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MURRAY
HOPEFUL OF
BEING FIT FOR
WIMBLEDON



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NAJD MASTERPLAN
TO CREATE NEW
FOOD-BASKET
FOR OMAN



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A DEDICATION OF
TWO WOMEN TO
SUPPORT LOCAL
ARTISTS IN OMAN



MUSCAT

EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN YEMEN CEASEFIRE

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Tuesday received Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen. The meeting discussed latest developments and the efforts exerted to enhance and sustain the truce in the Republic of Yemen. It also touched on backing the endeavours and enhancing trust and constructive dialogue among all Yemeni parties. The two sides affirmed their backing to the efforts of Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, aimed at ending the war and engage in a comprehensive political process.

DETAILS ON P3

Joint visions to ensure highest performance rates in economy



PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and ministers who are members of the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura and members of the Majlis Ash'shura Office.

The meeting was held within the context of the joint coordination between both the Council of Minister and the Majlis Ash'shura. The joint meeting was held between

SUPPORT FOR CONSTANT COOPERATION
AMONG ALL STATE INSTITUTIONS

MAJLIS ASH'SHURA'S ROLE IN PERFORMING ITS
RESPONSIBILITIES HAILED

MEETINGS TO ENHANCE THE MARCH OF
COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT

the Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash'shura Office in the presence of the ministers, members of the Council of Ministers.

The meeting was convened as stipulated in the Basic Law of the State and the Council of Oman Law. These meetings provide support to the constant cooperation among all state institutions to reach joint visions that ensure highest performance rates in the implementation of socioeconomic plans and programmes.

TURN TO P2

Omani fishermen back home after 10-day ordeal

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

Two Omani fishermen, who went missing after setting off on a fishing trip in the Sea of Oman, from Al Ashkharah in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, have returned home after 11 days.

Ali al Jaafari and Salem al Jaafari received a rousing welcome at the Muscat International Airport on Monday night. Huge crowd from their village and across the country was there to welcome them.

The two fishermen, Ali and Salem, went on a fishing trip off Ashkharah coast on June 9. Unfortunately, their boat's engine failed in the middle of the sea. They drifted in the open ocean aimlessly for almost 10 days.

They survived on just four litres of water until they were found by a Pakistani merchant vessel passing through the area. The ship's crew rescued them.

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Joint visions to ensure highest performance rates



FROM P1

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd commended the role of the Majlis Ash'hura in performing its responsibilities to enhance the march of comprehensive development.

He also affirmed that the government attaches a priority to visions and proposals of the Majlis Ash'hura that aim at achieving further development in the sectors and utilities in a manner that takes into consideration the balance required as per priorities of each state.

The meeting also affirmed that the government attaches importance to the current stage that requires collaboration of efforts to face the challenges



resulting from global economic crises and their repercussions on the economies worldwide.

The government's support to the Majlis Ash'hura's role is placed on top of its priorities. The Majlis Ash'hura is a partner with the government to carry out the national action through the attendance of the ministers responsible for service sectors in the sessions to discuss progress of

projects implementation, deliver ministerial statements about work progress in government sectors and respond to requests made by the Majlis Ash'hura to host government officials for discussion of topics being studied by the committees at the Majlis Ash'hura.

The Council of Ministers instructed the governors to hold periodic meetings where the



governor hosts members of the Majlis Ash'hura to reply to their inquiries, receive their proposals and briefing them on matters related to service and municipal aspects in the governorate.

The meeting reviewed its agenda that covered many topics which were discussed during meetings of the Joint Coordination Ministerial Committee between the two

councils.

The topics included the importance of enhancing the partnership between the Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash'hura, reviewing government plans on diversification of income sources and augmenting production to support the national economy.

The meeting also touched on the important role of the Majlis

Ash'hura to enhance community awareness. Views and proposals were presented during the meeting by some members of the Majlis Ash'hura Office. Those views and proposals were given blessing and they will be raised during visual presentations by the Council of Ministers in the presence of the Chairman of the Majlis Ash'hura and the members who are concerned with such proposals.

At the end of the meeting, it was agreed to activate the role of the Joint Coordination Ministerial Committee and continue exerting maximum efforts to serve this dear country that enjoys peace and stability, thanks to solidarity of all with the enlightened leadership. — ONA

Majlis panel approves report on mining sector

MUSCAT: The Economy and Finance Committee of Majlis Ash'hura held its ninth regular meeting under the chairmanship of Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, on Tuesday.

The committee approved its final report on the expressed desire regarding the governance plan for dealing with revenues accruing from the difference between the estimated price and the actual

price of Oman crude oil, the study of which is part of the committee's action plan for the current annual session. The committee also approved its report on the reality of the mining sector.

In addition, the committee approved a number of reports related to evaluating ministerial statements which included the statements of the Minister of Economy and the Minister

of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. It also reviewed the report of its visit to Duqm, Suhar, Salalah and Al Mazyouna.

The committee met with a number of members who presented expressed desires including those regarding setting a limit for remittances of foreign workers, revisiting investment procedures and legislation. This is

in addition to an expressed desire regarding the establishment of a centre for Omani investment.

The committee also discussed the executive situation of the expressed desire for unifying the certificate of commercial register and the certificate of affiliation to OCCI and the expressed desire on imposing fees on land plots allotted to tourism projects but have not been exploited.

Education drives inflation to 2.4pc

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkutyyp

Education accounts for the highest component of the inflation, which rose to a modest 2.4 per cent in May compared to the corresponding month in 2021.

According to figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the increase in the consumer price index in May 2022 was due to the increase in the prices of major groups such as education by 5.1 per cent and food and non-alcoholic beverages by 5.0 per cent.

Surprisingly, transportation increased only by 3.5 per cent, while the health group rose by 2.8 per cent and the miscellaneous goods and services group by 1.5 per cent.

Inflation decreased to 2.67 per cent in April 2022 from 3.6 per cent in March 2022. The Sultanate of Oman's annual inflation was recorded at 4.0 per cent in February and 4.4 per cent in January this year.

In its recent report, the International Monetary Fund expressed its satisfaction over Oman's efforts in containing inflation.

"Inflation turned positive to 1.5 per cent in 2021 and is projected to increase to 3.7 per cent in 2022, given rebounding economic activity and rising global inflationary pressures," it

said in the report.

However, the report expressed its concern over uncertainties and downside risks which continue to cloud the outlook.

"Downside risks stem particularly from uncertainty about the war in Ukraine, a renewed flare-up of Covid-19 infections and higher global food and energy prices may lead to increased inflationary pressures," it said.

At the governorate level, North Al Batinah and South Al Sharqiyah governorates witnessed the highest rate of inflation during the month of May 2022 by 2.9 per cent, followed by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate by 2.8 per cent.

They were followed by Al Buraimi Governorate by 2.6 per cent, Dhofar Governorate by 2.4 per cent, Al Dhahirah Governorate by 2.0 per cent, followed by the Governorate of Muscat with 1.9 per cent.

Other groups in the Consumer Price Index were the culture and entertainment group by 1.5 per cent, the restaurants and hotels group by 1.3 per cent, the furniture fixtures and household equipment and regular household maintenance group by 0.7 per cent. The housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuel groups, however, rose only by 0.7 per cent, and the clothing and shoes group by 0.4 per cent. Tobacco group by 0.1 per cent.

Subsidy on fuel prices a big relief

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Thanks to the Royal Directives, citizens are relieved over the fuel prices as they were feeling the pinch of sharp fluctuations in the price. The fuel prices, as per the directive, would be fixed as per the October 2021 level as the maximum.

Owing to the record rise, the government paid the difference. Government subsidies on petroleum products increased in the first quarter of this year to RO 67.3 million, compared to RO 7.6 million in the same period last year, registering an increase of 785 per cent, Oman News Agency announced.

In a cabinet meeting, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik directed to fix vehicle fuel prices according to the average of October 2021 as a maximum so that the government bears the differences resulting from any increase in oil prices until the



end of 2022. The fixed fuel price is 229 baisa per litre for 91 fuel, 239 baisa per litre for 95 fuel, and 258 baisa per litre for diesel.

His Majesty also approved, during a meeting with the Main Committee of the National Programme for Fiscal Balance (Tawazun) in April of 2021, a package of social protection initiatives, including an increase in the amount of subsidised fuel and consumed by national support card holders from 200

litres to 400 litres per month, and the government to bear the cost of VAT for that quantity so that it remains at the same subsidised price of 180 baisa per litre.

The fuel subsidy applies to all Omani citizens who meet the criteria set by the government. The criteria include Omani citizens who are over 18 years of age, own a vehicle or boat, and whose total monthly income does not exceed RO 950. The fuel subsidy is only for 91 fuel

type. It applies to vehicles (general population) and boats (fishermen only). It also applies when the M91 fuel price is 180 baisa or higher as per the rate set by the government on a monthly basis.

The fuel subsidy is used through the fuel subsidy card that was allocated by the fuel marketing company, pre-selected by the applicant. The total number of people registered in the system who benefit from fuel and electricity subsidies provided by the government reached 592,725 people.

In the current year's budget, the government allocated 35 million Omani riyals to subsidise petroleum products. However, the rise in oil prices above the level of \$100 per barrel, at a time when the government fixed vehicle fuel prices, raised the volume of oil product subsidies. The average price of oil in the current year's budget was estimated at 50 US dollars per barrel.



Travel bans during Covid hit quality of life: IATA

VINOD NAIR

vinot_nair

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has called for governments to ensure that future global health threats can be effectively managed without closing borders.

IATA officials told the Observer in Doha that if such a situation arises in the future, local governments should follow WHO guidelines.

The World Health Organization (WHO) long advised that border closures are not an effective means of managing a global pandemic. Evidence observed during the pandemic proved the point. Most governments ignored this advice, acted in isolation from the industry and other governments, and put in place measures to restrict travel.

Moreover, the restart of global connectivity has been made more challenging as constant policy changes by governments left most of the industry little time to prepare for the ramp-up.

With air traffic now rebuilding after more than two years of crisis, three key lessons have emerged for governments.

Evidence supports that view. Research undertaken by OXERA/Edge Health revealed that even if a new Covid variant was discovered and travel restrictions were introduced immediately, this would only delay the peak of infections by a maximum of four days.

Willie Walsh, the WHO Director-General, said, "There is no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade."

GOVERNOR OF NORTH AL BATINAH TAKES OATH OF OFFICE



MUSCAT: Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, Chairman of the Municipal Council in the Governorate, on Tuesday took the oath of office before Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. This comes as per Article 14 of the Municipal Councils Law. — ONA

Efforts to sustain Yemen truce discussed



Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy with Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen.

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Tim Lenderking, US Special Envoy for Yemen.

The meeting discussed the latest developments and the efforts exerted to enhance and sustain the truce in the Republic of Yemen. It also touched on backing the endeavours and enhancing trust and constructive dialogue among all Yemeni parties.

Within this context, the two sides affirmed their backing to the efforts of Hans Grundberg,

UN Special Envoy for Yemen, that aim at ending the war and engage in a comprehensive political process that meets aspirations of the Yemeni people in achieving security, stability and peace, as well as restoring development and prosperity for Yemen.

The US Special Envoy for Yemen expressed his appreciation for Oman's government's support and efforts in this regard.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department. — ONA

Dhofar gears up to receive visitors as khareef begins

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The Governorate of Dhofar geared up to receive tourists during the khareef season, which is characterised by tropical weather and moderate temperatures, making it a destination for visitors and tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. The season officially starts on June 21 and continues until September 21.

As part of the preparations for the season, Oman Air, the national carrier, increased the number of weekly flights on the vital Muscat-Salah-Muscat route to 112 scheduled weekly flights from June 23 to September 11, 2022.

Salalah Airport is one of the outstanding achievements of the Renaissance that contributed to the increase in tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar by opening direct local and international airlines during the khareef season, in addition to the Port of Salalah, which is one of the most important sea gates of Oman.

The accommodation sector in the governorate has witnessed a development in the past years, with an increase in the number of hotels, tourist resorts, commercial centres, parks and other recreational facilities. According to the statistics of 2019 by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the number of visitors to Salalah during khareef amounted to about 766,772. Also, visitors' spending increased by 1.4 per cent, recording RO 78 million, compared to RO 76.9 million in the 2018 season.

For this year, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said it is currently working on some maintenance projects including the maintenance of the public



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road from the entrance at Qairun Hariti to the Wilayat of Salalah, the installation of traffic and guidance regulations, painting, repair of asphalt potholes in various locations in Dhofar, and removing sand from the Haima-Thamrait highway, and the project to repair the damages on the Mirbat-Hasik-Shweimiya road due to the tropical depression of 2020.

The ministry is also implementing a project to maintain the asphalt road damaged by Cyclone Luban. It stated that it has a time plan for maintenance projects of asphalt and dirt road networks in mountainous and desert areas for five years (2021-2026).

Among the most prominent projects in preparation for khareef

is Wadi Afoul Bridge project on Raysut-Al Mughsail-Afoul road in the Wilayat of Salalah, a ferry construction project in Wadi Adunab on the Raysut-Al Mughsail road, and slope stabilisation works on Argot-Sarfit road.

Brigadier General Salem bin Mohammad al Ghaithi, Dhofar Governorate Police Commander, said that the Police Command is keen to provide human and logistical support to the Dhofar Governorate Police Command with the aim of providing the best services and ensuring a police presence in all tourist sites in all states of the governorate.

Among the governorate's preparations for the tourist season, the Dhofar Governor's office held a meeting to determine the readiness of the concerned authorities to receive visitors and tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting also discussed enhancing and raising the level of public services, roads, and readiness of the hotels and accommodation sector. The events and activities of the khareef season, organised by the Dhofar Municipality this year, will be held in various locations such as parks, gardens, and some natural and tourist sites.

Shabab Oman II takes part in Kiel Week 2022 in Germany



KIEL: The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel *Shabab Oman II* is currently taking part in Kiel Week 2022 in Kiel in Germany.

The ship docked at the Port of Kiel in Germany on Friday after travelling more than 7,500 nautical miles. The ship is on its sixth international voyage dubbed 'Oman, Land of Peace', which concludes on October 23.

The Kiel Week 2022 witnesses participation of sailboats from around the world.

Shabab Oman II will take part in many sports competitions and maritime events that will be held as part of Kiel Week 2022. The ship opened its doors for visitors to view its facilities and sections.

