.

With countries struggling to secure enough food to meet their populations' nutritional needs, many are now re-evaluating their food dependencies and seeking to expand local production. But unless sustainability is taken into account, efforts to increase short-term resilience by shortening supply chains could undermine medium- and long-term resilience by further depleting agricultural resources like soil and water.

Sustainability isn't cheap. Efficient production amid biophysical and climate constraints requires investment in costly technologies. But poor governance structures, limited growth prospects, and high debts pose major challenges for many countries. The pandemic has placed massive strain on public budgets, and debt crises loom for many governments, as loans taken out to address the pandemic come due.

Poor and vulnerable countries cannot be expected to address the myriad interconnected challenges they face, from pollution and biodiversity loss to hunger and poverty, without help. To bolster long-term food and nutritional security, we must look beyond country-level solutions to regional and international ones that consider the needs of communities living in marginal environments. Otherwise, there will be no escaping destabilising cycles of hunger, migration, and violence.

@Project Syndicate, 2021



Climate change poses an even larger threat to global food security.

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Oman U-20 team to take part in Arab Cup 2022

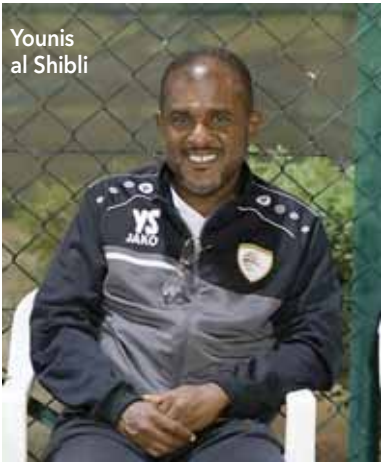
ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Oman national under-19 football team will take part in the 2022 Arab Cup U-20 Championship which will be held in Saudi Arabia from July 20 to August 5.

Younis al Shibli, team manager, told Oman Daily Observer that the team received an official invitation from the Arab Football Federation and the organising committee. "Taking part in this Arabian football tourney is vital ahead of the AFC U20 Asian Cup qualifiers tournament in September. This event will assist the team and players to have more official fixtures and matches ahead of the top Asian assignment," he added.

As many as 16 teams are expected to be part of this championship. The teams will be distributed into four groups and each group will feature of four teams. The top two teams will advance to quarterfinals.

"We are planning to have some warm-up sessions during the next



period in Muscat and Salalah. Due to final examinations for some players at school and university levels, we are facing little difficulty in conducting these camps. The forthcoming camp will be held during July 11 until the team's departure to Saudi Arabia to attend in the 2022 Arab Cup U-20 championship," the team manger said.

On a query about arranging friendly games, Younis al Shibli responded: "There is a plan for an abroad camp in Europe and the national team committee is seeking strong preparatory



games to be included in these warm-up gatherings. Besides that, we are following up with the neighbouring associations for friendly matches in the internal camps," he concluded. Muscat will host the AFC

U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers from September 10 to 18. The draw will be held on Tuesday at the AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

Oman under-19 football team concluded an internal preparatory camp before two weeks. The seven-

day warm-up gathering featured two friendly games against Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) team and Transportation team from the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

In both preparatory matches, Oman boys suffered losses as

they lost to RNO 2-1 and 3-1 against SAF. The camp was under supervision of David Gordo, head coach of Oman under-19 team. The third appearance of the team featured attendance of four Omani players who are playing in Spanish leagues including Nasser al Saqri and Khalid al Sulaimi (Pinatar Club de Futbol), Salim al Abdali (Celta de Vigo FC) and Tariq al Saadi (Queen's Park FC).

OMAN U-19 SQUAD

Loai al Rawahi, Marwan al Qutaiti, Said al Adawi, Ahmed al Harmali, Nawaf al Futaisi, Al Muntasar al Mawali, Salim al Shamakhi, Mulham al Hadhrami,

Osama al Mahrouqi, Osama al Rawahi, Salim al Abdali, Mohammed al Oraibi, Sultan al Marzooqi, Ahmed al Shanfari, Said al Ghanbousi, Abdul Aleem al Rawahi, Tariq al Saadi, Saif al Makhmari, Ahed al Mashakhyi, Mazin al Harrasi, Al Muhannad al Habsi, Nasser al Saqri, Khalid al Sulaimi, Abdul Majeed al Balushi, Ali al Balushi and Mohammed al Balushi.

Abdullah al Rawahi fights back to finish seventh in Jordan Rally

DEAD SEA (JORDAN): Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud produced a superb fight back from first day issues to finish seventh overall at the 2022 Jordan Rally, round four of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

With his Oman Rally Team Škoda Fabia R2 evo repaired after an accident on the notorious Jordan River stage on Friday afternoon, the Omani restarted on Saturday under the Rally2 ruling and was classified in ninth place in the general classification heading into two passes through the Bahath, Suwayma and Ma'in special stages in the Dead Sea area.

He continued to show excellent pace and set the outright fastest time in stage nine second fastest times behind leader Nasser Saleh al Attiyah in the other five special stages on Saturday.

That vital finish for the Omani ensured that al Attiyah was mathematically not able to confirm a record-breaking 18th regional title before the next



round in Lebanon.

Al Rawahi said: "Friday was disappointing for us. We had made a really good start to the rally. I was having a good pace and trying to be close to Nasser.

Unfortunately, we could not finish the last two stages. We went off the track and we got stuck in a ditch and had to retire. Otherwise everything was okay. We had a bit of over steer throughout the

weekend.

"It was important to gather some points, especially as we did not finish in Kuwait. This time we had a few dramatic moments, but we managed to come back and



the second day was good and the set-up for the car was much better when we went softer. The pace was there as well. Having Nasser in the championship is a great benchmark. He is a world class

driver. Every time I try and get closer and closer to him and that is happening and he is always there to support as well. Hopefully in the future we can do what Nasser has been doing!"



Real Madrid's Spanish defender Nacho Fernandez (TOP L) vies for a header with Real Betis' Spanish defender Marc Bartra during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Real Betis at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on May 20, 2022. — AFP

Real Madrid look to Liverpool after goalless draw with Real Betis

MADRID: Real Madrid's last game before the Champions League final against Liverpool ended in a goalless draw against Real Betis on Friday as Marcelo bid farewell to the Santiago Bernabeu.

Carlo Ancelotti picked a strong side for Madrid's last La Liga game of the season but with the title long sewn-up and the final in Paris just around the corner, neither team were keen to over-exert.

Instead, the contest was notable for the tribute paid to Marcelo and the lack of one for Gareth Bale.

Both players are expected to leave when their contracts expire this summer but only Marcelo was involved here, with Bale absent again from the squad.

Marcelo came on in the second half to a standing ovation and was given the captain's armband by Karim Benzema, who played the whole 90 minutes. Marcelo accepted applause from his teammates after the final whistle and left, waving to the stands as he went.

"One of the greats of world football is saying goodbye, and one of the best full-backs in the world," said Ancelotti.

Bale, meanwhile, has been struggling with a back problem in recent weeks, the lack of any goodbye just the latest anti-



Real Betis' Spanish forward Juanmi (L) vies with Real Madrid's Spanish defender Dani Carvajal during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Real Betis at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on May 20, 2022. — AFP

climax at the end of his Madrid career, which for too long has been characterised by drift and irrelevance.

"He couldn't be on the bench," said Ancelotti. "He wanted to say goodbye to the fans but he has one last chance, because I think Bale will be fine for the final."

The draw means Ancelotti's team finish the season on 86 points, 13 ahead of Barcelona, who could reduce the gap when they play at home to Villarreal on Sunday.

Real Betis sit fifth, three points clear of Real Sociedad, with Europa League qualification already secured.

The match almost felt like an exhibition at times, less a

competitive league fixture than a cosy end-of-season event.

GUARD OF HONOUR

Before kick-off, there was a double guard of honour, as Real Madrid recognised Real Betis' victory in the Copa del Rey before Betis saluted Madrid's triumph in La Liga, the crowd applauding throughout.

As well the warmth shown for Marcelo, there was applause as well for Isco, who is also out of contract at the end of June, and even for Real Betis' Joaquin, the 40-year-old coming on for his 600th La Liga match in the second period.

Ancelotti picked a strong team that could be the line-up that

starts against Liverpool, although David Alaba remains out injured meaning he will be playing his first game in just over a month next weekend if the Austrian is thrown straight back in.

"Alaba will be there to play the final," said Ancelotti afterwards. "In this type of match, it's not only about the physical aspect, it's about ability and experience."

Both teams coasted through the first half, with neither side playing with enough intensity to force mistakes or precision to create clear chances.

There were periods when Madrid's lethargy slipped into sloppiness, with Casemiro drawing the disapproval from fans and teammates alike when he rushed a clearance and then skewed a wild shot from close to the halfway line.