On board the ship is a photo exhibition showcasing the march of development which took place in the Sultanate of Oman as well as the features of modernisation that occurred across the country under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Yoga day evokes good response



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A large number of yoga enthusiasts took part in the 8th International Day of Yoga (IDY) in several parts of the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday. Yoga events took place in Salalah, Suhar, Nizwa, Sur and many other cities, while the main event happened in Muscat at Indian School Muscat.

More than 1,500 people, including Omani nationals, children and other members of the diaspora, took part in the event.

The theme for this year's IDY is 'Yoga for Humanity'. After the ease in Covid-19 restrictions, the event is happening with the physical participation of yoga enthusiasts

and learners.

Embassy of India in Muscat and the Indian School Muscat jointly organised the main event, which was graced by Shaikh Mohammed bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Chief of West Asia department.

Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, expressed gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of the Sultanate of Oman for their gracious support.

He also thanked all the yoga organisations, schools and participants. He said the theme 'Yoga for Humanity' chosen for the 8th International Day of Yoga reflected the importance of holistic health in these challenging times. He added that the ancient sciences of ayurveda and yoga had

been the greatest gift of India to the world.

As part of the celebrations, a common yoga protocol was conducted. A soulful rendition by Vineeth Pandit of his own composition on yoga was presented while a short video of yoga performed at the iconic Riyam Park as a run-up to the International Day of Yoga 2022 was also screened.

The celebration marked the culmination of the unique one-of-a-kind Yoga Marathon 'Muscat Yog Mahotsav-75 day, 75 events' launched on April 8. Muscat Yog Mahotsav featured 75 curated yoga events across the Sultanate of Oman, including the cities of Muscat, Salalah, Suhar, and Sur, for 75 days till June 21.



Going green

The world is facing the results of the abuse of environment in the form of climate change, the sub-forms of which are seen in global warming, uncertain weather conditions, cool climates becoming hot and hot are becoming unprecedented cool

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THE idea of 'going green' sounds good but implementing it is not easy. Dependence on plastic and plastic products has become so high that even genuine efforts to shun their use face obstacles. In most cases, plastic products come back in different shapes and sizes even after a general call of not using them in the interest of the environment, which is facing the biggest challenge of the time.

The world is facing the results of the abuse of environment in the form of climate change, the sub-forms of which are seen in global warming, uncertain weather conditions, cool climates becoming hot and hot are becoming unprecedented cool. Melting of glaciers is causing rise in sea level, while there is disruption in water supply to major water channels, including rivers and canals.

Amid all these challenges and alarming results, some good news is coming from the hospitality sector, which is working seriously to reduce the use of plastic and recycling things in day-to-day use.

A hotel chain in the region entered its second year of innovative collaboration with D'Grade, converting its PET (polyethylene terephthalate) waste into high-quality yarn for textiles.

Launched in 2021, the 'Be Green, Go Green' initiative of Hospitality Management Holding (HMH) empowered its teams to take positive action in their local communities to fight climate change and protect the environment.

A senior official of the hospitality sector found the reason for the 'Be Green, Go Green' initiative. "Consumers worldwide buy billions of plastic drinks bottles a year. Although most of these are made from

highly recyclable PET (polyethylene terephthalate), only a small proportion are ever actually recycled. The rest ends up in landfills or our rivers and seas, creating a serious environmental problem," said Mohamed Fouad, General Manager.

A praiseworthy move to protect the environment has been taken by the IHG Group in the Sultanate of Oman. To reduce the use of plastic in the system, one hospitality set-up under the IHG cited the implementation of a 'bulk-size amenities' policy in line with the Sultanate of Oman's 2040 vision of environmental sustainability.

Sounds good when it comes to protecting the environment. "This small step may have a huge impact if implemented across the hospitality sector. We at Crowne Plaza Resort, Salalah consume around 15,000 bottles of shampoo, 8,000 bottles of conditioner, 15,000 bottles of bath gel, and 10,000 bottles of body lotion annually," said Manuel Levonian, General Manager.

This is one example of the consumption of plastic for packaging purposes of small things like shampoo, conditioner, gel, body lotions etc. The amount of plastic debris created out of these cosmetic products only from the hotel industry can only be imagined. After their use, the plastic in which they are packed ends up in the landfills and finally in the water bodies. They pollute the environment and pose a great risk to living bodies like fish and cattle wealth.

All IHG hotels and resorts, according to Levonian, are using the 'Green Engage' system, an innovative online environmental sustainability system that gives hotels the means to measure and manage their environmental impact. Hotels can choose from over 200 'Green Solutions' designed to help them reduce their energy, water and waste and improve their environmental impact.



Training in tourism guidance for students of special education

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, in cooperation with Oman College of Tourism, has begun a training programme in tourism guidance skills for students with hearing disability of special education schools. The five-day training course is being held at Oman College of Tourism.

The course aims to prepare 18 students of special education schools for the deaf to work in the tourism industry, especially in the field of tourism guidance, and to provide them with the concepts of tourism. It also aims to provide them with basic information about the Sultanate of Oman and to develop the skills necessary to pursue the profession of tourism guidance. The training course also seeks to provide the participating students with the skills necessary to independently prepare, plan and direct tours, and understand the needs of tourists.

In a statement, Badr bin Saeed al Dhehli, Director of Tourism Studies and Administration Department, said: "This is the first training course of its kind in the college that is concerned with developing the skills of students with hearing disabilities. Through this course, we seek to

strengthen cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Oman College of Tourism, to develop students' skills in the tourism sector, which is characterised by the diversity of employment opportunities for many segments of society, especially in the fields of care and support. This course seeks to enable these students to deal, guide and direct their fellow tourists who need sign language."

"The programme continues for five days and includes the theoretical aspect in which a group of teaching methods are used, including lectures, group discussions, presentations and multimedia resources to enhance students' understanding of the content of the training programme, and is presented to the students inside the campus. The course also includes a practical side, in which the trainee gets acquainted with the mechanism of dealing with tourists at the airport, hotels and during tours. It is expected upon completion of this course that the trainee will be able to accompany their peers with hearing disabilities on tours inside the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, museums, and the most important tourist attractions in Muscat, in addition to taking them on tours inside the old city of Muscat, and providing basic tourism services, especially at airports and hotels," Badr al Dhehli added.

The course aims to prepare 18 students of special education schools for the deaf to work in the tourism industry

MoE signs deal on supporting curricula in waste management

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The Ministry of Education on Tuesday signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (SAOC) to implement and develop supporting curricula activities in the field of waste management. The deal targets school students at various levels and serves as an enrichment supplement to the current curricula in various educational stages, in the office of the Under-Secretary for Education.

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, signed the memorandum with Eng Tariq al Ameri, CEO of the Omani Environmental Services Holding Company. The signing ceremony took place at the office of the Under-Secretary for Education.



Dr Yahya al Harthi, Director-General of the Directorate-General for Curriculum Development, said: "This memorandum came to review the scientific content of the academic subjects, to identify the concepts of waste management contained therein, explicitly or implicitly, and to harmonise them with the concepts that are required to be strengthened in order to achieve

harmony between the concepts of waste management with other environmental concepts, within the scope of sustainability and circular economy. The importance of this memorandum stems from building awareness and knowledge about modern values and concepts of waste management among school students, by preparing a concept document that can be used and referenced when composing

or developing curricula, and designing educational activities supportive of environmental culture and natural resources, to be activated in the school environment in line with modern teaching strategies."

Eng Muhannad al Jumaa, Director of Bee'ah Academy at the company, said: "The memorandum came within the framework of the strong strategic partnership between the Ministry of Education and Bee'ah, which is represented in a number of projects and initiatives that focus on promoting the concepts of sustainability and circular economy among the younger generation as the leaders of change in the future. In the past period, the current curricula for all educational levels were analysed by a team from the Ministry of Education to know the aspects in which the concepts of sustainability and resource management will be included in the updated curricula."

Oman, Japan seek to enhance bilateral cooperation



MUSCAT: An official session of talks was held here on Tuesday between the foreign ministries of the Sultanate of Oman and Japan.

During the session, the Omani side was headed by Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, while the Japanese side was headed by Taro Honda, Parliamentary Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and means of enhancing them.

They also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of common interest.

The firmness of the political and economic relations between Oman and Japan was reiterated by the two sides.

The two sides also expressed their joint keenness in promoting cooperation and partnership towards broader horizons in various economic and investment spheres.

The session was attended by Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman.

Also on Tuesday, Taro Honda visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC).

The guest was greeted by Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raeesi, Senior Staff Officer of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Acting Head of the MSC.

Taro Honda was briefed on the centre's tactical roles and tasks in managing and leading search, rescue and environment preservation operations. He also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties.



Royal Hospital performs rare surgery

MUSCAT: A medical team specialising in endocrine surgery at the Royal Hospital succeeded in performing a rare surgery to remove a thyroid gland weighing 973 gm from the neck of a woman who has been suffering from a tumour for five years. Commenting on the surgical operation, Dr Omar Ahmed Ridha, thyroid and general surgery consultant, Department of Surgery at the Royal Hospital, said: "This is a rare and complicated operation given the size and nature of the tumour and it needed a great deal of precision and skill as the tumour existed amid arteries, veins and nerves that control other body functions."

The tumour was large and pressing the trachea and esophagus extending from the neck down to the rib cage. The surgery took about two hours, Dr Omar said, noting that such operations need special equipment to ensure the radical removal of the tumour while preserving the vital organs.

— ONA

Symposium sheds light on 'importance of film industry'

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JUNE 21

A symposium was held at the Nizwa Cultural Centre on Monday as part of the Al Dakhiliyah International Film Festival, organised by the Omani Society for Cinema and Theatre in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah.

"The importance of the film industry, centres and festivals in the economic mobility" was the topic of the symposium presented by Bahraini director Bassam al Thawadi, Omani director Haitham Suleiman, Emirati director Nawaf al Janahi, Algerian director Dalil Belkhouir. Producer Qassem Sulaiman was the moderator.

Bassam al Thawadi, speaking about the past, referred to an old question asked by Egyptian artist

Mahmoud Morsi, which was "Why do you want cinema in Bahrain?" The answer was also a question, "Is it because we love cinema only?" which indicated that the love for cinema alone was not a justification for the film industry.

The Bahraini director pointed out that the percentage of film lovers in the eighties of the last century did not exceed the fingers of the hand. This number is never enough for governments to come in support of the film sector. He stressed the need to increase this base, which still does not constitute a large number of the total population in the Arabian Gulf today. The number of film lovers does not exceed 1 per cent of the total population.

He said the sector grows through such forums and festivals, awareness and study,



and development of strategies. As for enlarging the base of movie watchers, it is through the establishment of associations and outfits that can attract those interested in films and thus make a larger audience.

He also indicated that

film-makers should get good distributors who can promote business on modern platforms such as Netflix, Shahid, and others. He said film production is not limited to cinemas only, which are few in the Arab Gulf. He noted that the process is not easy because if

these platforms are not convinced of the quality of work, they will not accept it, and the pressure is tremendous on them.

Omani director Haitham Suleiman presented a paper entitled, "The characteristics of film work in Oman - Al Dakhiliyah Governorate as a model". He focused on models from the governorate, whether from human cadres or sites that attract film production. He talked about the areas of challenge in film work, including the script's weakness and actors' weakness, bringing out the significant differences between television, theatrical and cinematic scenarios.

Algerian director Dalil Belkhouir spoke about the new concept of cinema, which can be called "the digitisation of cinema" and "the digitisation of

film festivals," imposed by the Covid pandemic. Considering that culture and art, including cinema, are lifelines that cannot be stopped, these images emerged from virtual cinema and virtual festivals.

Emirati director Nawaf al Janahi spoke about the film industry concept. He said: "We do not have a cinema industry in the region, but it is a cinematic movement. The industry needs production companies specialised in cinema, strong production, and an education sector establishing that industry."

Nawaf al Janahi concluded his speech by saying: "We need to teach cinema in schools, for cinema is an essential part of training, and from here, we must focus on expanding the circle of attention if we want to create an economic return and a cinema industry."

Lebanon signs gas deal with Egypt and Syria

BEIRUT: Lebanon signed a deal on Tuesday to import natural gas from Egypt via Syria to boost power supply by an additional four hours a day amid round-the-clock cuts. Grappling with its worst-ever financial crisis, Lebanon launched talks with Egypt last year to import gas through the Arab Gas Pipeline, which passes through Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

On Tuesday, Lebanese Energy Minister Walid Fayad and Syrian and Egyptian officials signed a final version of the agreement in Beirut.

“The importance of this deal... stems from the fact that it will secure an additional four hours of electricity per day following its implementation”, Fayad told a press conference.

The deal is a part of wider efforts — which include a separate electricity deal with Jordan — to boost supply by 8 to 10 hours a day in the coming months, up from just two currently.

Implementation of both agreements still needs World Bank funding and US assurances that they won’t trigger sanctions under the so-called Caesar Act which prohibits commercial dealings with Damascus.

“We hope that after today, all hurdles will have been cleared so that we can receive World Bank funding and... final guarantees from the US, especially with regard to sanctions”, Fayad said.

Syria stands to gain gas from Egypt as an in-kind payment for its part in the deal, but will not receive funds, Fayad said in January.

Two years into Lebanon’s economic meltdown, the cash-strapped state is struggling to purchase fuel for its power stations.

With mains electricity effectively non-existent, many rely on private generators, but prices have increased after the government lifted fuel subsidies as global fuel prices soared.

Lebanon’s crumbling electricity sector has cost the country more than \$40 billion since the end of its 1975-1990 civil war.

Successive governments have failed to cut down on losses, repair crumbling infrastructure or even collect electricity bills regularly across the country. — **AFP**



Lebanese, Egyptian officials take part in a signing ceremony for a gas import agreement at the Lebanese energy ministry in Beirut. — **AFP**

South Korea space rocket launch puts satellites in orbit

SEOUL: South Korea said on Tuesday it had successfully launched its homegrown space rocket and placed a payload into orbit in a “giant leap” for the country’s quest to become an advanced space-faring nation.

The Korea Satellite Launch Vehicle II, nicknamed Nuri and emblazoned with the South Korean flag, lifted off at 4 pm from the launch site in Goheung on the southern coast, trailing a column of flame. All three stages of the rocket worked, taking it to its target altitude of 700 kilometres, and it successfully separated a performance verification satellite and put it into orbit, Seoul said.

South Korea’s space programme “has taken a giant leap forward”, said Lee Jong-Ho, Minister of Science and Technology, adding he declared the mission a success.

“South Korea has now become the seventh nation in the world to launch a space vehicle with homegrown technology”, he said, adding the government would continue its quest to become “an advanced space-faring nation”.

South Korea will launch a Moon orbiter in August, Lee added. The Tuesday test, South Korea’s second test launch of its homegrown space rocket, comes eight months after the first test failed to put a dummy satellite into orbit.

In the first test last October, all three stages of the rocket worked with the vehicle reaching an altitude of 700 kilometres, and the 1.5-tonne payload separating successfully.

But it failed to put a dummy satellite into orbit after the third-



South Korea’s homegrown space rocket Nuri blasts off from the Naro Space Centre in the southern coastal village of Goheung. — **AFP**

stage engine stopped burning earlier than scheduled.

In Tuesday’s test, in addition to a dummy satellite, Nuri carried a rocket performance verification satellite and four cube satellites developed by four local universities for research purposes. The three-stage Nuri rocket has been a decade in development at a

The Korean govt will continue its quest to become ‘an advanced space-faring nation’

cost of 2 trillion won (\$1.5 billion). It weighs 200 tonnes and is 47.2

metres long, fitted with a total of six liquid-fuelled engines.

In Asia, China, Japan and India all have advanced space programmes and the South’s nuclear-armed neighbour North Korea was the most recent entrant to the club of countries with their own satellite launch capability.

— **AFP**

China hit by heaviest rains in decades, thousands evacuated

BEIJING: The heaviest rainfall in decades has triggered floods and landslides in southern China, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people, state media reported.

The downpours have dangerously swelled waterways in the low-lying Pearl River basin in recent days, threatening manufacturing, shipping and logistics operations at a time when supply chains are already stressed because of China’s strict Covid-19 controls.

The average rainfall in Guangdong, Fujian and Guangxi provinces between early May and the middle of June reached 621 millimetres, the highest since 1961, according to China’s National Meteorological Centre.

The downpours have swelled waterways in the low-lying Pearl River basin in recent days

State media photos showed people huddled on camp beds in schools converted into temporary shelters in Guangdong’s Shaoguan city and hundreds of tents erected on a sports ground.

In neighbouring Guangxi region, muddy water was seen flooding urban areas and emergency rescuers were seen evacuating villagers on rubber dinghies, according to state media images.

Guangdong authorities said on Monday that more than 200,000



A resident walks on a flooded street after heavy rains in Shaoguan in China’s southern Guangdong province. — **AFP**

people have been evacuated over the course of the disaster, and that the damage so far is estimated at 1.7 billion yuan (\$254 million).

The evacuees were among almost 480,000 people impacted by the rains and floods, according to the officials.

Shaoguan issued a red flood alert — the most serious — Tuesday morning, after multiple rural counties and the major city of Foshan upgraded their flood warnings in recent days. Guangxi was hit by the heaviest floods since 2005, local media reported.

Meteorological authorities said on Monday that 28 of Guangxi’s rivers had exceeded warning levels, with rains continuing on Tuesday.

— **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

Murmu is Indian presidential candidate

Draupadi Murmu will be the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nominee for the upcoming presidential election. The decision was announced late on Tuesday evening by BJP chief J P Nadda in New Delhi. Murmu was the former governor of Jharkhand. A relatively unknown name in national politics, Murmu has been a minister in the Odisha government. She is likely to file nomination on June 25. Voting is scheduled for July 18.

“For the first time, preference



has been given to a woman tribal candidate. We announce Draupadi Murmu as NDA’s candidate for the upcoming Presidential elections,” Nadda said.

DUBAI

Dubai restaurants earn ME’s first Michelin stars

Eleven Dubai restaurants were awarded the first Michelin stars in the Middle East as dozens of the city’s eateries made it into the prestigious gastronomic guide.

Two restaurants were given two-star ratings, another nine gained one star and 14 received the Bib Gourmand for value-for-money gourmet fare.

Inspectors spent months visiting eateries “from the most elegant and luxurious restaurants run by globally renowned chefs,



to the simple bistro operated by friendly locals”, Michelin Guide International Director Gwendal Poullennec said at the announcement event at Dubai Opera. — **AFP**

PHNOM PENH

‘World’s biggest’ freshwater fish netted

A fisherman on the Mekong river in Cambodia has hooked the biggest freshwater fish ever recorded, scientists said — a 300-kilogram stingray. The giant freshwater stingray, which measured four metres from snout to tail, was caught last week and released back into the wild after being fitted with a tag to track its behaviour. The monstrous bottom-dweller beat the previous record for biggest recorded freshwater fish, held by a 293-kilo Mekong giant catfish



caught in Thailand in 2005. The stingray, caught in Stung Treng province in northern Cambodia, was more than twice the weight of an average lowland gorilla.

— **AFP**



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In brief

■ LONDON



COVID-19 PATIENT LEVELS RISE IN THE UK

The number of people in hospital with Covid-19 is continuing to show signs of a rise in the UK, though levels remain well below the peaks reached in previous waves of the virus. Some 5,726 patients in England had Covid-19 on June 20, up 24 per cent on the previous week, government figures show. In Wales, 295 patients were recorded on June 17, the latest date available, up 20 per cent. Hospital numbers in both nations had previously been on a steady downwards trend since early April, following the peak of the Omicron BA.2 wave of infections. The rise is likely to be driven by the spread of the latest Omicron variants, BA.4 and BA.5, which are now thought to be the dominant strains in much of the UK. The 5,726 patients with Covid-19 in England is around a third of the level reached at the peak of BA.2 wave. — dpa

■ COLOMBO



AUSTRALIA TO HELP TRACK LANKA PEOPLE- SMUGGLING BOATS

Sri Lanka and Australia unveiled a facility to track possible migrant boats after a surge in people-smuggling attempts from the bankrupt island nation in the past month. The Fisheries Monitoring Centre in Colombo was opened by visiting home minister Clare O'Neil and Sri Lankan fisheries minister Douglas Devananda, the Australian High Commission said. "Australia is committed to supporting Sri Lanka's efforts to strengthen its border management capacity," the statement said. — AFP

■ MADRID



FIRE BRIGADES BRING WILDFIRES IN SPAIN UNDER CONTROL

Fire brigades and volunteers have managed to contain several forest fires in northern Spain. In the autonomous community of Navarre, a fire near the village of Gallipienzo was brought under control on Monday night, Diario de Navarra newspaper reported. However, there were still several forest fires in the region and the inhabitants of eight villages had to be brought to safety as precaution. Since Friday, about 3,300 hectares of forest have burned in the region. There is hope that the situation will ease soon, as temperatures are cooling down after a heatwave with temperatures of up to 40 degrees Celsius. — dpa



French leftist party members and members of NUPES in front of the National Assembly in Paris two days after the legislative elections. — AFP

Macron meets France oppn, retains PM after poll blow

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday held talks with the opposition on ending the deadlock sparked by his failure to secure a majority in parliamentary elections, after rejecting an offer by the prime minister to resign.

Macron met right-wing, Socialist and Communist party chiefs at the Elysee and was to host far-right leader Marine Le Pen for rare talks as he seeks solutions to a tricky situation that risks plunging his second term into crisis two months after it began.

The spectre of political paralysis and the breakthrough performance by the far-right under Le Pen has also raised questions over Macron's leadership in Europe as he seeks to keep a prime role in dealing with the Russian war of Ukraine.

The Elysee said French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, blamed by some analysts for heading a lacklustre campaign, had offered her resignation to Macron but the head of state turned it down.

Macron believes the government needs to "stay on task and act" and the president will now seek "constructive solutions" to the political deadlock in talks with opposition parties, said a presidential official, who asked not to be named.

Macron started Tuesday's flurry of discussions by talking with Christian Jacob, the head of the traditional right-wing the Republicans (LR), a party on the decline in recent months but which now may be courted by the president



France's President Emmanuel Macron with France's right-wing Les Republicains party President Christian Jacob after talks at the Elysee Palace in Paris. — AFP

Macron believes the govt needs to 'stay on task and act' and he will now seek 'constructive solutions'

to give him a majority.

The options available to Macron range from seeking to form a new coalition alliance, passing legislation based on ad hoc agreements, or even calling new elections.

One option would be an alliance with the Republicans, which have 61 MPs.

But Jacob after the talks appeared to close the door on such a solution. "I told the president there was no question of entering into what could be seen as betrayal of our voters."

"We will stay in opposition... there is no question of thinking about some kind of pact," he said, while vowing the party would not block the work of institutions.

Macron had hoped to mark his second term with an ambitious programme of tax cuts, welfare reform and raising the retirement age. All that is now in question.

"What can he (Macron) do now?" said the headline in the Le Parisien daily. "Macron in an impasse," added Le Figaro.

Despite vowing a new method of politics after his April presidential election victory, Macron has remained characteristically remote and has made no public comment on the outcome of the parliamentary polls.

— AFP

'Total consensus' in EU on making Ukraine candidate

BRUSSELS: EU ministers on Tuesday backed granting war-torn Ukraine "candidate status" to join the bloc, ahead of a summit expected to formally greenlight the move later this week, France's Europe minister said.



French Junior Minister for European Affairs Clement Beaune.

The bloc's executive arm last week proposed taking the symbolic first step to put Ukraine on the years-long path towards EU membership in a strong sign of support as Kyiv battles Russia's military onslaught.

French minister Clement Beaune, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency, said after a meeting with his counterparts that there had been a "total consensus" on taking the "historic" step.

It is now down to EU leaders meeting on Thursday in Brussels to sign off on the move and they are expected to agree to Ukraine and neighbouring Moldova joining the list of "candidates" pushing for membership.

"There is not a single country which makes problems with the proposal," said Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn.

"We will show great unanimity."

The EU is set to impose conditions on Ukraine and Moldova over judicial reforms and tackling corruption, among other issues, before they could move on to formal entry negotiations.

It would then take years — if not decades — of painstaking evaluations before Ukraine would get close to becoming an actual member.

Georgia, which also applied for membership in Ukraine's slipstream, looks likely to be told it needs to carry out further reforms before it can become a candidate.

Momentum has picked up for the EU to open the door to Ukraine after the leaders of heavyweights France, Germany and Italy threw their heft behind the move on a visit to Kyiv last week.

"It seems that we're going to have a smooth or at least smoother discussion than we expected regarding the candidacy," Ukraine's ambassador to the EU Vsevolod Chentsov told journalists. "We should not expect any crisis on Thursday."

More sceptical nations such as the Netherlands and Denmark have said they will back the move provided it is made clear that reforms are needed.

"We want to help the Ukrainians to reach the European dream and granting candidate status is a step and an encouragement to do that," said Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod. "It's also true that there's a lot of obligations that have to be fulfilled." — AFP

UK rail strike causes train chaos, surge in road traffic

LONDON: Millions of people are suffering disruption from rail strikes in Britain with 80 per cent of trains cancelled and a spike in road congestion. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called on the public to "stay the course" after around 40,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union at Network Rail and 13 train operators walked out in a bitter dispute over pay, jobs and conditions. Only a fifth of trains are running on Tuesday and half of all lines are closed.

Services are generally restricted to main lines, but even those are only open between 7:30 am and 6:30 pm. Last trains will be much earlier than normal, such as London Euston to Glasgow at 1:30 pm, London King's Cross to Edinburgh at 2 pm and London

Paddington to Cardiff at 4:27 pm. Much of Britain will have no passenger trains for the entire day, including most of Scotland and Wales, the whole of Cornwall and Dorset, and places such as Chester, Hull, Lincoln and Worcester.

Usually busy stations such as London Euston and London Paddington are nearly deserted except for union picket lines.

Many people are believed to be working from home rather than travelling to offices.

Those forced to travel are having to contend with skeleton traintime tables and increased traffic on the roads.

Electrical engineer Harry Charles said his normal 10-minute journey to work by train to London Bridge took him 90 minutes.

The 30-year-old, from



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks at the start of a cabinet meeting in Downing Street in London. — AFP

Lewisham, south-east London, said: "Obviously I had to wake up early and left my house at 6 am.

"I am with the employees who are striking because their money is not going up and the cost of

everything is rising.

"The strike has caused a lot of hassle for people but everyone wants to be able to eat."

At Liverpool Lime Street station, couple Sheila and Steve,

who did not want to give their last name, were due to travel to London for a theatre trip costing £500. Steve said: "The 8:47 am train has been cancelled and we're just keeping our fingers crossed for the next one at 9:47 am.

"I think they have got the right to strike but this seems a bit unfair on other people."

At Birmingham New Street station, a few would-be passengers and commuters were trying to work out their travel plans, gazing at timetables on their phones and the departures board on the main concourse. Carol Hutchinson, who was on her way back to the Lake District after coming off a six-hour flight from Egypt, landed in the UK to find her direct train from Birmingham International station cancelled. — dpa

Redefining fatherhood in the 21th century



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

German humorist Wilhelm Busch apparently once said, “It’s not hard to become a father. Being one is the really difficult part”.

As the world commemorated Father’s Day this Sunday, it is apt to see how the meaning of being a father has evolved over the years, and fatherhood itself has changed in the new millennium.

Traditionally seen as the breadwinners of the family, out of the house for hours, days, even months and years as they fished, gathered or traded across the oceans, fathers played little role in the nurturing of children and had little stake in moulding their minds.

Today, more than ever, fathers are an integral part of a nuclear family, at least physically. They

spend more time at home, at times even working from home. Unless in the case of migrant fathers, they stay involved in the daily routine of their children — schoolwork, nutrition, entertainment and everyday chores.

Popular culture like films, advertisements and the ever present social media also vouch for changed roles of fathers. We are inundated with images of fathers being present at childbirth, cooking for their children, even braiding their daughter’s hair. Such images lend respectability to chores which were earlier seen as only belonging to women in the family, particularly mothers.

Literature, always at the front of new ideas and theories, has

MOTIVATIONAL AND SELF-HELP BOOKS ON FATHERHOOD FOCUSES ON BONDING, NEGOTIATING DISCIPLINE AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

also done much to promote these changed roles among fathers. There is a whole industry of motivational and self-help books on fatherhood, with focus on bonding, negotiating discipline and being an emotional support.

Atticus Finch from Harper Lee’s novel ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’, the narrator in Cormac McCarthy’s

apocalyptic novel ‘The Road’ and even Hamlet’s ghost-father are all examples of ‘good’ fathers in western literature. Good in that they are protective, nurturing and friendly.