Benzema had his first real opening early in the second half and connected well with Dani Carvajal's cross but the shot was straight at Betis goalkeeper Rui Silva. The Frenchman almost won it with seven minutes left, but fired over after chesting down Rodrygo's ball in.

Marcelo, Isco and Joaquin all came on and Joaquin should have scored in the 86th minute. Cristiano Tello's cross to the back post was set back nicely to the striker but, from eight yards, he missed the target. — AFP

Man City aim to end Liverpool's quadruple bid in Premier League climax

MANCHESTER: Manchester City have the destiny of the Premier League title in their hands heading into Sunday's final day showdown, with the defending champions holding a slender one-point lead over quadruple-chasing Liverpool.

Pep Guardiola's men will claim a fourth English title in five years of a dominant era for Abu Dhabi-backed City with victory over Aston Villa.

"It's difficult to control your emotions when you know what you are playing for," said City manager Guardiola.

"The players are human beings but it's football, when you think that it is over it is not over."

City know that to their cost having been minutes away from the Champions League final only to blow a two-goal lead in their semifinal, second leg against Real Madrid earlier this month.

"The importance is unnecessary to tell them," added Guardiola. "They know it, they feel it."

Liverpool will instead face Real in next weekend's battle to be crowned champions of Europe in Paris as they remain in contention for an unprecedented haul of four major trophies in the one season. Jurgen Klopp's men have already lifted the League Cup and FA Cup.

"Imagine somebody tells you before the season you're going to be in all three cup finals and want to fight for the league," said Liverpool manager Klopp.

"The boys did it -- fed by the people here in the building, by our supporters, by all these kind of things."

"It's a fantastic time for a Liverpool supporter and now we have to make sure we enjoy the last two games as well," the

German added.

The presence of Liverpool great and now Villa manager Steven Gerrard on the opposition bench at the Etihad adds extra intrigue to the decisive day in the title race. Gerrard famously never won a league title in his 17-year career at Anfield, but could deliver one on a plate to his old club. Anything other than a City win will allow Liverpool to take the title with victory at home to Wolves.

"We'll go out at the weekend and give it everything we've got to try and get points for Aston Villa and our supporters," said Gerrard.

"If that inevitably helps Liverpool, fantastic, but my priority is to try and get points for Aston Villa."

EUROPEAN PLACES

AT STAKE

Chelsea will join City and Liverpool in next season's Champions League, with north London rivals Tottenham and Arsenal still battling for fourth spot. Spurs are in the driving seat as they just need a draw away to already-relegated Norwich to secure a return to the Champions League.

Back-to-back defeats have seen Arsenal throw away a golden chance to get back to European football's top table.

The Gunners have to win at home to an Everton side fresh from sealing their Premier League status and hope Spurs stumble at Carrow Road.

Manchester United and West Ham are guaranteed European football next season but their battle to be in the Europa League rather than the Conference League has also gone to the final day. — AFP



Fifa to announce 2026 World Cup host cities in June

LOS ANGELES: Fifa plans to announce the host venues for the 2026 World Cup in North America on June 16 in New York, football's global governing body said on Friday.

The contenders for what are expected to be at least 16 venues include 17 stadiums in 16 US cities, with the Los Angeles area submitting both SoFi Stadium in Inglewood and the Rose Bowl in Pasadena -- site of the 1994 World Cup final.

Fifa are expected to select

three venues each in Mexico and Canada for the first World Cup with three co-hosting nations, with the remainder to be in the United States, where 60 games are planned including all from the quarterfinals.

Fifa awarded the tournament -- which will be the first 48-team World Cup -- in June of 2018.

The venue selection process has since been slowed by the pandemic.

Venues under consideration in Mexico include the iconic Estadio



Fifa plans to announce the host venues for the 2026 World Cup in North America on June 16 in New York, football's global governing body said May 20, 2022. — AFP

Azteca as well as stadiums in Guadalajara and Monterrey.

Canada's bidders include Toronto's BMO Field as well as venues in Edmonton and Vancouver.

In addition to the Los Angeles-area venues, US hosting hopefuls include Dallas, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Denver, New York/New Jersey, Foxborough in Massachusetts, Houston, Kansas City, Miami, Nashville, Orlando, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Seattle.

Fifa said the decision on venues,

which in the US include an array of state-of-the-art NFL stadiums as well as iconic venues like the Rose Bowl, will take into account broader factors including general infrastructure and financial impact as well as sustainability.

The final decisions will aim to "lay the foundations for the tournament to be delivered successfully across all three countries," said Fifa vice-president Victor Montagliani, who is also president of regional governing body CONCACAF.



Zalatoris seizes PGA lead while Tiger makes the weekend

TULSA: American Will Zalatoris fired a bogey-free five-under-par 65 to seize a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the PGA Championship while Tiger Woods battled his way into the weekend.

Aided when gusting winds vanished in the afternoon at daunting Southern Hills, late-starter Zalatoris reeled off three back-nine birdies in a row and sank a seven-foot birdie putt at the 17th to finish 36 holes at Southern Hills on 9-under-par 131.

"I had the luck of the draw. There wasn't any wind after the 11th hole," Zalatoris said. "I made the most of it with some good shotmaking."

That enabled 30th-ranked Zalatoris, last year's Masters runner-up and the 2021 US PGA Tour Rookie of the Year, to grab a one-stroke lead over Chile's Mito Pereira, who fired a 64 to stand second on 132.

"I guess shooting six-under wasn't really the expectation, but here we are," the 27-year-old from Santiago said. "Not going to change anything."

Woods, fighting back after severe leg injuries in a car crash 15 months ago, overcame a double bogey at the par-3 11th with birdies at the par-5 13th and par-4 16th to shoot 69 and make the weekend on 3-over 143.

"I had to grind and go to work and I did and I made it," Woods said. "It wasn't pretty. I had to fight back. I'm not able to move like I did."

The most beautiful shotmaking came from two-time Masters winner Bubba Watson, who matched the course record with a seven-under par 63 that included nine birdies, his most in any major round. — AFP

Charles Leclerc completes practice clean sweep in Spain



Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc drives during the second free practice session at the Circuit de Catalunya on May 20, 2022 in Montmelo on the outskirts of Barcelona ahead of the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix. — AFP

MONTMELÓ, SPAIN: Championship leader Charles Leclerc completed a clean sweep of all three sessions when he topped world champion Max Verstappen in Saturday's third and final practice for this weekend's Spanish Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old Monegasque, who leads the Dutchman by 19 points in the title race, clocked a fastest lap of one minute and 19.772 in his Ferrari to outpace the Red Bull man by 0.072 seconds.

After their resurgence on Friday, Mercedes confirmed their improved form with George Russell heading seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in third and fourth ahead of local hero Carlos Sainz running a new chassis in the second Ferrari.

Sergio Perez was sixth in the second Red Bull, within half a second of Leclerc to raise the prospect of a fiercely competitive qualifying session later on Saturday.

Like Sainz, Lando Norris took a new chassis on his way to seventh for McLaren ahead of Kevin Magnussen of Haas, Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo and Esteban Ocon of Alpine.

The session was uninterrupted, but Mick Schumacher had to abandon his blazing Haas car after a major brakes blaze in the pit lane. On another hot day in Catalonia,



the air temperature was 30 degrees and the track 43 degrees, conditions certain to make tyre wear a key strategic factor in both qualifying and Sunday's race.

To the relief of many observers, Mercedes appeared to have maintained their Friday improvement while Aston Martin, at the centre of 'copycat' allegations the previous day, seemed to gain little advantage from their controversial 'green Red Bull' upgrades package.

Red Bull's special adviser continued to suggest that intellectual property (IT) may have gone to the Silverstone-based team, linking it to the fact that seven former Red Bull staff had moved from Milton Keynes.

"As things stand, copying isn't forbidden," Marko had told Sky Sports Germany.

"But you must also take into account that seven people were

poached from us and that our chief aerodynamicist (Dan Fallows) joined Aston Martin with a disproportionately high fee.

"There are still some facts that we are checking. We will look into it in detail. There is evidence that data was downloaded."

Fallows left Red Bull to join Aston Martin as technical director.

As that speculation continued, much of the on-track action centred on drivers out in new chassis, or running new engines.

These included Norris of McLaren who was first to lap in his new chassis to be followed by Bottas of Alfa Romeo, powered by a new engine, and Sainz, in a new red Ferrari chassis.

Sainz swiftly went top to be overhauled by team-mate Leclerc while fires affected Pierre Gasly's Alpha Tauri and Schumacher's Haas, the German's car suffering a major brakes blaze that spread across a rear quarter.

Verstappen was slow to join the fray and complained that this car "doesn't turn in at low speed", but he rose to second by mid-session, before being overhauled by a revived Russell.

The champion responded, but he could not beat Leclerc's 1:19.772 as Hamilton moved briefly to third, proving he and Mercedes will be a serious threat later in qualifying. — AFP

Bangladesh must defy injuries to win decisive Sri Lanka Test

DHAKA: Hosts Bangladesh hope that team spirit will propel them to victory in the series-deciding second Test against Sri Lanka from Monday with their four frontline bowlers all out injured.

Bowlers from both teams struggled to make an impact on all five days of the drawn first Test in Chittagong.

But the wicket at Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium is expected to offer some assistance and no Test has been drawn at the ground since 2016.

If Bangladesh, who enjoyed the upper hand in the first Test, are to get a result they will do so with their bowling stocks badly depleted.

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, who claimed 6-105 in the first innings of the first Test, was the latest to be ruled out with a finger injury on Friday.

The hosts are also without Taskin Ahmed, Mehidy Hasan and Shoriful Islam.

Bangladesh have opted not to replace pacer Shoriful, who suffered a hand injury in Chittagong, while a replacement for Nayeem is yet to be named.

Skipper Mominul Haque said it would need to be a team effort.

"Batsmen or bowlers, we get good results when we can play as a team. The team gets into a good position whenever we give a collective effort. It will help us in Dhaka," Mominul said.

Mominul pointed to the hosts' extensive experience of the wicket in the capital.

"We play our most matches in Dhaka. I think we know how to handle spin and pace," he said.

Sri Lanka struck an equally upbeat tone. They have won all three Test matches they have played at Sher-e-Bangla stadium, including a 215-run victory during their last visit in 2018.

"Our pacers did better than theirs (in the first Test). We have a few positives in that aspect," all-rounder Dhananjaya de Silva said.

Outlining a winning formula for the second Test, de Silva said the Dhaka wicket "will be helpful to the spinners".

"If we are batting first we will try to get 275-300, and then get them out for less than 150 in one innings," he said. "It will give us a chance to win."

Pace bowlers took seven of Sri Lanka's nine wickets in the first Test, with right-arm quick Kasun Rajitha — playing as a concussion substitute for Vishwa Fernando — leading the way with 4-60.

Bangladesh Squad: Mominul Haque (Capt), Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Najmul Hossain, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Mosaddek Hossain, Taijul Islam, Ebadot Hossain, Khaled Ahmed, Quazi Nurul Hasan, Rejaur Rahman, Shohidul Islam.

Sri Lanka squad: Dimuth Karunaratne (captain), Kamil Mishara, Oshada Fernando, Angelo Mathews, Kusal Mendis, Dhananjaya de Silva, Kamindu Mendis, Niroshan Dickwella, Dinesh Chandimal, Ramesh Mendis, Chamika Karunaratne, Suminda Lakshan, Kasun Rajitha, Vishwa Fernando, Asitha Fernando, Dilshan Madushanka, Praveen Jayawickrama, Lasith Embuldeniya. — AFP



Djokovic and Nadal bid to derail Alcaraz hype at French Open

PARIS: Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, with 41 Grand Slam titles between them, will attempt to derail the growing hype surrounding teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz at the French Open from Sunday.

All three have been placed in the top-half of the draw, meaning only one will make the Roland Garros final.

Defending champion Djokovic is seeded to face 13-time winner Nadal in the quarterfinals. Alcaraz is a potential semifinal opponent.

"I feel I am always in contention to fight for any Grand Slam

trophy," said Djokovic who arrives in Paris fired up by his inability to defend his Australian Open title in January when he was deported over his vaccination status.

"Reliving the memories from last year is something that obviously gives me goose bumps and motivation to try to replicate that."

Djokovic, who turns 35 on Sunday, captured a second French Open title in 2021.

He did it the hard way, coming from two sets down to beat Lorenzo Musetti in the last-16, winning an epic four-set semifinal



against Nadal before needing to overturn another two-set deficit to see off Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final.

Djokovic has played only five tournaments in 2022 but arrives in Paris buoyed by a sixth Italian Open title, becoming just the fifth man to win 1,000 career matches in the process.

It was his 38th Masters triumph, two more than Nadal at the top of the all-time list.

NADAL 'FEELS BETTER'

Djokovic starts his French Open against 94th-ranked Yoshihito

Nishioka of Japan.

Nadal has played down concerns over the chronic foot issue that resurfaced in Rome last week.

On Wednesday, he practised in front of thousands of fans at Roland Garros without any obvious discomfort.

"There is nothing to recover," Nadal told reporters on Friday. "What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices."

"I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here." — AFP



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Over 1,000 industrial units to be covered in annual survey



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

More than 1,000 industrial establishments distributed across the Sultanate of Oman will be covered in an annual survey due to commence on Sunday, May 22 under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The roughly two-month-long exercise will cover industrial and manufacturing plants operating within the industrial cities located in various governorates, ports and free zones, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, and other locations around the country.

It will be facilitated by the Invest Easy portal of the ministry, as part of a goal to update and digitalise information about the

The survey will support the delivery of the Industrial Strategy 2040. It will cover all plants set up with an investment of more than RO 5,000 and having a workforce of more than nine workers

Sultanate of Oman's expanding industrial and manufacturing base.

Eng Sami bin Salim al Sahib, Director General of Industry, said the information garnered from the survey will support the delivery of the Industrial Strategy 2040. It will cover all plants set up with an investment of more than RO 5,000 and having a workforce of more than nine workers.

Sultanate of Oman on track for sound economic recovery

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The Sultanate of Oman's financial performance during the first quarter of this year, as characterised by a budget surplus of over RO 300 million for the quarter, affirms that a national economic recovery is well under way, according to a number of experts contacted by Oman News Agency (ONA).

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, credited the brightening outlook to concerted government efforts, supported by buoyant international oil prices. The government actions, in particular, helped ensure that economic and financial conditions were conducive to sustained growth.

These efforts were complemented by earnings from high oil prices, which helped deliver a budgetary surplus that will be channelled towards sustained economic growth, notably by enhancing spending on priority development projects to achieve economic and social objectives, while easing public debt.

Describing the Q1 budgetary performance as reassuring, Dr Al Maawali said the improving fiscals will contribute to accelerating the pace of economic growth. They also underscore the positive fundamentals of the Omani economy notwithstanding ongoing global challenges, volatility in international energy margins, and disruptions in global supply chains.

The overall positive outlook also bodes well for the achievement of the medium-term fiscal balance plan for 2020-2024, especially in



directing those surpluses achieved in the reduction of public debt, stimulating economic recovery and increase spending on priority development projects.

At the same time, prospects for a comprehensive economic recovery have become better, especially for the sectors most affected by the pandemic, the official said. The State Budget recorded a surplus of about RO 357 million in Q1 2022, compared to a fiscal deficit of RO 751 million for the corresponding period of 2021.

Investment expenditure climbed 131 per cent in Q1 2022 to about RO 150 million compared to the same period of last year. This uptick in expenditure facilitated the spending of ministries and civil units.

The cost of debt servicing also amounted to RO 291.500 million for the quarter.

Also auguring well for improved economic growth is the combination of high oil prices and the increase in the Sultanate of Oman's crude oil production, which averaged 1,025K barrels per day in the first quarter.

As a result of these contributory factors, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have projected GDP growth of about 5.6 per cent this year, buoyed by oil sector growth of 8 per cent and non-oil sector growth of 2 per cent — the highest projections among the GCC countries.

According to Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri, Chairman of the board of directors of the Omani Economic Association, the positive performance of the state budget in the first quarter was also the result of a 70.2 per cent jump in net oil revenues which surged to RO 1.56 billion.

He noted in particular the importance of the improved fiscals to the government's goal of reducing its public debt, which would have a positive impact on the country's credit ratings by international agencies including Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's.

The improved ratings outlooks have contributed to reducing the cost of public debt, by renegotiating with lenders to take loans at lower interest rates and using them to pay the public debt.

Mustafa Ahmed Salman, CEO of United Securities, said the improved fiscal situation in the first quarter would help boost sentiment in local markets and the Muscat Stock Exchange. It would also have a beneficial knock-on effect on the general economy, by improving the living conditions of citizens, he added. — ONA

Thai energy firm signs pact to procure Oman crude

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Thai state-owned energy firm PTT has signed an agreement with its subsidiaries in the Sultanate of Oman for the procurement of around 9 million barrels of Oman crude annually.

Auttapol Rerkpiboon, President and Chief Executive Officer of PTT Public Company Limited (PTT), presided over the signing ceremony of the Sale and Purchase Contract of Oman crude between PTT and PTTEP Oman E&P Corporation (POC) and PTTEP MENA Limited.

The contract was signed by Disathat Panyarachun, Senior Executive Vice President, International Trading Business Unit is proud to enter into the Crude Sales Agreement

Unit, PTT, and Montri Rawanchaikul, Chief Executive Officer, PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP). Kris Imsang, Chief Operating Officer, Downstream Petroleum Business Group, PTT, also witnessed the signing.

Disathat Panyarachun, Senior Executive Vice President, International Trading Business Unit, PTT, said Oman crude is widely recognised as one of the most important crude benchmarks in the world.