Elsewhere, fatherhood can be more clouded. ‘Baba’ in Khalid Hosseini’s “The Kite Runner”, Matussem Ramoud in Diane Abu-Jaber’s “Arabian Jazz” or Rahamat in Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Kabuliwala’ are all more complex characters who struggle with what it means to be the ‘head of the family’ and the challenges that come with such a traditional role.

New fathers tend to be conflicted because they live in two worlds: The one of their own fathers which is marked by discipline and

reticence and the softer, friendlier version they see in popular culture. A scene from the iconic film ‘Kramer vs Kramer’ has Dustin Hoffman initially struggling to make scrambled eggs, in contrast to the last poignant scene where he has mastered the art, but has no son to make the eggs for. Such re-definitions of the role of the father means that new paths to fatherhood are now available, and that is both a challenge and an inspiration.

As Christopher Shiple from the website ‘Parent Map’ says, “Instead of comparing what we do to what our dads or grandfathers did, let’s compare what we do to what our partners do”. The bar is definitely higher for new dads.

– happy father’s day!

For Iraqis a sweltering summer of ‘hell’ has begun

HUSSEIN FALEH

Umm Mohammed, 74, waves a fan back and forth to cool down, but in the blistering heat of Iraq’s southern city of Basra there is nothing but stiflingly hot air. While Basra is used to scorching summers, this year it has started sooner than expected, bringing misery to residents in a city also plagued by chronic electricity shortages.

“By God, we are tired”, Umm Mohammed said faintly, adding that the heat had woken her up in the middle of the night.

Just days into summer, the temperature in Basra has already soared to around 45 degrees Celsius. Umm Mohammed’s modest home has a flimsy sheet-metal roof that retains the sweltering heat. Further north in the capital Baghdad, temperatures have already topped 50 Celsius — in the shade.

Battered by decades of conflict that has sapped its infrastructure, Iraq is struggling with droughts, repeated sandstorms, desertification and a drop in some river levels. Chronic power cuts are exacerbated in the summer, and only those who can afford private generators are able to keep their fridges or air conditioning units running.

In Basra, high humidity compounds the oppressive heat. And with many Iraqis struggling to survive, spending around \$105 a month for a private generator is not an option. The authorities “must help poor people”, Umm Mohammed said, decrying their failure to provide an adequate mains supply. Referring to how the government treats its citizens, she said: “Even God does not agree to that.”

Iraq is the second-largest oil producer in the Opec cartel. But the once thriving country has for years bought gas from neighbouring Iran, which supplies about one-third of its power sector needs.

US sanctions on Iranian oil and gas have complicated Baghdad’s payments for the imports, leaving Iraq in heavy arrears and prompting Tehran to periodically switch off the taps.

The result is longer power cuts for most of Iraq’s 41-million-strong population, many of whom blame politicians and endemic corruption for their plight. Anger over blackouts helped fuel deadly protests from late 2019 to mid-2020, including many in southern Iraq.

Nataq al Khafaji, who lives in Nasiriyah, just north of Basra, said getting by in the heat without electricity was “very difficult for the children and the elderly”. “It’s hell”, he added.

During the summer holidays, Khafaji’s three children have nowhere to go and little to do. Stuck in their darkened home, they try as best as they can to escape the suffocating heat outdoors. — AFP

Fed up Libyans clamour for peace, from onstage to burger joints



Vivian Yee

The writer is Cairo bureau chief at ‘NYT’

When Taha al Baskini won a part in a new play about soldiers who reunite after dying in combat, his costume was already in his closet. His onstage camouflage pants were the same ones he had worn as a fighter during Libya’s most recent civil war a few years ago, when an airstrike injured Al Baskini and killed several of his comrades as they defended their city.

“People are sitting and talking to you, and the next moment they’re bodies”, Al Baskini, 24, whose brother died in the same conflict, said after a recent rehearsal for the play, “When We Were Alive”, at the National Theatre in Misrata, Libya’s third-largest city. “You never forget when they were smiling and talking just moments before.”

As an actor, “I try to show reality to the people”, he went on. “The message of the play is: ‘No more war.’ We’ve had enough war. We want to taste life, not death.”

To the audience, that message is hardly a tough sell. After more than a decade of violent chaos — years that saw their country overrun by foreign mercenaries and subjugated by fighters whose power made them a law unto themselves — Libyans are clamouring for peace.

The question is whether the country can maintain a brittle truce even as two rival governments and their foreign backers jockey for power, raising fears that Libya is, once again, sliding toward conflict.

To achieve lasting peace, Libya needs not only to find its way out of the current political crisis, but also to demobilise a generation of young men who have grown up knowing little but war.

Misrata, whose powerful fighters were key to overthrowing Libya’s longtime ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, during Libya’s 2011 Arab Spring revolt, is full of such men. More than 40 of them — mostly veterans of Libya’s conflicts — now act at the National Theatre, a former meeting hall for Gaddafi’s political party. They hope to bring Misrata entertainment, they say, and some semblance of normalcy.

But there is no avoiding the city’s damage, physical and psychic alike, onstage.

“I’d rather do something funny to lighten people’s moods, instead of reminding them of the friends and brothers they lost”, said Anwar al Teer, 49, an actor and former fighter who raised money and put his own acting earnings toward converting the venue, which city officials were renting out as a wedding hall, into the National’s 330-seat theatre, installing seating and lights himself. “But the theater is impacted by Libya’s reality, even

THE QUESTION IS WHETHER LIBYA CAN MAINTAIN A BRITTLE TRUCE EVEN AS TWO RIVAL GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR FOREIGN BACKERS JOCKEY FOR POWER

when you don’t want it to be”, he said. “A play is like a mirror reflecting the consciousness of our society, and our society is sick.”

Libya’s 2011 revolution made rebels into heroes. In the years that came after, as the country splintered into rival political factions and warring regions, many former rebels and new fighters joined armed militias, hoping to defend their hometowns or simply

to make a decent living.

Fighters could pay three times as much as the average salary or more, not that there were many other jobs on offer for young men. As fighters grew into political forces, the higher-ups raked in illicit profits from smuggling weapons, fuel and migrants, building their fortunes and their power.

It was not only the money that appealed. At a time when weapons spoke loudest and wearing a fighter uniform inspired deference, young men took to imitating the fighters’ style, even if they had never fired a shot: Driving pickup trucks with blacked-out windows, wearing their beards long, dressing in fatigues.

“They were seen as heroes”, said Mohammed Ben Nasser, 27, a rising star in Libya’s small-but-growing television industry who also acts in “When We Were Alive.” “It was how you got money, power, cars.”

For the four decades of Gaddafi’s rule, no one was allowed to be more famous than the dictator. Soccer players’ jerseys carried no names, only numbers, lest they gain a following. Paranoid about what it saw as the contamination of foreign ideas, the regime banned foreign films, allowing only Libyan productions that pushed the Gaddafi agenda.

If Libyans saw anything else during that period, it was thanks to smuggled-in videotapes and, eventually, illicit satellite and internet downloads.

— New York Times



Friends play a game in Martyr Square in Tripoli.

Let peace prevail!



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a journalist and author

The annual Global Peace Index report 2022 has revealed that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.3 per cent in 2021 to the lowest level in 15 years fuelled mainly by post-Covid economic uncertainty and Ukraine conflict.

The report, which covered 99.7 per cent of the world's population and used 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators from highly

respected sources to compile the index, found that countries deteriorate much faster than they improve.

Although 90 countries improved, and 71 deteriorated, two of the five countries with the largest deteriorations in peacefulness were Russia and the Ukraine, joined by Guinea, Burkina Faso and Haiti. All these deteriorations were due to ongoing conflict.

We all know that the Covid-19 pandemic has pushed countries towards unprecedented economic and political crises. Also the fact is that countries that had become progressively more peaceful faced outbreaks of protests and violence aimed at expressing the people's ire at the respective governments' handling of the pandemic and the situation followed.

After the pandemic came the Ukraine-Russia war, the impact of which is still being felt. It has had a significant effect on the Peace Index.

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN GUARANTEES PROTECTION FOR ITS CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE THROUGH ITS REGULATIONS, LEGISLATIONS AND LAWS

While South Asia was the region with the highest frequency and intensity of violent demonstrations where India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan recorded their highest levels since the inception of the Index, in Europe, there were widespread anti-lockdown protests, especially in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Austria,

Croatia and the UK, with similar developments in North America.

With regards to countries in the Arab region, the Sultanate of Oman moved up nine places to be ranked among the top five Arab countries in the Global Peace Index for the year 2022. Globally, Oman has been ranked 64 with a score of 1,889 points. Other Arab countries in the Index are Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and the UAE.

The Sultanate of Oman has been advocating a peaceful world order ever since the late Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne in 1970. Under his leadership, Oman commanded global respect and appreciation as an effective peace broker in the Middle East.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik too envisions a conflict-free world; and in his first address to the nation immediately after taking office stressed on the continuation of the country's foreign policy fundamentals that are based on peaceful coexistence and friendly relations with nations, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and international cooperation in various spheres, among others.

Oman guarantees protection for its citizens and residents from all forms of violence through its regulations, legislations and laws. It has also set forth many programmes and projects providing protection for individuals and the society and for reducing mortality. It is a member of many International Human Rights Conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities etc.

All Omani legislations assertively ban discrimination between individuals, and provide legal protection from all forms of violence to all social categories with many mechanisms and institutions including the National Commission for Family Affairs, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Committee for the Care and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, the Follow-up Committee on the Rights of the Child and the National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking.



EU's aid policy won't fix Palestine's economy



Alexandra Gerasimčiková

The writer is Middle East Adviser at the Brussels-based advocacy nonprofit ACT Alliance EU

The European Union's financial institutions are increasingly focusing on Palestine in order to help spur sustainable development, create jobs, promote growth, and support the post-pandemic recovery. But despite massive flows of investments – mostly in the form of loans to the Palestinian private sector – the EU continues to ignore the structural obstacles to Palestine's development. Instead, its assistance props up the Palestinian banking system and sustains a broken economy under occupation.

According to a recent EU review of investments in Palestine since 2014, ongoing contributions from “Team Europe” – the EU, its member states, and public development banks, particularly the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development – amount to €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion). Three-fifths of that sum was committed in the past two years, with loans accounting for 71 per cent of the total, or €1 billion.

The EIB, which recently opened an office in Jerusalem for the West Bank and Gaza, is the largest investor, accounting for €372.3 million – over a quarter of all European financing for Palestine. The EU has provided €77.1 million via instruments such as technical assistance, guarantees, and investment grants from the European Fund for Sustainable Development. Other large contributors include Sweden (€279.5 million), France (€253.2 million), and Germany (€166 million). Given that the EU's core development aid to Palestine in 2020 was around €241 million, these sums are significant.

But the share of non-performing loans among Palestinian small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) is rising, and household indebtedness is increasing, too, calling into question whether more loans can support sustainable economic growth. Instead, this approach risks siphoning off European aid from where it is most needed, such as civil-society funds, cash transfers to families in extreme poverty, or support to public-sector services like education and healthcare.

These sectors have suffered severely since Hungarian EU Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi proposed freezing over €200 million of the EU's aid budget due to claims that certain Palestinian schoolbooks incite violence – despite an EU-funded study tempering the allegations. After nearly a year of back-and-forth discussions over conditioning the aid package on education reforms, Brussels has now released the funds. Regardless, the consequences of the

freeze are severe and wide-ranging: the termination of life-saving treatments for at least 500 cancer patients, the suspension of cash transfers to as many as 120,000 vulnerable Palestinians, and cuts in public-sector salaries.

Increased public-sector financing has been key to Europe's post-pandemic economic recovery and should play a similar role in Palestine. In fact, Israel's de facto annexation of West Bank territory means that public-sector support for small Palestinian businesses is indispensable. Palestine lacks sovereignty and control over its borders and natural resources, and structural obstacles – ranging from movement restrictions to Israel's control over Palestinian external trade – limit the space for private-sector activity.

EUROPEAN UNION FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS HAVE POURED €1.4 BILLION INTO PALESTINE IN AN ATTEMPT TO KICK-START ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. BUT WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEGOTIATED ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE SEEMINGLY REMOTE, EUROPE URGENTLY NEEDS A NEW AID MODEL THAT BETTER MATCHES REALITIES ON THE GROUND

Under the Oslo Accords, Palestinians are effectively locked into economic dependence on Israel and international aid, without the fiscal space to address national development needs.

Unsurprisingly, the effects of prolonged occupation and myopic neoliberal aid policies – high levels of unemployment, inequality, indebtedness, and deepening poverty – have heightened the Palestinian Authority's dependence on bank loans to cover fiscal deficits. The PA and public employees now account for 40 per cent of bank credits.

This highlights a further concern about the €1 billion in European loans, which are oriented overwhelmingly towards Palestinian banks and microfinance institutions: a lack of transparency regarding the beneficiaries and insufficient clarity on the development gains. The vast majority of European investments are

aimed at supporting Palestinian SMEs, but there is also funding for the energy sector and corporate finance, including mid-cap firms and project developers.

Yet, it is unclear whether EU financial institutions demand sufficiently disaggregated lending data from intermediaries. In 2019, the European Commission concluded that the results of the EIB's interventions outside Europe remain mostly unknown, and other funders face similar transparency-related criticism.

True, European investments in Palestine include some positive elements. For example, the Swedish Guarantee Facility offers optional political risk coverage of 90 per cent of loan principal in Gaza and Area C. Area C constitutes around 61 per cent of the West Bank and contains most of Palestine's natural resources and fertile land, which are vital for socioeconomic development.

But the Israeli authorities' control of the area effectively precludes business activities, and risk-averse banks and financial institutions are unlikely to favour projects there without government incentives. Businesses might therefore benefit more from additional forms of public support like subsidies and debt-relief schemes. Yet the number of firms in Area C and Gaza that benefit from the Swedish programme is unclear from published data.

If Europe wants to promote Palestine's sustainable development, ending the occupation must be a top diplomatic priority. But with the possibility of a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian peace seemingly remote, the EU should urgently develop a new aid model that better matches realities on the ground.

Better-designed, transparent concessional finance, coupled with direct grants and debt-relief schemes for the productive sector and small businesses – especially those with a higher risk profile and those delivering greater social benefits – could support a rights-based economy and protect Palestinians' presence on their land.

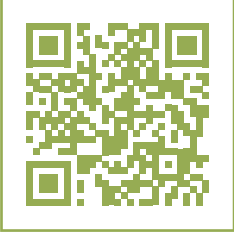
The EU can also direct assistance to Palestinian public bodies that are well-positioned to supervise such investments. And in the planning process, instead of relying on a PA that has not held elections since 2006, consultations with Palestinian civil society, trade unions, and associations should be held to ensure that local needs are met.

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it,” goes the old adage. But with the Palestinian economy in dire straits, Europe's aid model desperately needs an overhaul.

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Oman Sail youth team to participate in Al Bareh International Regatta 2022

MUSCAT: Oman Sail's youth sailing team is participating in the 29th annual Al Bareh International Regatta from 22-25 June, 2022 at the Bahrain Maritime Sports Association off the coast of Al Jazaer Beach, Zallaq, Bahrain.

The seven sailors are competing in ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 classes as part of a 54-strong fleet from seven nations, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE, in what will be an ideal opportunity to measure their progress against sailors of the same age from around the region.

Led by coach Ahmed al Wahaibi and team leader Mohammed al Balushi, the team will be looking to impress and show how much progress they have made this season.

The squad has been selected based on ranking races and will

The seven sailors are competing in ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 classes as part of a 54-strong fleet from seven nations, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE, in what will be an ideal opportunity to measure their progress against sailors of the same age from around the region

feature: Elyas al Fadhli, Osama al Zadjali, Ablaj al Dughaiishi, Salim al Hamdani and Nibras al Owaisi in the ILCA 4 class, and Al Motasem al Farsi and Abdul Malik al Hinai in the ILCA 6 class.

Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail's Head of Performance, said, "We



are looking forward to what will be a very interesting test of the progress our sailors have made. The Al Bareh International Regatta is one of the longest-



running regattas in the region and we will be looking to continue Oman's strong track record of good performances. This will also serve as vital practice as we

prepare for regattas throughout the year and develop the skills and experience of our young team."

Mohammed al Balushi, Team Leader and Centre Manager of

the Oman Sail Mussanah Sailing School, said, "Our team has improved a lot already this year and the chance to sail against the peers from across the region will be a tough test. We are looking forward to travelling to Bahrain and putting our training into practice will give our young sailors a chance to impress and identify areas of additional development as we build towards a busy second half of the year."

Alongside racing in ILCA 4 and ILCA 6 classes, fleets in Optimist and ILCA 7 Standard will be also competing. Each class will consist of 10 races across three days where the top three places will be decided. After the conclusion of the Al Bareh Sailing International Regatta, the young squad will return to Oman and prepare for the upcoming Optimist World Championship taking place from June 27 to July 7.



Oman Women lose to Singapore Women in last-over thriller

MUSCAT: Singapore Women edged past Oman Women in a last over thriller in the ongoing ACC WT20 Championship 2022.

Both sides put in all they had to register their first win respectively. Asserting the Oman Women to bat first, Singapore started convincingly claiming three wickets in the first 6 overs of

the Oman innings. Priyanka Mendonca was the lone batswoman who kept piling up runs to equalise the pressure onto the opposition.

Bhakti Shetty guarded the ship with her steady and cautious 26 helping Oman reach a respectable 109 at the end of 20 overs. Priyanka finished the innings not out with 48 of 39 balls to ascertain

Oman's interest into choking the Singapore Women.

Oman going in with a play-to-win mindset were successful to uphold Singapore by taking 4 wickets in the first 6 overs.

The game was evenly poised before the resistance and positive gameplay of Vinu and Divya build a 68 run to ball partnership taking

the game away from Oman.

Saya Channa and Priyanka Mendonca ended with two wickets each accompanied by Bhakti Shetty's economical spell and a wicket at the end of the game.

Oman currently stands with no wins and a no-result point on the points table playing its next game vs Malaysia on June 22.



Giggs resigns as Wales manager to avoid World Cup distraction

LONDON: Ryan Giggs resigned from his role as manager of Wales on Monday as the former Manchester United great awaits trial on an accusation of domestic violence.

Giggs has been on leave since November 2020 when he was arrested.

The 48-year-old is accused of controlling and coercive behaviour against his former girlfriend Kate Greville between August 2017 and November 2020.

Giggs is also accused of assaulting Greville, causing her actual bodily harm, and common assault of her younger sister, Emma Greville, at his home in the Manchester area in November 2020.

He has denied the allegations and pleaded not guilty to all charges.

His trial has been delayed until August in January to a courts backlog.

Since then, his former assistant Rob Page has led Wales to their first World Cup since 1958.

Giggs' decision to step aside means Page will take charge of games against the USA, Iran and England in Qatar in November.

"After much consideration, I am standing down from my position as manager of the Wales men's national team with immediate effect," Giggs said in a statement.

"It has been an honour and a privilege to manage my country, but it is only right that the Wales FA, the coaching staff and the players prepare for the tournament with certainty, clarification and without speculation around the position of their head coach."

Giggs won 13 Premier League titles and two Champions Leagues among 25 major honours during a 24-year career with United at club level.

He began his coaching career at Old Trafford, taking temporary charge at the end of the 2013/14 season after David Moyes

The 48-year-old is accused of controlling and coercive behaviour against his former girlfriend Kate Greville between August 2017 and November 2020

RYAN GIGGS
Former Wales manager

was sacked before working as an assistant to Louis van Gaal for two years.

Giggs was appointed Wales boss in January 2018 and helped them secure qualification for Euro 2020.

And he said he hopes to return to management in the future.

"I do not want the country's preparations for the World Cup to be affected, destabilised or jeopardised in any way by the continued interest around this case," he added.

"It is my intention to resume my managerial career at a later date and I look forward to watching our national team alongside you in the stands."

In a statement, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) said: "The FAW places on record its gratitude to Ryan Giggs for his tenure as manager of the Cymru Men's National Team and appreciates the decision he has taken, which is in the best interests of Welsh football."

"The full focus of the FAW and the Cymru Men's National Team is on the Fifa World Cup in Qatar later this year." — AFP

Tens of thousands salute triumphant Warriors in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO: Tens of thousands of fans poured onto the streets of San Francisco on Monday to salute the victorious Golden State Warriors as the team celebrated its fourth NBA championship in eight seasons with an open-top bus parade.

A blizzard of blue and gold confetti billowed along downtown San Francisco's Market Street as buses carrying the Warriors players and team staff made their way along the 1.4 mile-long parade route.

The Warriors clinched their seventh NBA crown on Thursday after defeating the Boston Celtics on the road in game six of the finals to close out a 4-2 series victory.

The victory completed a triumphant return to the pinnacle of the sport just two years after the Warriors finished the 2019-2020 season with the worst record in basketball. Warriors talisman Stephen Curry — wearing a gold chain carrying his collection of NBA championship rings — led the festivities as Golden State players sprayed hordes of fans with champagne in brilliant sunshine.

"I had to bring the jewellery back out," Curry said of his ring-laden necklace.

"I don't look at it during the year. Every so often though you gotta remind yourself — we got four!"

Curry said the Warriors had been motivated to get back in the winner's circle after a painful defeat in the 2019 NBA Finals.

"I'd be lying if I said I knew we'd be champions because it's a lot of work -- but sometimes you've got to manifest it," Curry said.

"We had some reverses, hit some road bumps, but peaked at the right time and everybody, 1 through 16, our coaching staff, everyone, played a significant part in this."

'AN AMAZING YEAR'

The Warriors' defensive star Draymond Green paid tribute



Stephen Curry and Damion Lee hold trophies as they wave from a confetti-covered double-decker bus. — AFP



Basketball fans cheer during the Golden State Warriors NBA Championship victory parade. — AFP

to the Warriors players and team personnel that made the win possible.

"This has been an amazing year," Green said. "I told you no one could stop us from winning a championship. I warned you all."

"I really love this group, and when I say this group, I mean this entire group."

"There were times in the past when we won a championship

and everything didn't have to be aligned, like we were just that good."

"But for this to work, every single person up here had to be aligned. It's just so special."

"You talk about which championship means more, but the reality is every single one of them has their own journey."

"What you appreciate about the journey is the people you go

The Warriors clinched their seventh NBA crown on Thursday after defeating the Boston Celtics on the road in game six of the finals to close out a 4-2 series victory

through it with. And what brings me the most joy is seeing the guys who are winning it for the first time."

Warriors coach Steve Kerr meanwhile revealed he had been inundated with messages of congratulations ranging from fellow NBA coaches such as Gregg Popovich to former president Barack Obama.

"I got a text from president Obama, which was pretty cool. That was pretty special," Kerr said.

"This is incredible. When we started camp I thought we would be pretty good but I didn't know we could win the whole thing."

— AFP

■ OEF APPROVES EQUESTRIAN FOR SALALAH TOURISM FESTIVAL



The Oman Equestrian Federation has approved equestrian events in the festival of Salalah Khareef 2022. The activities are the endurance race and the tent pegging championship and traditional horse race 'Ardah' for the people of Dhofar, in addition to holding a training course for young people to teach them the basics of horse riding in cooperation with the equestrian schools in Dhofar.



Murray hopeful of being fit for Wimbledon

LONDON: Andy Murray faces a race against time to be fit for Wimbledon next week, but believes he is in a better position than he was ahead of the championships last year. The three-time Grand Slam champion was forced to pull out of last week's tournament at Queen's due to an abdominal injury suffered in losing the final of the Stuttgart ATP event to Matteo Berrettini.

"The positives are I've been able to practise but there are certain shots I've not been able to practise, so that has obviously disrupted my preparations. The injury is healing but still not perfect," said the two-time Wimbledon winner.

“The positives are I’ve been able to practise but there are certain shots I’ve not been able to practise, so that has obviously disrupted my preparations. The injury is healing but still not perfect”

ANDY MURRAY
British player

"I've been practising for the past three or four days and have been practising well. But unfortunately in matches you can't just not hit certain shots. In the next couple of days hopefully I'll get the chance to test that and hopefully it will be fine."

Murray made it through to the third round at Wimbledon last year despite an injury-disrupted preparation.

His form on the grass at Surbiton, where he reached the semifinals, and Stuttgart has edged the 35-year-old back up to 51 in the world. And he is confident of performing well at the All England Club, as long as he is not hampered by injury.

"Going into Wimbledon last year I'd gone in with hardly any proper practice at all, hadn't really played much in the build-up to it and the fact I got through a few matches was a great effort considering what I was able to do in the build-up," added Murray.

"I was in a good position against Berrettini as well before the issues so that for me is the biggest thing."

"I practised really well the last few months and worked on a lot of things with my team. I'm in a good place tennis wise. Physically I do feel good overall, I just unfortunately got this slight injury, which is frustrating."

Wimbledon begins on June 27. — AFP

Muguruza gets much-needed win in Eastbourne

EASTBOURNE, UK: Garbine Muguruza kick started a difficult season as the former Wimbledon champion beat Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-1, 7-6 (9/7) to reach the last 16 of the Eastbourne International on Monday.

The number five seed earned just her third win on the WTA Tour since February.

"The conditions were hard today. I feel like I fought hard against the wind, and I haven't played many matches on grass either," said Muguruza.

"I could see today that if I didn't fight as hard as I can, I wasn't going to win."

Muguruza next faces the winner of the second round match between 12th seed Camila Giorgi and Canadian lucky loser Rebecca Marino, who got the better of Britain's Heather Watson 7-6 (7/1), 6-4.

Magda Linette produced an upset to beat 17th seed Alison Riske in a marathon encounter lasting over three hours.

World number 66 Linette came from a set down to outlast Riske 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

All eyes on Tuesday will turn to Serena Williams' return to court as she pairs up with world number

three Ons Jabeur in the doubles.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, has not played since suffering an injury during her first-round match at Wimbledon 12 months ago, plummeting to 1,204th in the world rankings.

However, the 40-year-old has been handed a wildcard to return to singles action at Wimbledon next week and is getting some match practice this week at Eastbourne.

"Many players were jealous because I'm playing with her. Honestly, Serena is Serena. She is a legend and always will be," said Jabeur. Williams and Jabeur began their partnership against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo and Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic.

In the men's event, Australia's Alex de Minaur began the defence of his title with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Chilean Cristian Garin.

America's Sebastian Korda pulled out of Wimbledon due to "terrible shin splints" after he lost in straight sets to John Millman 6-3, 7-6 (7/5).

Millman will next play Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik after he beat seventh seed Frances Tiafoe 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 6-0. — AFP





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Najd masterplan to create new food-basket for Oman

Strengthening food security: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Water Resources seeks qualified consultant to prepare comprehensive masterplan for Najd Agriculture Development Area in Dhofar Governorate

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

MUSCAT: An ambitious plan to unlock the immense agricultural and farming potential of the Najd area of Dhofar Governorate has been initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The proposed Najd Agricultural Development Area – a vast arid swathe in the south of the Sultanate of Oman – is the subject of a major bid by the Ministry to harness its enormous agricultural capacity to strengthen the nation's food security goals.

A competitive tender floated recently by the Ministry seeks the services of an international consultancy services firm to assist in the preparation of a comprehensive masterplan for the development of the Najd Agricultural Area.

The move comes amid a renewed focus on the Najd – both by government and private sector investors – as a largely untapped region for agricultural and farming related investments.

Barring a small number of enterprising Omani farmers who had undertaken small-scale cultivation and farming in this barren desert stretch in previous decades, the Najd's potential has, of late, caught the eye of corporates and commercial farmers eager to tap into its promising potential. The successful start-up of large-scale operations, centring around dairy, poultry and fodder based activities, has also fuelled this upsurge of interest in the area.

DEDICATED DEPARTMENT

Earlier this year, the Ministry set up a dedicated department to oversee the Najd's development into the country's newest agricultural and farming hub. It noted the need for an integrated approach to the Najd's development, aimed at optimising agricultural and farming output from the area, developing the requisite infrastructure to attract investment inflows, and ensuring balanced and sustainable usage of its limited water resources – chiefly ancient aquifers.

The Ministry also stressed



the importance of modern agricultural practices based on the use of green houses and related technologies, and opportunities to create employment prospects for nationals. The need for investments in cold chain infrastructure and marketing outlets was emphasised as well.

In recent months, officials of the Ministry, as well as the influential Oman Agricultural Association, have been sharing updates and images on some of the bountiful produce being harvested from the Najd.

In addition to an abundance of date palms, farmers have also been cultivating lemon, mango, grape, fig, garlic, onion, tomato, green pepper, eggplant and okra, among other fruits and vegetables. Wheat cultivation, for example has tripled to around 1,500 tonnes during the most recent season, up from around 500 tonnes a year earlier. Production of watermelon and muskmelon too has surged over the past year.