With the accomplishment of the Joint Collaboration Agreement with PTTEP, PTT International Trading Business Unit is proud to enter into the Crude Sales Agreement



SUCH COLLABORATION GUARANTEES THE ENERGY SECURITY OF THAILAND AS WELL AS ENHANCES THE EFFICIENCY IN MANAGING SUPPLY/DEMAND BASE AND STRENGTHENS COMPETITIVENESS OF THE GROUP IN INTERNATIONAL TERRITORIES.

with PTTEP Oman E&P Corporation and PTTEP MENA Limited for the procurement of approximately 9 million barrels

per year of Oman crude oil.

"Besides, the collaboration is another milestone of successful synergy among PTT Group between upstream and downstream.

Furthermore, such collaboration guarantees the energy security of Thailand as well as enhances the efficiency in managing supply/demand base and strengthens competitiveness of the Group in international territories," the parent group said in a press statement.

Montri Rawanchaikul, Chief Executive Officer, PTTEP said PTTEP has investments in three producing projects in the Sultanate of Oman: the Oman Block 61 Project, the PDO (Block 6) Project and the

Mukhaizna (Block 53) Project — which are recognised as ones of the largest petroleum assets in the country.

Through investments in these three projects, PTTEP has established a strong foothold, creating the company's long-term growth in the Middle East as well as generating revenues for Thailand, it stated.

PTTEP has participating interests through its subsidiaries in the Oman Block 61 project, the PDO (Block 6) Project and the Mukhaizna (Block 53) Project at 20 per cent, 2 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively. By combining the equity portion of the three projects, PTTEP holds approximately 24,000 barrels per day of Oman crude oil.

NBO wins award for corporate banking innovation

MUSCAT: Continuing to raise the bar for banking, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has won the award for 'Best Innovation in Corporate Banking and Finance' at the MEA Finance Banking Technology Awards 2022.

The award recognises the bank's achievements in delivering smart banking solutions, namely its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform, online trade channel, the first-of-its-kind Merchant App, and the recently launched direct debit service, as well as its overall efforts to drive growth in an increasingly competitive regional market.

Using technology and security features, National Bank

of Oman's Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform allows companies to make instant transactions, payments and transfers, access account balances and complete transaction history on all company's accounts, delegate authority and restrict user's functions. All of these are accessible 24/7.

Meanwhile, the first-of-its-kind in Oman Merchant App allows merchants to receive payments through a dynamic QR code raised through the app.

Through Direct Debit Service, companies can now automate their monthly payments, eliminating the need for cheques. These services are regularly



updated to provide customers with a distinctive banking

experience. Mohammed bin Yahya al

Jabri, AGM, Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO

said, "Putting our clients first and offering tailored services that meet their evolving banking requirements are key objectives for us at NBO.

We continue to employ the latest innovations and technologies to ensure they have access to the best service possible. This prestigious award recognises our efforts and spurs us on to achieve even more when it comes to digitising our banking services and ultimately, creating value for the industry."

More details about NBO's range of products and services are available in-branch, online at www.nbo.om or by contacting the Call Centre on 24770000.

Ahlibank celebrates second batch of graduates from Etimad Programme

MUSCAT: Enhancing its pioneering role in developing the leadership skills of its employees, throughout empowering Omani youth, and supporting their career development. Eight employees of ahlibank, have recently graduated from the Etimad Leadership Development programme.

The employees were felicitated by the bank's senior management and the in-house Talent Management Committee (TMC). The ceremony was overseen by Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, along with several members of the executive management and senior staff of the bank.

The new graduates from the second batch of Etimad Programme symbolise the bank's growing focus on human capital development. Having fielded a team of eight employees in the programme last year, ahlibank followed it with a new batch of talented employees to demonstrate its alignment with the national objectives for youth empowerment and Omanisation.

As a National Leadership programme, Etimad aims to create qualified Omani leaders — middle and senior management — in the private sector. The



Programme represents a strategic collaboration between the public and private sectors in Oman, and ahlibank's participation reaffirms its commitment to upskill Omani team members for competitive roles in the future.

On the sidelines of the felicitation ceremony, the bank also conducted a discussion panel to exchange knowledge and expertise among the employees who enrolled into the Etimad Programme. The employees, occupied in leadership and supervisory positions, assured the team members that they would leverage their training to move up the career ladder and take on roles that define their professional development.

Presiding over the discussion, Said al Hatmi, outlined ahlibank's alliance with the government in

realising the larger objectives of Oman Vision 2040. He noted that the bank's undeterred focus has and will always be on achieving sustainable human resource development by raising the levels of education and enhancing the potentials of the local youth, in the regional and global employment market.

Complementing the government's efforts to build the national workforce with training and development initiatives like Etimad, he said it helped motivate private sector organisations to collectively forge the path ahead. He also thanked the bank's management team and TMC for their intuitive knowledge in assessing the needs of the market and responding to it with initiatives that refine employee skills and hone their talents.

OTC organises academic major fair and parents' forum

MUSCAT: Oman Tourism College (OTC) organised an exhibition for academic programmes and a forum for students' parents on May 18, at its facilities.

The event was in line with OTC's keenness to familiarise students and their parents with the academic programmes offered by the college and the job opportunities associated with them in the labour market and the promising opportunities in the tourism sector.

Commenting on the importance of holding such events, Mohammed bin Shamis al Rawahi, Head of Internships and Placement said, "The aim of the Academic Major Fair and Parents Forum was to introduce the foundation students to the programmes offered by OTC and the career opportunities associated with them in the future. This is because the tourism sector is one of the key focused economic sectors within Oman Vision 2040.

In this context, the forum sought to help students make the right decision that will determine their career path. In addition, it also stems from



the college's educational role in providing assistance and support to its students in choosing the academic major, in line with their aspirations and capabilities, which will then represent the beginning of their career path to form a successful future.

Alongside the fair, the event included a forum for parents to introduce them to the specialisations so they can help their children choose and build a successful future for them."

"OTC offers programmes that keep pace with the needs of the market and support the objectives and pillars of Oman's Vision 2040 as well as the Sultanate of Oman's tourism strategy in graduating Omani

workforce to lead the tourism sector.

Offered programmes include a Bachelor's degree with honours and a Diploma in four major disciplines: Tourism and Hospitality Management, Event Management, Tourism Marketing and Business Management. Each major is associated with a wide range of promising opportunities in the tourism sector," he added.

The event saw a speech on the academic programmes of the college, presentation of success stories from the college's graduates, competitions for attendees and a tour to introduce the college's specialisations and student projects.

HCG Cancer Hospital successfully performs autologous BMT

MUSCAT: HCG Cancer Hospital, one of the leading cancer chain hospitals in India, successfully performed autologous Bone Marrow Transplantation (BMT) of a 2-year paediatric patient from Oman who was suffering from medulloblastoma, a cancerous brain tumour that starts in the lower part of the brain.

The expert team was led by Dr Intesar Mehdi, Director and Head of the Department, Senior Consultant — Paediatric Hematology-Oncology & BMT, and a team of doctors at HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru.

Patient Saad (name changed) was referred to HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru from Oman with a medical history of being diagnosed to have infant

medulloblastoma brain tumour in May 2021 and had undergone surgery at a hospital in Oman for the removal of tumour. He also underwent VP shunt insertion. Post removal of tumour, the patient was administered chemotherapy according to protocol. It was completed in November 2021.

In such cases where patients are young radiotherapy cannot be given and hence, they will be treated with high dose chemotherapy with autologous BMT. After which he has been referred to HCG Cancer Hospital Bengaluru for autologous bone marrow transplantation due to the case being a complex paediatric case, and they wanted expertise to take care of the child.

MUSCAT: United Engineering Services (UES), the engineering solutions arm of MB Group of Companies has been awarded by Masirah Oil Limited (Oman Branch-Block 50) a contract for the provision of offshore production facility and services.

The offshore production facility and associated services have been designed, fabricated, and commissioned fully by United Engineering Services within three months with the capability to process the client's current and projected daily productions.

Tariq al Barwani, MD of the United Engineering Services, said, "UES leveraged its engineering competencies and 40 years of experience to provide engineering solutions to our valued client



MOL in excellent time and to the highest standards. We're proud of the value we are bringing to Oman's offshore oil and gas efforts."

David Pilgrim, General Manager of Masirah Oil Limited, said "We are pleased to award this contract to United Engineering Services, which has a long history

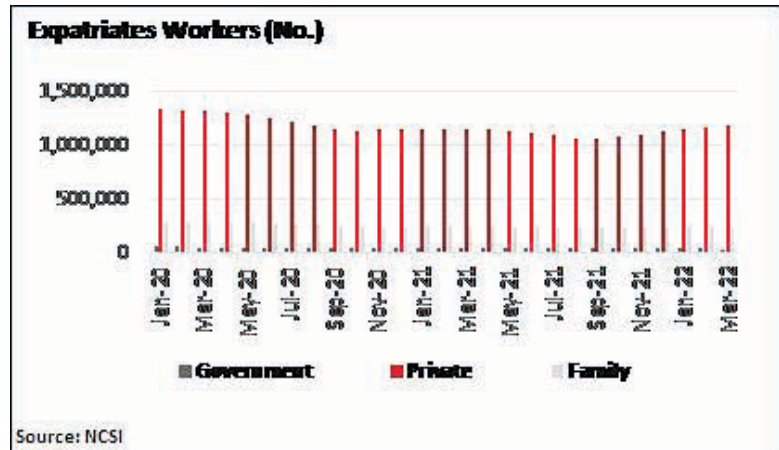
of supporting the Oil and Gas industry. MOL will leverage this equipment to continue optimising our field recovery."

Mahfooth al Shaikh, GM-Business Development & Contracts, said: "UES was and continues to be a reliable premier provider of Engineering Solutions to the market. We are active in

the Oil and Gas, power and water generation, mining, and marine sectors, and look forward to continuing to provide value to our clients in these fields.

We are proud that our operations team was able to design, engineer, manufacture, and function-test the offshore package in within three months while achieving more than +95% In Country Values with regard to the design, engineering, manufacturing/fabrications and staffing of the offshore package utilising UES capabilities. Special thanks go to David Lindsay, Eddie Richie, Farid Aggoun, Supply Chain, Engineering and Fabrications team, HR and all the team members for the great effort"

MSX closes the week higher, supported by industrial sector



MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.26 per cent. The industrial index ended the week higher by 0.19 per cent. The Financial Index and service index closed down 0.30 per cent and 0.29 per cent respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed higher by 0.22 per cent.

Takaful Oman Insurance announced that it has received regulatory approval from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) for the Rights Issue of 150,000,000 Offer Shares at a price of Baizas 41 per share (consisting of issue price of Baizas 40 and Baiza 1 towards issue expenses). The Board of Directors of the Company has resolved that the Record Date of the Rights Issue shall be May 22, 2022. Oman Fisheries Co announced to its shareholders that a commercial fishing agreement has been reached with the Irish company Atlantic Dawn in May 2022, one of the leading companies in small pelagic, for a period of three years. The partners aim to utilise the fishing quotas granted to the company by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in order to secure sustainable supplies in addition to enhancing export operations.

Accordingly, Atlantic Dawn will bring a small pelagic fishing vessel targeting 30,000 metric tonnes of small pelagic that, if achieved, will result in improvement in financial performance and margins. It is anticipated that the ships will start fishing in Omani waters by the next fishing season in 2022. Total expatriate worker numbers rose 2 per cent MoM and 3 per cent YOY in March'22. Private sector expatriates rose by 3 per cent YoY in March'22, while family expatriates also rose 3 per cent YoY. Government expatriates continue to decline (fell 13 per cent YoY). The

total number of expatriates stood at 1.49m at end-Mar'22, forming 32 per cent of Oman's population and 82 per cent of total expatriate population. Total expatriate workers continue to remain below the numbers in Jan'20 (proxy for pre-covid), but the recent trend of growth is encouraging, especially for its impact on economic output and sectors like real estate, consumer goods and services, telecoms etc.

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), which regulates the electricity sector, among other public utility services in the Sultanate of Oman, plans to shortly commission an audit of licensed power transmission and distribution companies to ensure that consumers are not impacted by poor quality power supply.

The audit will form the basis of a new 'Quality of Power Supply Regulatory Framework' to help monitor compliance by transmission and distribution licensees with the technical requirements of quality of supply across their networks.

A number of consultants are participating in a competitive tender launched by APSR for the selection of a qualified firm to undertake the proposed audit, as well as to develop the regulatory framework around it. Interested bidders have until June 6, 2022 to submit their proposals in this regard. Islamic banking is continuing to grow rapidly in Oman driven by growing awareness about Sharia-compliant products, strong retail demand and supportive regulations. Total assets of the Sultanate of Oman's Islamic banks and windows grew by 10.7 per cent year-on-year to hit RO6bn mark in the first quarter of 2022, according to the Central Bank of Oman's data released on Sunday.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Oman's second iron ore pelletising project to come up in Sohar Port

NEW CAPACITY: Output earmarked for integrated steel complex of Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel Mill

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Finnish mining and metallurgical industries specialist Metso Outotec has announced that it has been awarded a contract for the supply of key machinery for a new iron ore pelletising project planned for development at Sohar Port and Freezone.

The Helsinki-headquartered machinery manufacturer, which is also a leading global supplier of grate kiln-type pelletising plants, said it has won a contract worth around EUR 33 million (approx. \$31m) for the manufacture and installation of a 6 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) pelletising plant at the industrial port.

The client has been identified as Vulcan Pelletizing LLC, which will supply all of its output to Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel Mill LLC, which owns and operates an integrated steel complex at Sohar Port.

When operational, by around the end of 2023, Vulcan's plant will be the second such iron ore pelletising project to be in operation in Sohar Port & Freezone. The industrial port is also home to a giant pelletising project of Vale Oman Pelletizing



Company, an Oman-Brazilian joint venture majority owned by Vale, one of the world's largest mining companies.

In addition to a pelletising plant of 9 mtpa capacity, Vale Oman also operates a giant stockyard and distribution centre with a throughput of 40 million tonnes per year.

Metso Outotec says its contract covers the supply of a grate kiln-type pelletising plant, which typically produce pellets of more consistent quality at a lower cost than other types of pelletising

systems. In addition to the core machinery, the hardware will also include the travelling gate, rotary kiln and annular cooler.

"This is the third order for a 6 mtpa grate-kiln pelletising plant within the last 16 months. Metso Outotec is proud to be the Vulcan group's selected partner in iron ore pelletising, and we look forward to propelling the Vulcan group to be a global leader with world-class pellet products," Chris Urban, Vice President, Heat Transfer Products at Metso Outotec, noted in a press statement.

The Finnish firm, which earned revenues of around EUR 4.2 billion in 2021, has installed more than 50 grate kiln type pelletising system globally with a combined capacity of 130 mtpa.

Significantly, the new plant will augment Sohar Port's importance as a metallurgical hub, alongside its sizable petrochemicals, logistics and food clusters. The industrial port and adjoining free zone has already attracted investments in a world-scale aluminium smelter, ferrochrome smelters, and other metals-based ventures.

Russia halts natural gas supplies to Finland

HELSINKI: Russia on Saturday stopped providing natural gas to neighbouring Finland, which has angered Moscow by applying for Nato membership, after the Nordic country refused to pay supplier Gazprom in roubles.

Following Russia's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has asked clients from "unfriendly countries" — including EU member states — to pay for gas in roubles, a way to sidestep Western financial sanctions against its central bank.

Gazprom said in a statement on Saturday that it had "completely stopped gas deliveries" as it had not received rouble payments from Finland's state-owned energy company Gasum "by the end of



Gas pipes at the Gasum plant are pictured in Raikkola, Imatra, Finland. — AFP

the working day on May 20".

Gazprom said it had supplied 1.49 billion cubic metres of natural gas to Finland in 2021, equal to

about two thirds of the country's gas consumption.

However, natural gas accounts for around eight

per cent of Finland's energy. Gasum said it would make up for the shortfall from other sources through the Balticconnector pipeline, which links Finland to Estonia, and assured that filling stations would run normally.

"Natural gas supplies to Finland under Gasum's supply contract have been cut off," the company said in a statement. In April, Gazprom Export demanded that future payments in the supply contract be made in roubles instead of euros.

Gasum rejected the demand and announced on Tuesday it was taking the issue to arbitration. Gazprom Export said it would defend its interests in court by any "means available". — AFP

Huawei showcases next generation of cutting-edge products

MUSCAT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (BG) has announced a variety of Huawei's cutting edge hardware products at the Huawei flagship product launch 2022, including: Huawei Mate Xs 2, Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro, Huawei Watch FIT 2, Huawei Band 7, Huawei Watch D and Huawei S-TAG which aim to further simplify the daily lives of consumers.

Along with its hardware products, Huawei also features its world-renowned Health App which has aided consumers all around the world lead a healthy lifestyle. Huawei Consumer Business



Group always puts consumers at the centre of what it does.

At the launch event, Richard

Yu, CEO of the Consumer Business Group, highlighted Huawei's continuous dedication

to optimising user experience to fulfil its strategy and vision of an All-Scenario Seamless AI Life.

Introducing the Huawei Mate Xs 2, Huawei's brand-new flagship foldable smartphone: With a weight of only 255 g and a thickness of only 5.4 mm2, the phone features the first 3D Fibreglass Design to achieve a fusion of aesthetic colours and textures.

To achieve an ultra-flat surface which is minimalistic and natural, the phone uses the Falcon Wing Design.

Through that, the movement of the hinge and screen is precisely synchronised via the fixed-length

linkage control. For the phone's screen, the use of Huawei's self-developed innovative industry-first composite screen to absorb all shock and buffer makes the Huawei Mate Xs 2 ultra-reliable.

The Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro, available in Titanium and Ceramic editions, and comes with a new interface design, premium materials, an ultra-clear large screen and a range of watch faces to choose from.

The latest Huawei's flagship smartwatch makes it easy to support a healthy lifestyle, with ECG analysis, Arterial stiffness detection and TruSeen 5.0+ data monitoring technology,

allowing for accurate heart health measurement and blood oxygen monitoring.

With a 1.43-inch AMOLED high-definition colour display, displaying 466 x 466 high-definition resolution, the watch produces clear and precise information on screen.

To ensure comfort and durability, the Huawei Watch GT 3 Pro uses a sapphire glass lens and a ceramic back case. The skin-friendly materials allow for automatic detection of any change in temperature. With fashionable characteristics, the Huawei Watch FIT 2 connect style and functionality together.

IMF bailout ‘indispensable’ for Tunisia

Tunisia has no choice but to seek a bailout from the International Monetary Fund as it battles a surging budget deficit made worse by the war in Ukraine, its central bank governor said.

As the conflict has sent global commodities prices spiralling, the import-dependent North African country has adjusted its budget deficit projections from 6.7 per cent to 9.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, Marouane Abassi told a conference in the coastal business hub of Sfax.

He blamed the jump on “the Russian-Ukrainian crisis” which has dramatically bumped up prices of both wheat and energy imports, on which Tunisia depends heavily.

To prevent these costs hitting the poorest households in a country where the minimum monthly wage is equivalent to just 125 euros, the Tunisian state subsidises bread and fuel. But the country is mired in debt equal to almost 100 per cent of GDP after years of feeble growth, and is no longer able to borrow on global capital markets.

A new IMF deal — the third in a decade — is therefore “indispensable” for Tunisia, Abassi said. “It would allow access to financing at reasonable costs” and pave the way to loans “from other lenders and the international financial markets.”

After the Covid-19 pandemic dealt Tunisia an “unprecedented” 8.7 per cent hit to GDP in 2020, the country managed a “modest” comeback last year with growth of just over three per cent, he said, forecasting 2.6 per cent growth this year.

The Ukraine war has hiked grain prices in a country where bread is a vital part of the diet and where historic hikes on the price of a loaf have sparked riots.

The conflict has also sent oil and gas prices surging, with a barrel of oil costing over \$110 — far above the \$75 per barrel projected in Tunisia’s 2022 budget.

It has impacted Tunisia’s exports, hitting demand in the country’s main export market, the European Union.

As well as a grinding economic downturn, Tunisia has faced years of political deadlock culminating in a power grab by President Kais Saied in July last year. — AFP


The deal would allow access to financing at reasonable costs and pave the way to loans from other lenders and the international financial markets

MAROUANE ABASSI
Central bank governor



HARVESTING SEASON
An aerial view shows labourers harvesting durum wheat, before roasting it to produce freekeh, in a field in the Syrian town of Binnish in the province of Idlib in northwestern Syria. — AFP

Venture Capital’s risk appetite in bear market



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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

OFTEN SUPPORTED BY A BROKER, RETAILS INVESTORS ARE RARELY LOOKING AT THEIR DAILY PERFORMANCE, AIMING MOSTLY AT LONG TERM GAINS

Nobody likes to lose money. That is a fact. But when the bear market hits, many retail investors will inevitably suffer. A retail investor is — by definition — the average person that in the spare time places some savings on one or more stock exchanges, hoping that the price of the shares will eventually go up.

Often supported by a broker, retail investors are rarely looking at their daily performance, aiming mostly at long term gains.

Similarly, retail investors in cryptocurrency usually purchase and sell currencies at a spot price. The problem with spot trading, is that retail investors miss out on all of the profit opportunities available when the market goes down. For such an endeavour, traders need to use derivative instruments, which — among others functions — allow to short investment positions. So, when the market goes down, profits are available to grab.

During the past 2 weeks, and continuing these very days, both the traditional stock market and the crypto currencies are facing a downwards trend that seems to have

gobbled up all the profits generated over the past 2 years.

However, those that seem to be hit the worst, are retail traders. In my latest column we have directed the Luna / Terra fiasco. On the other hand, when it comes to professional investors, which are able to trade, hedge, and speculate virtually 24/7 with all sorts of existing tools, a bear market could represent a superb profit opportunity.

Yesterday at dinner, I was casually attempting to explain my job to my cousin. When I mentioned that I was involved in crypto and blockchain, he immediately said: “Oh, I heard that things are bad now...”

That is the typical retail investor’s mindset. Market goes up: good. Market goes down: bad. But in the eyes of a professional trader, as well as in Venture Capital, the equation above does not hold much water. On the contrary, the opposite can equally be true.

Venture Capital tends to look at the long term impact that a project can create on the entire ecosystem. The way I put it down for my cousin goes this way: when a company builds a highway, even if the company goes bust, the highway remains intact.

Moreover, the highway now connects points that were not previously linked, thus offering many more opportunities. In this simplified analogy, the retail investor would mourn the company’s bankruptcy, the professional investor would have profited by shorting the share, while the Venture Capital would start warming up the engines to invest in companies able to use the highway.

“We are confident that the market will react. Many innovations have bloomed in blockchain and web 3.0,” commented Andrei Grachev, Leader at VRM Ventures. “We are committed not only to provide funds, but also to offer strategic support to the projects that VRM is investing into.”

According to Dragonfly Capital: “Lots of talent will flood onto the market in the next 3 months. The bargaining power between talent and companies will shift closer to normal. The market will be less speculative for a while, especially as retail investors are no longer driving as much flows. Many narratives will get reset. We will not see the same old stories play out.”

Overall, the industry’s sentiment seems positive, despite the losses suffered by retail investors.

China’s golden tech grab



ANGELA HUYUE ZHANG

The author is Director of the Centre for Chinese Law at the University of Hong Kong.

Hopes are rising that China’s embattled tech giants will finally get a reprieve from the severe legal and regulatory crackdown that has wiped out over \$1.5 trillion of their shares’ value.

Amid mounting challenges to economic growth, some Chinese government officials have signalled a possible shift to a new strategy: the acquisition of a 1% equity stake — or a so-called golden share — in major tech firms. But will this approach really brighten the outlook for China’s tech industry?

A new approach is certainly needed. The authorities’ effort to discipline Chinese tech firms over the last 18 months has been clumsy and highly costly, featuring a raft of opaque and unpredictable regulations.

The suspension of Ant Group’s

initial public offering in late 2020, the record antitrust fines imposed on Alibaba and Meituan, and the surprise cybersecurity investigation into Didi Chuxing all spooked investors and sent share prices tumbling.

China’s government now seems to hope that the golden-share arrangement will give it the information and influence it craves while avoiding the economic costs of ham-fisted regulations.

A 1% equity stake would normally enable the state investor to appoint a director to the board, ensuring insider access to important corporate decisions and the power to veto them. This would go a long way towards assuaging government fears of the “disorderly expansion of capital.”

At the same time, China’s leaders apparently hope that the arrangement would help tech firms

manage their regulatory risk, as it would enable them to ensure their alignment with the state’s agenda and policies.

Any disagreement would be handled internally at the firm, eliminating the need for the state to intervene after the fact and offering greater clarity and certainty to investors.

This might have helped the ride-hailing giant Didi Chuxing. When the firm decided to list its shares on the New York Stock Exchange, China’s powerful Internet regulator, the Cyberspace Administration of China, advised it to conduct a cybersecurity review first.

The golden-share arrangement thus appears to be a win-win for the government and tech firms. And steps have already been taken in this direction. In April 2020, Weibo — a social-media platform with over 500 million active users —

sold a 1% stake to an entity owned by the China Internet Investment Fund, which was established by the CAC and the Ministry of Finance in 2017.

Since then, the CIIF has invested in more than 40 Chinese tech firms.

While most of these investments do not appear to be golden-share arrangements, the CIIF or its affiliates have taken a board seat in at least two companies, ByteDance and Weibo.

But, when it comes to enabling firms to avoid regulatory hassles, this arrangement is hardly a silver bullet. For starters, the golden share empowers the state investor to veto only decisions that are deliberated by the board; it would have little to no impact on the company’s day-to-day operations. Yet those are the activities that regulation tends to target.

Approaches to issues like

competition with rivals, treatment of employees and gig workers, the distribution of value among platform participants, and the collection, processing, and sharing of user data are unlikely to be vetted by the firm’s board. But they all fall within the ambit of regulation.

Moreover, regulatory powers in China are divided among a number of government departments and agencies, which often engage in fierce competition with one another. Direct or indirect ownership by one government department may do little to protect the firm from intervention by other government departments, especially if the ownership stake is held by a lower-tier government entity.

A regulatory body might even target a firm in which it has an ownership stake.