Furthermore, with the fertile coastal stretches of North and South Al Batinah prone to saline ingress, the Ministry has also been encouraging farmers to move their water-intensive fodder cultivation activities to the Najd.

Interested parties have until July 25, 2022 to submit firm bids for the tender.

Beehive receives licence as Oman's second crowdfunding platform

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUN 21



The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a decision licensing Beehive Technologies as the Sultanate of Oman's second crowdfunding platform for a period of three years.

Dubai-based Beehive is a Peer to Peer (P2P) financing firm licensed for the same activity in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Crowdfunding platforms are innovative financing tools employing fintech to allow entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises access to financing. There are four types of crowdfunding platforms namely donations, equity, reward or peer to peer financing, the latter is applied by Beehive through issuance of investment notes (convertible and negotiable).

CMA issued the regulation

for crowdfunding as part of the national priorities of the Oman Vision 2040 and the rules are flexible enough and exempted the licensees from the fees until January 2023.

Crowdfunding platforms furnish access for financiers and investors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman through the platforms. Financing is restricted to commercial enterprises not individuals who are allowed only as investors and financiers for the projects offered in the platform according to the terms and conditions stipulated in the regulation.

Earlier this year, Malaysia-based Ethis Group became the first crowdfunding platform to receive a license to operate in the Sultanate of Oman.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUN 21

SALALAH: In anticipation of the arrival of tens of thousands of tourists and visitors this upcoming khareef season, the Directorate General of Roads and Land Transport in Dhofar Governorate is carrying out governorate-wide improvements to road infrastructure to ensure smooth traffic flows during the popular summer holiday.

Speaking to the Observer, Eng Said Tabook, Director General, added that various contractors are busy rehabilitating roads that suffered damage during recent natural cyclones and disasters that swept through the area.

Additionally, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is ensuring that existing and new road projects are designed and built in accordance with approved standards and specifications with the goal of easing traffic congestion and accidents.



According to the official, several key carriageways have been identified for particular attention in advance of the khareef holiday. These roads, which typically attract huge numbers of visitors, include the Hareet checkpoint leading into Salalah. In addition to installation of signboards and informative displays, all of the

important roadways have been freshly painted, lanes clearly demarcated, and safety signs set in place.

Elsewhere in the governorate, roads are being rehabilitated where necessary, and sand depositing on the key Haima- Thamrait highway cleared regularly as well. Repairs to the Mirbat – Hasik – Al

Shuwaymiyah carriageway, which was impacted by adverse weather in 2020, are under way as well.

Importantly, given the importance of the network of mountain roads leading to tourist attractions in the jabals, the Ministry is implementing a five-year (2021- 2026) plan for the regular maintenance of asphalted and graded roads in the governorate.

On the key Raysut Al Maghsayl carriageway, major box culverts are being constructed to allow for storm water to be safely channelled into the sea at Wadi Adoneeb. A tender for similar work at Wadi Afoul will be shortly floated, according to the Ministry. Slope stabilisation works are also ongoing along the Arjoot – Sarfait road.

In one of the biggest initiatives to date, the Ministry plans to float tenders for the construction of roadside paving, covering a total distance of 165 kilometres, along networks linking the city centre with Salalah's neighbourhoods.

Bank Muscat wins Operational Excellence Award from Wells Fargo



BANK MUSCAT, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has once again won the Operations Excellence Award from Wells Fargo, the San Francisco headquartered multinational bank. Recipients of this award have traditionally demonstrated a very high Straight-through Processing (STP) rate. With an excellent STP rate of 97.8 per cent, the bank's exceptional quality of SWIFT messages for dollar payments and outstanding error-free rate for remittances in 2021 were among the main criteria for receiving the award. Wells Fargo representatives commended Bank Muscat for

both outstanding transaction-processing quality and dedication to operational excellence. Speaking on the occasion, Zuwaina bint Abdullah al Sharjiyah, Assistant General Manager — Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to win this award, which affirms the bank's commitment to meeting the highest standards of quality in fund transfers. We take this opportunity to thank Wells Fargo for recognising the bank's exceptional quality in the delivery of payments and transfers. Facilitated by a state-of-the-art in-house payment architecture,

the bank consistently maintains high SWIFT standards which are backed by our customer-centric services." Cross-border payments are a critical component of banking relationships in today's global economy and the need for fast, efficient and predictable processing is a shared responsibility by all the financial institutions involved. Wells Fargo, which is among Bank Muscat's prominent correspondent banks for dollar payments, provides Bank Muscat with high quality payment processing, seamless and efficient servicing and outstanding customer service.

NBO holds new Tamayuz talent programme

CONTINUING TO PUT its people at the centre of its growth ambitions, National Bank of Oman (NBO) held the second session of its talent development programme, Tamayuz. 58 high-potential employees from across the bank, including its branches and Muzn Islamic Banking, were taken through a series of workshops on the bank's core values, five-year strategy and objectives. Launched earlier this year, the initiative is part of the bank's efforts to develop the capabilities of its people, supporting its strategic priorities. Aliya al Balushi, Head of Talent & Performance Management at NBO, said, "Our people are the heartbeat of the bank and strengthening their capabilities and supporting their development is key to our values and our strategy. Our team is full of hand-picked and qualified professionals



and by providing them with opportunities like Tamayuz we are keeping their growth on track. This way they can continue to fulfil their personal and professional goals, while staying aligned with the bank's ambitions as a progressive, market-leading institution, one where people enjoy working and ultimately, are equipped to serve our customers best." The first batch of Tamayuz will run until December 2023. Held in

collaboration with elite business schools and training institutes, it includes workshops and courses alongside external coaching to help participants strengthen their areas of development, preparing them for leadership roles in the future. Participants will also undertake assignments in line with NBO's strategic goals and will also be able to earn professional certification to help progress their aspirational and organisational goals.

Al Mouj Muscat drives sustainable growth

AL MOUJ MUSCAT was established in 2006 as the Sultanate of Oman's first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), and now that the award-winning lifestyle destination is 75 per cent complete, development milestones have been reached that show how the project has had a significant impact on sustainable socio-economic growth for the nation. The partnership behind Al Mouj Muscat between Majid Al Futtaim, Omran and Tanmia, designed a masterplan that through its implementation would actively contribute to Oman's vision of long-term economic diversification. Total investment in the mixed-use development is \$3.5 billion, and Al Mouj Muscat's portfolio of properties has stimulated growth and attracted considerable foreign direct investment (FDI) with details of its major achievements now clearly illustrated in Al Mouj Muscat's Impact campaign. To date, over 2,500 residences have been delivered from chic one-bedroom marina-side apartments to six-bedroom oceanfront luxury villas. With the project now in its final 25 per cent phase, approximately 2,200 homes will be completed taking the total up to 4,770. Still to come also is a unique oceanfront business park at Al Mouj Golf plus expansion of Al Mouj Marina to provide 400 berths with the surrounding area to be enhanced and developed further through the addition of residences, offices, retail, food and beverage outlets and hotels. Currently Al Mouj is home to 8,000 residents from 85 different nationalities living in four districts and within which are thriving neighbourhoods where people value a sense of connection and belonging inspired by Al Mouj's guiding principles of Placemaking. Through infrastructure and lifestyle opportunities that transform public spaces, the philosophy is to create communities and places where people have experiences



that enrich their sense of well-being everyday so they may live the best life possible. The wide choice of leisure, cultural and entertainment opportunities available at the lifestyle destination is central to its success. Another winning component is the superb quality of the properties available, a factor that Badriya al Saqri, Construction Engineer at Al Mouj recognises: "The teams working to deliver properties are wholly dedicated to quality." "This goes beyond excellence in terms of materials and finishes. We are committed to sustainable development, which demands that every aspect of what we design and build contributes to well-being for residents and environmental responsibility. We consider everything from efficient resource use to waste and emissions reduction and biodiversity protection, alongside creating interior and exterior

spaces that promote health, safety and a sense of harmonious living." Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, adds: "With our development at 75 per cent completion, we have delivered on our promise of creating a community that has a sustainable and positive socio-economic impact for Oman. "A key achievement has been our development of exceptional amenities and a diverse property portfolio. The quality of the homes and the wealth of leisure experiences on offer has established Al Mouj Muscat as Oman's premier lifestyle destination, attracting residents and investors from across the region and the globe. "As a team and a partnership between private enterprise and the public sector, we will continue to deliver for Oman and I believe that Al Mouj Muscat's impact will generate benefits for our nation for many years to come."

Al Futtaim IKEA now open at Oman Avenues Mall

SWEDISH HOME FURNISHINGS giant IKEA, opened doors to its first store in Oman today at Oman Avenues Mall. In the run up to the official inauguration, a large crowd of 3,100 customers were waiting for the store to officially open. Featuring inspirational room setups and creative solutions for visitors with over 9,000 articles across Living Room, Bedroom, Kitchen, Bathroom and other home furnishing accessories, the store is located in the centre of the city, making it accessible for customers to visit. The opening event was attended by Omar al Futtaim, Vice Chairman and CEO of Al-Futtaim Group, HH Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini al Said, Niclas Trouve, Ambassador of Sweden to the Sultanate of Oman, Shaikh Mohammed bin Saud al Khalili, Shaikh Taher bin Saud al Khalili, Shaikh Saad bin Suhail Bahwan, Vinod Jayan, Managing Director of Al-Futtaim IKEA, UAE, Egypt, Qatar and Oman along with selected VIP



guests and customers who queued up to witness the opening. Visitors at the opening were welcomed with performances that included Omani national drums, face painting for children and a dedicated photobooth to mark the launch day. Oman's first IKEA comprises a 394-seat restaurant, directly connected to the shopping centre for easy access and convenience. Featuring self-service kiosks, the

IKEA restaurant extends into the mall for more seating options for customers. Customers can shop from the Swedish Food Market for their favourite Scandinavian ingredients and enjoy fresh pastries, cookies and more at the IKEA Bistro. As one of the world's largest food providers, IKEA has taken the next step towards making healthy and sustainable food more affordable and accessible to the many people. The



retailer continues to inspire better food choices at its Oman store, with a food and beverage range that includes IKEA's popular plant-based meatballs, ASC-certified salmon and UTZ-certified coffee. IKEA has hired Omani nationals across different departments and positions. The retailer received over 48,000 applications to fill various roles across different departments and positions with a focus on equal opportunities to

bring balance into the workplace. All IKEA employees have access to IKEA's development programmes in Oman and across the global IKEA network that helps them to enhance their skills. Vinod Jayan, Managing Director — Al-Futtaim IKEA UAE, Egypt, Qatar and Oman, said, "We are so delighted to have finally opened doors to IKEA's first store in the Sultanate of Oman. It has been amazing to see the number of

visitors at the store today. This is the first milestone in a journey of many more to come in Oman. IKEA brings affordable, comfortable and sustainable furnishing solutions to its customers. Reflecting our core ethos, we keep our customers at the heart of all that we do and offer various different shopping experiences to suit everyone's needs. We can't wait to become a part of the everyday life of the residents and citizens of Oman." The newly launched store offers the convenient and contactless Click and Collect service to the Sultanate of Oman. This gives customers the option to pick up essential items from the store on the same or the next day, without even leaving their car. The store is also equipped with the competent staff, services and technology to provide customers with everything they need from A-Z. Additionally, the store also offers services such as instore planning tools and picking services, to help customers create and find everything they need to build their dream space.



APICORP first in MENA to launch an A/B loan programme

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), the region's only energy-focused multilateral financial institution, has launched an A/B loan structure aimed at encouraging international debt financing in its Member Countries which have limited access to foreign currency debt.

The A/B loan structure, which was unanimously approved by APICORP's General Assembly at its last meeting in Jeddah on April 24, makes APICORP the first financial institution in MENA to offer this type of loan, in line with its drive to support the energy sector in its less developed Member Countries and encourage private sector participation for a more sustainable energy ecosystem.

Leveraging its Preferred Creditor Status, the Corporation will offer the whole loan to the borrowing entity in two tranches, A & B, inviting commercial financial institutions from the private sector to participate in the B loan through a Participation



Agreement. APICORP will lead negotiations and administer the whole loan and be the lender of record.

Commenting on the announcement, Khalid Ali al Ruwaigh, Chief Executive Officer of APICORP, said, "The new A/B loan is a significant addition to APICORP's extensive range of innovative financial solutions to support the sustainable development of the region's

energy sector. In launching this new facility, we can offer our less developed Member Countries the largest diversified sources of financing possible to fund the sustainable transformation of their energy sector."

"The new facility offers distinct advantages for all parties. Notably, B-loan participants from the private sector will enjoy unique privileges and immunities that APICORP has been granted

by its Member Countries in its Establishing Agreement, including mitigating transfer and convertibility risks and certain tax benefits. This will encourage larger mobilisation of funding from financial institutions who otherwise would not have participated for risk considerations, making A/B loans a very effective tool in helping APICORP achieve its sustainable development agenda on a commercial basis," added Al Ruwaigh.

A/B loan participants are typically credit and financial institutions which do not have the status of multilateral development banks (MDBs), such as commercial banks and national development financial institutions.

It is worth noting that APICORP launched the Infra Initiative in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank earlier this year, a \$1 billion private sector-focused programme which aims to finance strategic utility projects with limited access to international financing and address low private sector participation in funding energy projects.

Growth forecast for Middle East despite mounting global economic pressures

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 21

The latest Economic Insight report for the Middle East, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics, reveals a positive regional outlook despite a darkening global landscape as market pressures mount and uncertainty heightens. Middle East GDP growth in 2022 is now projected at 5.2 per cent, an increase of 1 percentage point on Oxford Economics' forecast three months ago.

According to the report for Q2, Middle Eastern countries are having to adjust to pressures stemming from the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, China's economic slowdown and the tightening of global market conditions. However, the rise in oil prices has provided strong support to the macroeconomic environment across the Gulf, which is being used to offset the impact of rising inflation and supply chain disruptions to regional commodity importing countries. That being said, a scenario in which several large economies slide into recession would weigh on oil demand and test the GCC's resilience.

Inflated oil prices have led to improved GDP growth prospects in Saudi Arabia, where output is forecast to expand by 7.1 per cent, compared to 4 per cent previously. There is also optimism in the UAE, where government reform agendas and a rise in oil output are expected to underpin growth of 6.7 per cent this year. The higher income from hydrocarbons means that all six GCC nations will likely post budget surpluses, despite rising expenditures. However, this is unlikely to impact on spending plans, with most of the windfalls earmarked for debt repayments.



This should see debt-to-GDP ratios decline across the region.

Non-oil growth also continues to show strong signs across the GCC and ICAEW's 2022 forecast for GCC non-oil activity stands at 4 per cent, rising from 3.4 per cent three months ago. Recent S&P Global's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) survey in the UAE and Saudi Arabia indicated signs of business activity softening, as global headwinds take a toll on confidence, but they still remain firmly in expansion territory. In Qatar, an upswing in demand pushed the PMI to a survey high in May. Despite this apparent resilience, many firms are bearing the brunt of rising costs to allay pressure on consumers, which is beginning to weigh on employment.

Vanessa Heywood, ICAEW Head of Middle East, said: "The Middle East is faced with an interesting dilemma. Geopolitical turmoil has brought the GCC nations to the international negotiating table to aid global oil supply challenges. But hiking up

oil production counteracts the region's long-term strategy of diversification. It is also important to note that the Middle East sits in an ecologically sensitive part of the world and is therefore more susceptible to climate change. While inflated energy prices will support its renewable energy transition, the region's Leadership has demonstrated resistance to delaying the progress being made in its energy transition, even as global pressures mount."

Scott Livermore, ICAEW Economic Advisor, and Chief Economist and Managing Director, Oxford Economics Middle East, said: "The GCC economy has seen an impressive bounce back from the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and has appeared steady despite global headwinds from prolonged market instability. Growth in the oil sector has largely been the driver of the region's success, although Saudi Arabia recently gestured its willingness to help control rising oil prices — an

indication that the region is concerned about the impact of a recession in key economies."

Rising commodity prices, caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, have buoyed the GCC's fiscal and external balances but have subsequently caused inflation rates to increase. ICAEW predicts GCC inflation to average 3.1 per cent this year (forecast was 2.7 per cent three months ago), up from 2.3 per cent in 2021, before falling back to 2.5 per cent in 2023.

The GCC's US dollar currency pegs have meant the region's monetary authorities have been forced to follow the United States Federal Reserve rate hikes in March and May. The Federal Reserve has displayed intent to tame the significantly high inflation in the US, with rate hike increases expected to total 2.5 percentage points this year. The resulting rise in financing costs may dampen the non-oil recovery in 2023 but it should not pose an immediate risk to the region's growth or continued expansion.

Cybercriminals sell access to companies via the Dark Web



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 21

With the rise of cybercrime as a service business model, the information necessary to organise an attack is in demand among cybercriminals. Kaspersky's experts analysed nearly 200 posts on the dark web offering to buy information for initial access to companies' forums. The average cost for access to a big company's systems lies between \$2000 and \$4000, which is relatively inexpensive compared to the potential damage it could cause targeted businesses. Such services are of prime interest to ransomware operators, whose profits could reach up to a whopping \$40 million a year. These and other findings can be found in the new report, 'How much does access to corporate infrastructure cost?'

Kaspersky research revealed a high demand on the dark web not only for data obtained through an attack but also for the data and services necessary to organise one (e.g., the data needed to perform specific steps of a multi-phase attack). Once an attacker gains access to the organisation's infrastructure, they can sell that access to other advanced cybercriminals, such as ransomware operators. Such attacks result in significant financial and reputational losses to the targeted organisation and may even cause a suspension of work and disruption to business processes. SMBs and enterprises are both targeted by these attacks.

Company experts analysed nearly 200 posts on the Dark web offering to buy the information for initial access to companies' forums, intending to define the main types of corporate data sold, as well as which criteria cybercriminals use to evaluate the price

for an organisation's data. Most of posts (75 per cent) were selling RDP (Remote Desktop) access. It provides access to a desktop or application hosted remotely, then allows cybercriminals to connect, access, and control data and resources via a remote host as if a company's employees were controlling the data locally.

The prices for the initial access vary greatly from a couple of hundred dollars to hundreds of thousands. Unsurprisingly, the key determinant for the high prices of the analysed offers is the potential victim's revenue — the price grows alongside the revenue. The prices might also differ depending on the company's industry and operating region.

Access to large business infrastructures usually costs between \$2,000 and \$4,000, which are relatively modest prices. But there is no upper limit to the cost either. Data belonging to a company with a revenue of \$465 million is for sale for \$50,000.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important components of the initial access price is the amount of money the buyer can potentially earn from an attack using that access. Ransomware operators are ready to pay thousands, or even tens of thousands, for the opportunity to infiltrate a corporate network for a reason. These often cost the targeted corporation millions of dollars. The most prolific actors from the past year have potentially received \$5.2 billion in transfers over the last three years.

As well as encrypting corporate data, cybercriminals also steal it. They may later post some of the stolen data in their blogs — primarily as proof, but also for extra leverage — threatening to publish more unless the company pays them the money they demand within a stipulated timeframe.

Airlines seek govt support for net-zero pledge

World airlines on Monday called on governments to support the industry's goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The plea at a meeting of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) came three months before a crucial gathering of the United Nations' intergovernmental agency supporting aviation.

IATA, whose member airlines account for 83 per cent of global air traffic, pledged in October to reach net-zero by mid-century, an enormous and costly technological challenge.

"It is critical that the industry is supported by governments with policies that are focused on the same decarbonisation goal," Willie Walsh, IATA's director general, said in a statement during the group's annual general meeting in the Gulf Emirate of Qatar.

IATA's 2050 target is in accordance with goals of the landmark 2015 Paris climate accord to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

"The decarbonisation of the global economy will require investment across countries and across decades, particularly in the transition away from fossil fuels," Walsh said.

"Stability of policy matters." His appeal comes three months before the International Civil Aviation Organization meets at the end of September in Montreal, where it is to examine the issue of reducing emissions.

Agreement is far from certain as Russia and China are among companies targeting decarbonisation 10 years later, in 2060. Chinese airlines voiced objections last year to the IATA target during the group's meeting in Boston.

In an effort to counter such reluctance as the effects of climate change become increasingly apparent, France, holding the rotating EU presidency, in February published the Toulouse Declaration calling on the entire world to sign up to the goals.

In addition to 42 countries, airports, airlines and other industry players adopted the declaration. "The industry's determination to achieve net-zero by 2050 is firm. How would governments explain the failure to reach an agreement to their citizens?" said Walsh. — AFP

The decarbonisation of the global economy will require investment across countries and across decades, particularly in the transition away from fossil fuels.



METAL-ACCUMULATING PLANT

A woman from the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) poses at an experimental plot of metal-accumulating plants set by at the nickel mine of Konambio as part of a phytoremediation programme, an emerging technology that uses plants to clean up pollutants (metals and organics) from the environment. Japanese knotweed or cane from Provence: these ornamental plants, of exotic origin, which have become invasive in almost all of Europe, have found an industrial outlet in Montpellier in the laboratory of the chemist Claude Grison who valorises them in the form of "eco-catalysts", much in demand by the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry in search of naturalness.

— AFP

Bankers fear job cuts as deal boom ends



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THE BONUS INCREASES OF LAST YEAR WILL BE WIPED OUT IN 2022 AT LEAST. THE FEAR IS THAT THERE COULD BE CUTS LATER THIS YEAR.

There was a time of 'making hay while the sun shines' – but now the good times in deal making are fizzling out. The boom of 2021 led to record fees of \$130bn for the sector, prompting investment banks to dish out bonuses not seen since the heyday prior to the 2008 financial crisis. Certainly, times have changed.

"People are hunkering down and most are unwilling to make a move," said the head of one Wall Street bank, speaking under the condition of anonymity. "The bonus increases of last year will be wiped out in 2022 at least. The fear is that there could be cuts later this year."

Fee income for M&A, capital raisings and other transactions fell by 37 per cent to \$32.1bn so far this year, according to data provider Dealogic, with a 70 per cent fall in equity capital markets activity leading the decline. Senior bankers who were contacted said deal-making activity had deteriorated.

"The current slowdown has hit people's psyche," said the head of European investment banking at a major Wall Street bank. "It is difficult to prise people out. In a volatile market, they need faith that the bank they are moving to is growing or they will stay where they feel safest," they added.

In public, at least, there are signs of optimism. A wall of private equity money, geopolitical shifts and a rising tide of ESG-related work is keeping some types of deals going.

At a panel of senior dealmakers at Davos, Peter Orszag, chief executive of Lazard's advisory business, pointed to the "emergence of a European superbloc" that would prompt more cross-border activity and have "significant implications for M&A transactions."

Global head of corporate and investment banking at BBVA, Luisa Gomez Bravo, said there were "financial conditions underpinning huge uncertainty" that did not exist this time in 2021. When bonuses landed in the accounts of staff earlier this year, banks went all out. The bonus pool at Goldman Sachs increased by up to 50 per cent compared to a year earlier, and there were similar increases at JPMorgan and Bank of America.

While the swiss bank, Credit Suisse cut its bonuses by 32 per cent, it also put out a new programme to pay its dealmakers more cash upfront in an attempt to ensure it did not lose senior talent.

"When bonuses were paid, I was expecting to lose a big chunk of senior people," said the head of European

investment banking. "That didn't happen, which is reflective of how the market has changed."

During the first quarter as deal-making fees slumped, Goldman Sachs reduced the amount it spends on pay for London-based staff by 66 per cent. The US bank shaved off \$1bn in compensation costs during the first quarter for employees at its Goldman Sachs International branch, a figure that reflects how much it expects to spend on staff bonuses in 2022, according to newly released accounts.

The \$539m it put aside for compensation in the first quarter of this year is down from \$1.6bn at the same time last year when investment banks were getting ready for a record year.

The US chief executive of a large European bank said that the hiring market on Wall Street had rapidly cooled over the past couple of months and he sees this continuing. Meanwhile, the global head of investment banking at a Wall Street firm said that the "hyper hot" recruitment market of last year was over.

He said: "There are pockets of the business where it remains incredibly challenging to hire — technology, healthcare, fintech and ESG expertise are very tight. Elsewhere, the craziness is levelling off."

The cost of Bangladesh's garment-driven economic boom

SAM JAHAN

Bangladeshi ferryman Kalu Molla began working on the Buriganga river before the patchwork of slums on its banks gave way to garment factories — and before its waters turned pitch black.

The 52-year-old has constant cough, allergies and skin rashes, and doctors have told him the vile-smelling sludge that has also wiped out marine life in one of Dhaka's main waterways is to blame.

"Doctors told me to leave this job and leave the river. But how is that possible?" Molla said near his home on the industrial outskirts of the capital Dhaka.

"Ferrying people is my bread and butter." In the half-century since a devastating independence war left its people facing starvation, Bangladesh has emerged as an often unheralded

economic success story.

The South Asian country of 169 million has overtaken its neighbour India in per capita income and will soon graduate from the United Nations' list of the world's least developed countries.

Underpinning years of runaway growth is the booming garment trade, servicing global fast-fashion powerhouses, employing millions of women and accounting for around 80 per cent of the country's \$50 billion annual exports.

But environmentalists say the growth has come at an incalculable cost, with a toxic melange of dyes, tanning acids and other dangerous chemicals making their way into the water.

Bangladesh's capital Dhaka was founded on the banks of the Buriganga more than 400 years ago by the Mughal empire. "It is now the largest sewer of the country," said Sheikh Rokon, the head of the Riverine People environmental

rights group.

"For centuries people built their homes on its banks to bask in the river breeze," he added. "Now the smell of toxic sludge during winter is so horrible that people have to hold their noses as they come near it." Water samples from the river found chromium and cadmium levels over six times the World Health Organization's recommended maximums, according to a 2020 paper by the Bangladeshi government's River Research Institute.

Both elements are used in leather tanning and excessive exposure to either is extremely hazardous to human health: chromium is carcinogenic, and chronic cadmium exposure causes lung damage, kidney disease and premature births.

Ammonia, phenol and other byproducts of fabric dyeing have also helped to starve the river of the oxygen needed to sustain marine life.

In Shyampur, one of several sprawling industrial districts around Dhaka, locals

said that at least 300 local factories were discharging untreated wastewater into the Buriganga river.

Residents say they have given up complaining about the putrid smell of the water, knowing that offending businesses are easily able to shirk responsibility.

"The factories bribe (authorities) to buy the silence of the regulators," said Chan Mia, who lives in the area. "If someone wants (to) raise the issue to the factories, they'd beat them up. They are powerful people with connections." The crucial position of the textile trade in the economy has created a nexus between business owners and the country's political establishment. In some cases, politicians themselves have become powerful industry players.

Further south, in Narayanganj district, residents showed a stream of crimson-coloured water draining into stagnant canals from a nearby factory.

"But you cannot say a word about it

loudly," an area resident said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "We only suffer in silence." The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), which represents the interests of around 3,500 top factories, defends its record by pointing out the environmental certifications given out to its members.

"We are going green — that's why we are witnessing big jumps in export orders," BGMEA president Faruque Hassan told a recent press conference.

But smaller factories and sub-contractors operating on the industry's razor thin margins say they are unable to afford the cost of wastewater treatment.

A top garment official in the Savar industrial district, speaking on condition of anonymity, said even most high-end factories serving major US and European brands often do not turn on their treatment machinery.

"Not everyone regularly uses it. They want to save costs," he said. — AFP

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Zawraq Collective: An initiative of two women to support local artists in Oman

Zaima al Adawi and Noor al Mahrouqi have created a space for youth to express their desires, expectations and talents through the creation of non-conventional art. They have also provided local artists with a place where they can “break down preconceived notions of the shape art must take and what it must communicate” ... **P20**

Street art in Montreal is writ large

A MYSTERIOUS CREATURE playing piano, a white tiger baring its fangs, and a huge Batgirl: dozens of artists are busy this June painting giant frescoes for the tenth edition of Montreal's Mural festival. Started in 2012, the street art event is looking to be crowned the “leader in urban art” in North America, organiser Pierre-Alain Benoit told. Visitors can view more than 100 past and new murals in central neighbourhoods of the French-speaking metropolis painted by artists from Canada and around the world. Twenty-one artists painted new murals this year.