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BREAKING NEWS

Making a business out of painting anime's on everyday objects

In 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, young Omani artist Taif al Daroushi decided to embark on a business journey where she drew animated characters and convert them into digital art and eventually printed them as stickers to be used by students and other anime-loving individuals into everyday items... **P20**

Senegal festival brings contemporary African art to the streets

INTRIGUING PYRAMIDS and a huge yellow dog have cropped up on the Senegalese capital's seafront.

The enormous exhibits are part of the much-anticipated Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art, which opens on Thursday and promises to "break down" gallery walls by bringing modern art to the streets of Senegal.

It's a fresh idea for the 14th Biennale as the organisers set out to challenge art's "elitist image".

The exhibition is all about moving "the artist's studio to the street", they say — a "plea for art to be more present in public spaces".

By the ocean, people silently approach

two pyramid-shaped mausoleums. Dozens of earthen faces appear in piles in their interior and on their outside walls, their eyes closed. Some are screaming.

A line of shoes leads away from the tombs and towards the cliff edge of Dakar's corniche, as though they're falling into the sea.

Senegalese artist Yakhya Ba's work is a powerful study of the agony faced by migrants and their families.

A little further on, others take selfies by Egyptian artist Khaled Zaki's massive dog sculpture. He wanted his work to delight children — and draw attention to the problem of stray canines in the Senegalese capital.

AFRICA AT THE CROSSROADS

The Biennale this year will showcase works from more than 2,500 artists across 85 countries.

It is to feature some 300 exhibits in the capital and nearby islands of Ngor and Goree, as well as around 100 in other towns and countries of the diaspora.

The exhibition was postponed due to Covid in 2020, but the 2018 event attracted almost 250,000 visitors, including 50,000 from abroad.

For this year's edition, artistic director El Hadji Malick Ndiaye asked 17 artists to produce monumental works to interact with locations along Senegal's coast, from fishing villages to universities and prisons.

This year's theme is "Ndaffa" — the forge in Wolof — and "the construction of new models".

"This Biennale is symbolically strong because it's after the Covid-19 crisis that shook and tested African countries," Ndiaye said.

"Africa is at the crossroads of several changes. There are movements for a new appropriation of African heritage, questions about the CFA franc and the autonomy of African countries, unrest in several countries, and the emergence of new citizen consciousness."

He said participating artists had been invited "to have their own points of view on all this" and "forge new ways of thinking".



DREAMLIKE WORK

A former courthouse hosts the Biennale's international exhibition, which displays the work of 59 artists from 28 countries, including 16 African countries and 12 countries of the diaspora.

There's dreamlike work from Senegalese painter and contemporary art sensation Omar Ba, video pieces courtesy of South African artist Sethembile Msezane, and space-age creations from Franco-Togolese-Senegalese Caroline Gueye — who is also an astrophysicist.

Other exhibits include a "forest" of 343

armless sculptures by Senegalese artist Ousmane Dia, a fierce critic of inequality who is calling for a new order "that focuses more on human dignity".

There will also be a seminar, organised by Senegalese writer Felwine Sarr, discussing the restitution of African heritage.

The Biennale, which runs until June 21, comes as war rages in Ukraine.

Artistic director Ndiaye said art was vital to encourage reflection in such fateful, changing times.

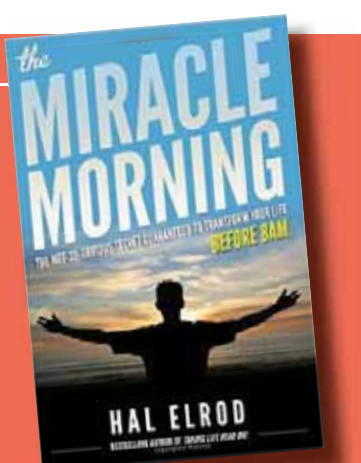
"When weapons crackle, we must make sure culture does too," he said. — **AFP**

READ

THE MIRACLE MORNING

BY HAL ELROD

This method of self-improvement consists of waking up early in the morning to set up a daily morning routine, through 6 activities called life savers.



ART SCENE

Claude Monet's Le Grand Canal et Santa Mariadella Salute has gone under the hammer for \$ 56.6 million, making it the most valuable view of Italy by any artist sold at auction. The piece has joined a series of Monet masterworks that have sold for more than \$50 million in consecutive New York sales at Sotheby's auction house. The previous record sale for any view of Italy was achieved by Turner's Rome, From Mount Aventine, which sold at Sotheby's in London for \$47.6 million in 2014. — **dpa**



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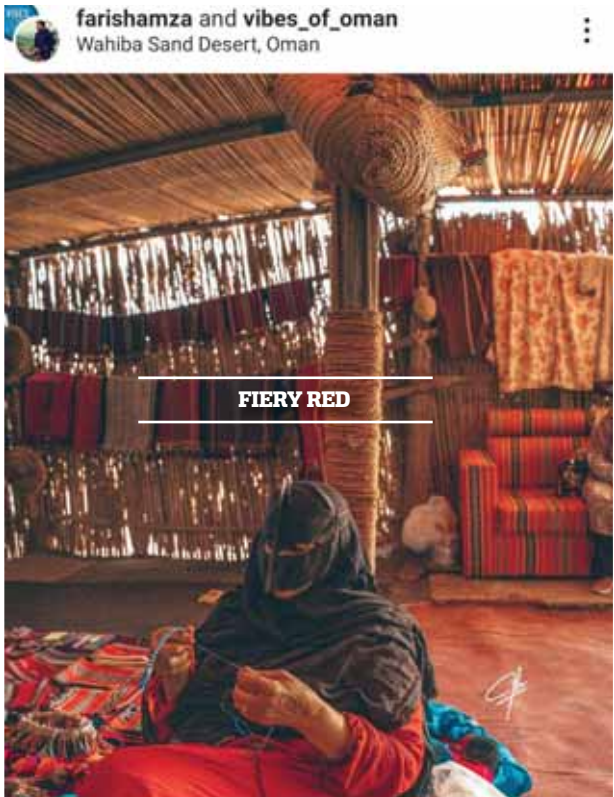
Rob McClure, centre, in the lead role of the musical "Mrs. Doubtfire" at the Stephen Sondheim Theater in New York. — **NYC**





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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Algerian rapper Soolking plays Harlem's Apollo during debut US tour



AS HIS MERENGUE-INFLECTED single "Suavemente" once again topped France's songs chart, Algerian rapper Soolking was stateside, delighting fans and wooing new followers with his blend of rap and Maghrebian folk music.

Already acclaimed in the Francophone world, the Algerian rapper Soolking this year set his sights on North America, where he played historic venues including New York's Apollo and the Globe Theatre in Los Angeles.

"I never thought that one day I would come here to sing," the artist born Abderrauuf Derradji told AFP backstage ahead of his set at Harlem's esteemed venue, which launched the careers of icons including Billie Holiday and Aretha Franklin, and where James Brown recorded a groundbreaking live album.

"It's a mythical hall like Paris' Olympia... where so many legendary artists have performed," said Soolking, wearing oval sunglasses and a black beanie.

"It's an honour for me; it's cool."

Born and raised in a suburb of Algiers, the 32-year-old was born to a percussionist father and at a young age began playing music and learning dance.

He first moved to France in 2008, but returned to Algeria to be in the rap group Africa Jungle, with whom he released two albums: "Ched Rohék" and "Eclipse."

The artist returned to France several years later, launching a solo career in 2016, adopting the moniker Soolking and starting to play small venues and drop music online.

He went viral shortly thereafter after performing his song "Guerilla" — a track about his experience immigrating without papers — on the popular French radio Show "Planet Rap."

'REPRESENTING FOR ALGERIA'

With two successful albums under his belt and another on the way, Soolking embarked this spring on a North American tour that along with New York and Los Angeles included dates in Montreal, Houston, Chicago and Washington.

The artist who sings in both French and Arabic is interested in expanding his global reach but isn't terribly concerned with where his fans come from: "The most important thing is my fans."

"In my country of origin, there's people who listen to me and people who don't listen to me," the rapper continued. "I'm going to look for what's human, because in the end, music is feeling."

As evidenced by his first New York show, Soolking had broken ground in the United States long before he played any of its stages: fans danced and sang along at the Apollo, waving Algerian flags and illuminating their phones.

"It's just amazing to see someone from our country in New York City and their name in lights," said 26-year-old Sarah Hammadi, one of four cousins who travelled from New Jersey to catch the show.

"It's amazing — he's really representing for Algeria."

"It just feels like you're back at home," seconded her cousin Dilia, 18. "He's such a pop icon in our country... it just brings warmth to our heart." — AFP

ART SCENE

Ukraine street artist Gamlet 'under orders' to paint Kharkiv



A BLACK BULLETPROOF vest bearing a Ukrainian military crest, a tourniquet on his vest. Every painting is signed with its name.

"You're staying in Ivano-Frankivsk for too long. We need you here (in Kharkiv) — you have to paint," the commander told him.

The 35-year-old Ukrainian has remained in his hometown of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-biggest city, to paint its walls even amid the destruction of Russia's invasion.