Among them is Caroline Monnet, an Indigenous artist who traces her ancestry to the Great Lakes region of Canada and the US. The first-timer here chose to paint geometric patterns of repeating triangles or lozenges common in Ashininaabe textiles, that have been “passed from generation to generation.” This celebration of her culture, she said, is also a political statement of sorts, admonishing the nation's colonial past. “We have been excluded from any cultural expression for a very long time,” she explained. “So to be able to have my art on



a platform as large as this one, and to have it accessible to a wide audience as well... I think that's great.” “I think we're taking a step forward,” she said, cans of spray paint in hand. For others, such as Kata Hull, a painter from Boston visiting Montreal with her husband, the open-air exhibition poses an opportunity to reach a wider art audience. “I like seeing art anywhere, so outside

feels more accessible to more people. And not everybody's interested in gallery,” she said. Natalie Capuano, who snapped more than 500 photos of the murals, expressed pride at seeing so many of them, saying “it changes the look of the city.” “It's such a pleasure to come and discover new murals every year, we are often surprised and it's much more beautiful than bare walls,” says the local resi-

dent. Among the more famous murals in Montreal are two massive portraits of its most famous singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen, who died in 2016. The festival is also showcasing 25 hip-hop artists including American rapper Lil Yachty and French rapper Kaaris. And passersby who download the festival's app can check out augmented reality installations at two nearby parks. — **AFP**

READ

STIFF THE CURIOUS LIVES OF HUMAN CADAVERS

BY MARY ROACH

The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers is a nonfiction book about the history of human cadavers. Mary Roach explores how, for nearly two thousand years, dead bodies have been used in research and experimentation leading to some of the most consequential innovations in medical science.



WHAT A FUZZ

A Old English Sheepdog in the Benching Area during the Hound and Herding Breed Judging at the 146th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at the Lyndhurst Mansion, New York. — **AFP**



LET'S TALK ABOUT

Talk about an expensive date: a mystery bidder will be spending a record \$19 million for the right to have lunch with legendary American investment guru Warren Buffett. — **AFP**



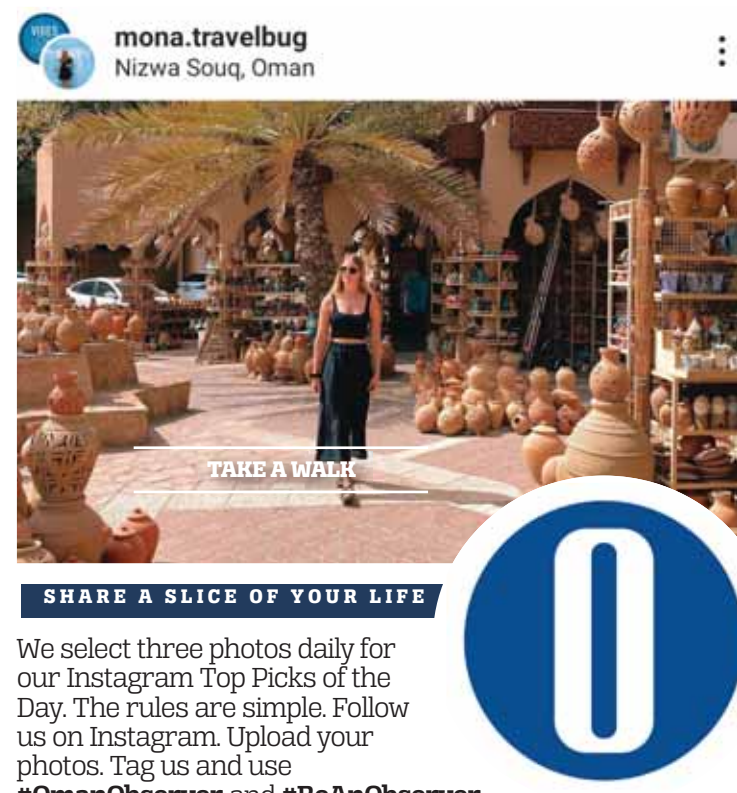
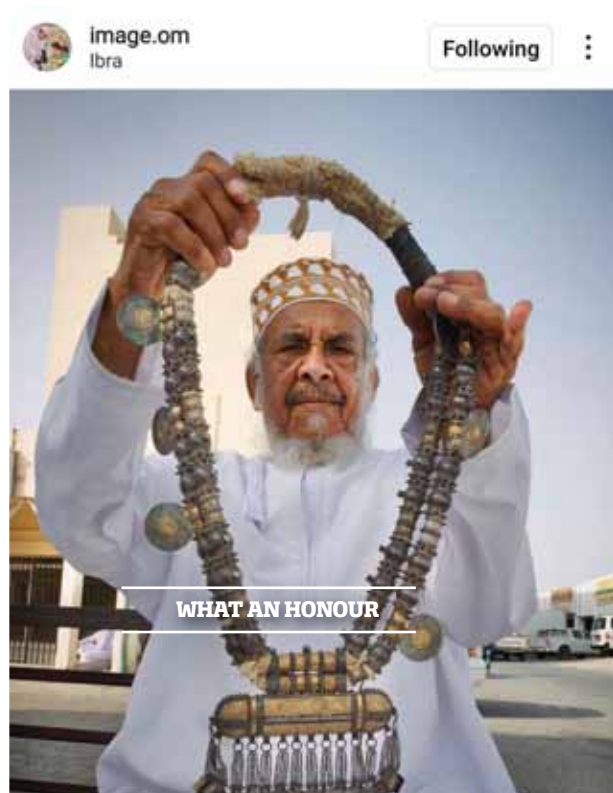


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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Lagos film school helps focus Nollywood's global push



INSIDE THE CAVERNOUS Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic church in Lagos, a man in a dark hoodie stops menacingly at the entrance and glares at the Christ statue before him. He crosses himself slowly, staggers against the pews and freezes.

Black baseball cap shielding her eyes, director Esther Abah squints into her monitor. The shot was off. Time for another take.

"Come back, come back", she calls out to her actor. With a crew of student actors, lighting gaffers and sound engineers, cameramen and grips, Abah is part of a project to sharpen the skills of a new generation of Nigerian film-makers to help them appeal to international audiences.

The church scene is part of a six-minute piece "Father Forgive Me", Abah is filming halfway into an 11-week intensive course with EbonyLife Creative Academy. The joint project between EbonyLife production house — a Nigeria film powerhouse — and Lagos State government, wants to train students like Abah to make African stories for a wider international public.

Films like "Father Forgive Me" — a tale of a priest struggling with a moral dilemma — may not get to the foreign market, but they are teaching young moviemakers how to appeal beyond Nigeria.

"You can have an original story but you have to present it in a way that anyone will watch it", said Theart Korsten, the South African head of the Lagos academy.

"We want them to tell Nigerian stories for the international audience."

MASSIVE INDUSTRY

Nigeria's domestic film industry, Nollywood, is massive, and prolific — second only to India's Bollywood in

terms of movies produced and ahead of Hollywood.

Its films, along with the dominance of the Afropop music scene with stars like Burnaboy and Whizkid, have guaranteed Nigeria's place as a cultural powerhouse on the continent.

Nollywood has come some way since its roots in the early 1990s when directors made low-budget videos and DVDs that rarely made it to the cinema screen.

But Nigeria's film industry made up 2.3 per cent of the national GDP or \$660 million last year, according to the PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook report.

A shift to television, cinemas and streaming has made films more accessible to Nigeria's elite and the African diaspora, eager for content with bigger budgets, said Alessandro Jedlowski, an anthropologist specialising in Nollywood at Science Po university in Bordeaux, France.

The rise of platforms like Netflix and Amazon is also creating demand for better films from beyond the western studios that have traditionally dominated the entertainment industry. Already some of the academy's students helped in the production of Netflix's first original from Nigeria, "Blood Sisters", which tells the tale of two friends caught up in an accidental killing.

"Netflix is global, so it's getting traction, not only from the Nigerian or African diaspora, (but) traction from Europe and America also", said Nigerian film-maker and EbonyLife teacher Daniel Oriahi.

"It's great our stories are getting global attention but what are we going to do differently?"

INTENSE TRAINING

Opened just over a year ago, the school takes up part of an

EbonyLife building in Lagos' Victoria Island commercial district, where students specialise in one aspect of film-making from script-writing to post-production.

About 500 hopefuls apply for 120 posts in the programme, which is free and taught by film-makers from South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria.

After a few weeks of training, they move on to filming in an intense programme. Four of the films are selected to get a screening at the graduation ceremony.

"I made a couple of short films but I knew I needed to understand more about film", said young director Abah.

"I see film now from a different perspective and I really understand what film is all about."

For the Lagos State government, the investment was part of a drive to help the city's creative industries. Two more film schools will be part of the programme.

"The government has invested hugely in this training and we are happy that we are seeing the results", said Lagos tourism and culture commissioner Uzamat Akinbile Yussuf.

Back at the Lagos church, an actor's make-up is touched up by the light of a cellphone as lighting crews look how to capture the colours of the stained glass windows.

"We have to make do with what we have", said Elijah, one of the lighting crew.

The camera rolls as a character moves off the sellotape cross on the floor marking his starting point.

Patience is wearing thin and the crew gets restless. South African cinematography lecturer Jan du Toit steps in with a touch of guidance. He moves lighting into the pews and guides the cameraman to smoothly follow the actor.

"Now that looks better", he said. "Fantastic." — AFP

ART

Egyptian mind-map art maestro Adham AbdelMoneim catches the Middle East art community's eyes



ADHAM ABDELMONEIM, the 26-year-old Egyptian painter who goes by the brand name of "The Sultan Adham", is making waves in the Middle East and garnering the attention of the art community and collectors alike with his unique mind-map paintings. The contemporary mind-map art, unlike conventional and archaic styles, captures the thoughts and emotions of the owner, thereby striking a personal chord. With its novelty — the state of being experimental and rather new to the Middle East — mind-map art is increasingly finding itself on the walls of art enthusiasts and collectors' homes, adding an interesting, new dimension to existing collections. The brainchild of Adham AbdelMoneim, mind-map painting draws upon his creative inheritance from his iconic Egyptian artists/actors/performers, grandparents Hassan Mostafa and Mimi Gamal.

Adham 4"Art is an enchanting world", says Adham. "My inspiration comes from the beautiful colours that God created in the art of life and how our minds, souls and thoughts respond to this; how our moods and emotions trigger our day-to-day life. I aim to achieve that through my art — how a mix of different colours, shapes, and strokes can be a map of someone's mind. What you'll see in my artwork is a mind-map that gives you a brief example of confidence, experiences, love, hate, character, and much more."

Although art runs through his veins,

Adham truly discovered his painting prowess during the pandemic as he found himself increasingly confined indoors. The enabling household environment facilitated by his parents and grandparents — with whom he feels a deep connection — gave wings to his dreams of adding colours to people's lives.

"The inclusiveness of the concept and art direction is what makes me excited to create more — how the heart and the brain both communicate together. The power of the human mind and the emotion of the human heart allow me to spread out the acrylic colours on the canvas and just paint my way through my thoughts — because what defines artists anyways? The

power to express", explains Adham.

Under the banner "The Sultan Paints", he began his body of work at the pandemic onset. Within a couple of months, Adham's paintings were selling out in reputable galleries in two-three days, with acclaimed international collectors vying to own customised mind-map paintings. His burst onto the art scene was such that he was holding solo exhibitions in no time, with "Mind Maps" at Karnik Gallery in Mayfair, London, being a notable one. People's perceptions of life and day-to-day experiences were thus embodied in the form of paintings. Adham's works have since been selling across the globe, especially in the Middle East.

Adham's impact on the Middle East has been particularly noteworthy because of what he stands for — a young artist who dared to dream, with a goal of creating a first-of-its-kind movement in the region. In doing so, he has essentially blazed a new trail for budding Arab artists to make their mark on the world. "I want to convey the creativity and virtuosity of the Arabs to the world", explains Adham. "There is so much clutter in this world, but I choose to see the beauty in every mind and intend to showcase it on the canvas."

art & life

Local Scene

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Zawraq Collective: An initiative of two women to support local artists in Oman

By Zuwaina Al Sulimani
Photos by Waleed Juma

"YOUR LOCAL LIFEBOAT" — shaping what art can be" is the startling point of Zawraq Collective. The team is made up of two amazing women who are fond of theatre and cross-genre art in Muscat.

Zaima al Adawi and Noor al Mahrouqi have created a space for youth to express their desires, expectations and talents through the creation of non-conventional art. They have also provided local artists with a place where they can "break down preconceived notions of the shape art must take and what it must communicate."

Their vision is to create a network of artists who seek the exceptional, not limiting them to specific artistic mediums opening the space for them to reshape, recreate and reimagine what art can be.

Zawraq Collective held their first art exhibition on January 2022, gathering different local artists in Fikra Tourism, Muttrah.

"You can't be here" was the name of the exhibition where artists were asked about "what would you make if people could hear, taste, touch or smell your art?". It explores the notion that as the pandemic has paralyzed our senses, what artists can create if audiences could do more than looking at their arts?

Many local artists participated in this art exhibition contributing in the change of the way of how people can look at their art. Among them, Razan al Humaidi and Umaima al Hina, who created a piece of art named "Scent diary" — a collection of smells common to most who experienced the pandemic in Oman. Tanya Shamil created a piece of art called "I Exist Where You Stand". It is "a multimedia installation that explored the harrowing currents of isolation, social detachment, and numbness that punctuate people's lives when they are forcibly cut off from the world for extended periods of time."

Samah al Ansari and Bashayir al Naimi created "Wasted Youth Shopping" as a mini mart designed to remind us of the lockdowns, when people were only allowed to go out to buy groceries. People felt relief and comfort in buying from supermarkets as outdoors activities were forbidden. The two artists focused on reshaping food items that gave people temporary joy and evoked different emotions on them.

The exhibition was admired by many people as it was attended by over 8,000 visitors within ten days among them were some notable personalities like Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy and Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy.

The main sponsor of the

exhibition was "Global Shapes Community Muscat", and the silver sponsors are the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Tunes and Jotun.

This exhibit was followed by the much talked about installation held at the Muttrah Fort on March 19 to 20, 2022 sponsored by Muttrah Fort in collaboration with Teepee and Sekka.

It was named as "Ahlam el Asr" which means the dreams of the afternoon. The exhibit was well lauded for making use of the space giving it a new life other than the history it already proudly embraces.

It was for all who are longing for the past and wanting to transcend time and place, and to live in an exceptional experience in Muttrah Fort.

The exhibition was presented as a utopia of a nostalgic past mingling different traditional and modern cultures together.

The artists who showcased their works included Majda al Hinaei, Safa al Balushi and Hafsa.

Zaima and Noor are just beginning in their journey to create a space where artists in Oman can take their art to a higher level. With two memorable events in their sleeve, their next venture is highly anticipated as those who already attended are fully aware that the two are championing the voiceless artists of Oman.