Recognised internationally with exhibitions and paintings from Lima to London, Gamlet has put aside his globe-trotting success and now uses his talent to support the home front during the war.

"If I move I can have my career somewhere abroad. But it will only be comfort. In Ukraine, I have the feeling that I'm building the country," he said.

"All the city is my house, all the city (is) my gallery," the bald artist added, with four silver rings glinting on his left hand.

He writes the words "hellish hospitality" on the latest addition to his Kharkiv portfolio, a combination of Molotov cocktails and a petrol can drawn in a city centre scarred by Russian artillery fire.

'YOU HAVE TO PAINT'

At the start of the war, Gamlet spent a night in a Kharkiv metro station and 10 days at his parents' house before moving with relatives to Ivano-Frankivsk in relatively untouched western Ukraine.

He spent two months there raising funds for humanitarian aid and Ukraine's army, saying he sold a painting for two night vision devices.

Then came a telephone call

from the commander of the Khartia Battalion, whose insignia he proudly sports on his vest. Every painting is signed with its name.

"You're staying in Ivano-Frankivsk for too long. We need you here (in Kharkiv) — you have to paint," the commander told him.

Gamlet believes working in the street, where he can paint when and where he wants, is more important for public morale than getting exposure in galleries.

"I see people smiling and happy because they see a destroyed building which they loved but smile when they see painting," he explained.

Gamlet also sees his work as increasing access to art, which he prioritises above simply earning money from selling pictures.

"Street art, it's the story for people who have never been to (an) exhibition or who don't visit museums, but they know my work in the street."

Gamlet hopes that his works, painted on wood covering the windows and exteriors of damaged buildings, will be given to a future war museum or sold for a good cause.

Only one of the eight paintings he completed in the eastern city of Izium survived battles with Russian forces in recent weeks, he added, while other works were lost in Berdyansk and Mariupol.

But he says he does not see his art as a weapon against Russia.

"What I'm doing helps real fighters with weapons to uphold this country. This country, apart from people and cities, has artists, musicians, and culture they love. This inspires them (soldiers) to fight and defend."

BRUSHES WITH THE LAW

This is the second time that Gamlet has stayed in Kharkiv for political reasons.

He was ready to move to Paris in 2013 before the pro-Western Maidan revolution toppled Ukraine's pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich in 2014.

That proved to be a watershed moment. "In 2014 I started painting with a new powerful spirit. I understood I was Ukrainian," he said.

Gamlet started painting Kharkiv's walls when he was 17 — and his artistic activities earned him many brushes with the law.

He said he would spend as much money on "corruption" to leave police custody as he did on paint.

After yet another arrest, Gamlet decided to challenge the officers.

"I told them, 'What are you doing? Don't you have other things to do? Crimea was annexed and you found (a) terrorist like me.' Then they stopped bothering," he recalled.

Since then, he says he rejected an offer from the city to become its official painter in order to remain independent.

Gamlet studied art at university and art school for eight years. But he decided to do away with colours 12 years ago, preferring the minimalism of black and white in his work.

"I don't want to paint beautiful paintings, but great ideas," he explained.

"In the world everything is smeared and it's hard to understand if it's good or bad. In painting I can make it black and white." — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

Beyond the Châteaux: New Escapes in France's Loire Valley



THIS WAS MY third visit to the Loire Valley from my home in Paris, and the whole fairy tale experience felt tired. Little beyond a nearby converted hotel had changed. Not the exasperated guide going through the motions, or the throngs of tourists dropped off by the busload and herded through each room at a fast clip. The dumbfounding beauty stretching the length of the Loire River was the same too, which is ultimately what salvaged the trip.

A lack of change does not have to be a bad thing: The UNESCO Heritage-protected region, which drew 9 million yearly visitors to its cultural sites and 1 million cyclists before the pandemic, has been beloved for decades for its castles and the rolling vineyards that produce what oenophiles consider France's most diverse selection of wine. But it has arguably leaned too heavily on that past, reliant on what appeared to be an endless stream of travellers interested only in château-hopping and bicycling. With all of the Loire's dramatic landscapes and rising culinary stars, was this the best it could offer?

It is a question that local chefs, hoteliers, entrepreneurs and regional leaders were asking themselves even before the coronavirus hit, setting their sights on the area's reinvention. By the time I returned in October 2021 to meet some of them, the region's evolving identity was palpable.

"Our cycle route and châteaux have always been popular, but the fairy tale needed updating," said François Bonneau, president of the Centre-Val de Loire, the regional council overseeing the Loire Valley. "The French traveller has long associated it with field trips they took as schoolchildren, while the foreign traveller has a plethora of other destinations in the country to choose from. We needed to better express the region's identity in its entirety."

The pandemic, he continued, only reinforced the need to promote the region differently as visits to the valley's major sites dropped by 43% in 2020 and 32% in 2021 — unsettling numbers for a region where tourism makes up 5% of the local GDP, or

around 3.4 billion euros.

Rethinking what Loire Valley travel should be for the future has meant shifting the focus from fairy tale castle crawls to experiences anchored more firmly in nature, food and the arts, all while continuing to celebrate the region's unique terroir.

That was evident from one of my first stops, at the 15th-century Château de Rivau. Patricia Laigneau, a co-owner, has been working to attract a broader audience for the storybook castle and sought-after wedding venue through food, devoting the last few years to the produce grown and cooked on-site.

Her two organic kitchen gardens were half-moon-shaped and overflowing with forgotten or nearly extinct varieties of regional vegetables such as Berry sucrine, violet celery and more than 43 varieties of colourful gourds. It is considered an official conservatory for Loire Valley produce by the Pôle BioDom/Centre, a regional center for preserving local biodiversity. The homegrown produce, in addition to a host of herbs and edible flowers, have been used for years in Rivau's no-frills café. But now they are the foundation of the menu at Jardin Secret, Laigneau's new 20-seat fine dining restaurant set up beneath a glass canopy and surrounded by rose bushes. She brought on chef Nicolas Gaulandeau, native to the region, to highlight the local bounty through dishes ranging from squash served with pickles and smoked paprika to roasted rack of lamb with vegetables from the garden.

"Not only were our guests asking for something more, I saw the restaurant as an opportunity to show that the châteaux of the Loire can be champions of French gastronomy," Laigneau said.

Celebrating the land and its food is central to other new properties in the region.

In July 2020, Anne-Caroline Frey opened Loire Valley Lodges on 750 acres of private forestland in Touraine.

"Things have been very slow to change here, so of course the idea seemed wild," said the former art dealer. "But we were fully booked almost instantly."

— NYT

art & life

Local Scene

f t i y @omanobserver

SUNDAY | MAY 22 | 2022

Making a business out of painting animes on everyday objects

By Mazoun al Ghailani
Instagram: @mazoun_alghailani

She grew up in an era where anime and animation were a big trend and artist Taif al Daroushi has used both her passion for anime and creating art.

Taif is a general nursing student that took digital art as a hobby to occupy her spare time. Growing up watching anime, she's quite fascinated as to how these characters not just exude life but are a joy to a lot of people her age. She realised that there are not a lot of artists in Oman that do this kind of thing so she decided to put her love for art and anime into one business combo.

In 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, Taif decided to embark on a business journey where she drew animated characters and convert them into digital art and eventually printed them as stickers to be used by students and other anime-loving individuals into everyday items.

"I drew my first digital drawing because of a request from my cousin who asked me to draw the Suri traditional dress on a character. The result was interesting since it was my first experience. After a series of failed attempts, I finally landed an art that I loved. From here, the idea of creating my private business account began to paint and sell stickers," Taif said.

Accuracy in the drawing is the most important for Taif. Especially since digital drawing needs more focus and dedication. Due to the lack of an electronic pen for drawing, she tried making them with her finger despite the many challenges these poses.

"The benefits of a painting by finger help me to relax and increase my focus. Psychologically, it makes me feel a sense of accomplishment and pride but it was fun," Taif said.

"I draw with my mobile phone using 'ibis paint x' drawing program. For the specifications, I prefer a widescreen phone so that I can draw more freely," she added.

Painting strengthens Taif's personality in terms of attention and focus. She became more competitive to focus on her own style of drawing because she is surrounded by many competitors in this field (digital drawing and distributions).

Taif paints on paper cups as well. She said, "I saw the idea on Instagram accounts and decided to implement it in my own way, as well as after my parents encouraged me."

She paints cups with watercolour and the drawing depends on the customer's request. The difficulty that she faces during painting is the curvature of the cup since it is not as flat as paper, which makes it difficult to draw on it. Also drawing some orders that she's never drawn before makes it a little tricky to implement.

"I can say the art of painting on cups is almost suitable as a home project for every painter if he/she tries and starts in this field, it may stumble at first, or the turnout may be almost non-existent, but with training, determination and perseverance, this project can become something you enjoy, love, innovate and earn something from it, even if it is simple," she shared.

