

EU studying Iran response

The European Union said on Tuesday it was studying Iran's response to a "final" draft agreement on reviving a 2015 nuclear accord with major powers it presented at talks in Vienna. The United States had already said on Monday that it was informing EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell of its response to the text he submitted on August 8. **DETAILS ON P6**



P10

VLAHOVIC DOUBLE SINKS SASSUOLO



P15

BRITAIN'S HOT LABOUR MARKET COOLS AND INFLATION EATS PAY



P18

FRENCH SORGHUM FARMER DEFIES DROUGHT WITH SUSTAINABLE CROP



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO GABON PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Republic of Gabon, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Ondimba good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Gabon further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO INDONESIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Joko Widodo of the Republic of Indonesia, on the occasion of his country's Independence Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Widodo good health and happiness and the people of Indonesia further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN OBSERVER

FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH NEWS APP IN OMAN

DOWNLOAD NOW

Available on the App Store and Google Play

INSIDE



CHINESE RESEARCH SHIP DOCKS IN SRI LANKA

P6

WAKE TWOKE

WHY REPUBLICANS TURNED AGAINST ENVIRONMENT

P8



EXPLORING DATES HARVEST SEASON

Noted Omani lensman Nasser bin Hamed al Harthy is an adventurer who loves to explore. He has a passion for landscape, mountains, portraits, people and wildlife. Recently he completed photographing the vast expansive spread of yellow coloured dates or the Al Tabseel date harvest season in the Wilayat of Bidiya. **DETAILS ON P20**

Joint efforts yield results as road accidents fall by 60% in 5 years

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

After working together for several years, the Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in bringing down the number of road accidents by more than 60 per cent over the past five years, thanks to a joint effort of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and many other government and private organisations. According to the report published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of road accidents in Oman fell to 1,539, at a rate of one accident every six hours at the end of 2021, resulting in a reduction of 60 per cent over the past five years. Authorities say will continue to educate and create awareness on practising safe driving on roads

A conscious approach by people can only sustain the benefits, and it is every individual's responsibility towards the society to make our roads accident-free

AHMED AL KHADOURI
Safety Expert

through various campaigns, brochures and pamphlets and educating the public through electronic means to help reduce casualties on roads.

However, the onus to sustain the results and to achieve the zero road accidents is on people. During the above mentioned period, road accidents left 1,621 people injured and 434 dead. Omanis constituted 76 per cent of the injured and 66 per cent of the dead as at the end of 2021. By 2021, speeding was cited as the main cause of road accidents (53.3 per cent accounting for 820 accidents), while collisions topped the list of 'types' of road accidents (41.1 per cent). Data shows that most accidents (58 per cent) in Oman occur outside the boundaries of cities, and that accidents along straight roads accounted for 51 per cent of the total number, of which 809 occurred during nights and 730 during daytime.

TURN TO P2

First post-blockade food aid ship leaves Ukraine for Africa

KYIV: The ship Brave Commander has left the Ukrainian port of Pivdennyi, carrying the first cargo of humanitarian food aid bound for Africa from Ukraine since Russia's war, Refinitiv Eikon data showed on Tuesday. Ukraine's grain exports have slumped since the start of the war because of the closure of its Black Sea ports, driving up global food prices and sparking fears of shortages in Africa and the Middle East. Moscow calls its action in

Ukraine a "special military operation". Three Black Sea ports were unblocked last month under a deal between Moscow and Kyiv, brokered by the United Nations and Turkey, making it possible to send hundreds of thousands of tonnes of Ukrainian grain to buyers. The Brave Commander, carrying 23,000 tonnes of wheat, left for Djibouti with supplies destined for consumers in Ethiopia, Ukraine's infrastructure ministry said.



The Lebanese-flagged bulk carrier Brave Commander leaves the sea port of Pivdennyi with wheat for Ethiopia. — Reuters

"The ministry and the United Nations are working on ways to increase food supplies for the socially vulnerable sections of the African population," it said in a statement. World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley said the most important step in combating hunger is the opening of Ukraine's Black Sea ports. Further cargoes are likely to deliver food aid to countries in the Middle East and Horn of Africa, she said. — Reuters



■ BEAUTY OF BAHLA



An aerial view of the village of Sayfam in the Wilayat of Bahla in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Bahla, known for its ancient heritage, is one of the most famous tourist and heritage destinations in the Sultanate of Oman. – Photo by Khamis bin Nasser al Hakmani / (ONA)

Tourism sector
contributes
2.4% to GDP

FROM PAGE 1
with stronger growth expected during the medium-term forecast period (2024-2026). The agency's report indicated that there is a noticeable recovery in the sector in Oman, which began in the late fourth quarter of 2021, with expectation of a continued growth over the coming years, benefiting from the economic diversification agenda of Oman Vision 2040 and the tourism development plans implemented by the government through recovery programmes from the effects of pandemic, digital marketing initiatives, and the announcement of new investments in the sector.

Joint efforts yield results as
road accidents fall by 60%



FROM PAGE 1
Ahmed al Khadouri, expert at the Safety Institute, says a conscious approach by people can only sustain the benefits, and it is every individual's responsibility towards the society to make our roads accident-free.
He said that nearly 1.2 million people are killed in road accidents globally, resulting in more than 20 million people becoming either disabled or injured and about 2.1 per cent of deaths annually across the globe are from road accidents.
It is also reported that youth

are the most vulnerable to road accidents and they lose their lives on roads during their most productive lifetime, which is between 25 and 44 years of age.
Additionally, around 90 per cent of deaths happened are in middle and low-income countries.
Statistics show that the number of vehicles registered in Oman in 2021 stood at 1.55 million, down by 0.3 per cent as against 2020. Private vehicles constituted 79.4 per cent of the total number of vehicles registered in Oman.

■ EXPIRED PAINT SEIZED



In the context of combating the spread of unauthorised trade in goods, the Consumer Protection Authority in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate sized a number of tins of expired paints.

Drop in ATM withdrawals as
users shift to transfers, online

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

There has been a substantial increase in the number of cashless transactions made across various retail outlets across the country, this was revealed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) on Tuesday.
Speaking at a seminar conducted to promote the habit of savings, Tahir bin Salim al Amri, CEO, Central Bank of Oman, said that there has been more than 14 million electronic clearing or the Automated Clearing House (ACH) transactions, with a value of more than RO 9 billion, an increase of 39 per cent in 2021 compared to 2020.
The percentage of ATM cash withdrawals decreased to 19 per cent in 2021, compared to 26 per cent in 2020, while at the same time the payments via cards, including online transactions, increased from 66 per cent in 2019 to 81 per cent in 2021.
According to sources in the banking industry, the pandemic has played a major role in the adoption of digital payments as lockdowns encouraged online purchases.
Speaking to the Observer, small traders are not very enthusiastic on the shift to card payments. "We need some liquid cash to



carry out the routine activities of our business. But as the world is moving toward cashless payments, we should accept them for the convenience of customers, said Salim, who runs a grocery store in Maabela.
But for customers, it is a welcome trend as cards and online transactions have become safer and more convenient to use.
From January this year, the cashless payment scheme was rolled out in stages, covering shopping malls, cafes and restaurants, commercial centres, gift markets, jewellery stores,

The payments via
cards, including online
transactions, increased
from 66% in 2019 to
81% in 2021

electronic shops, grocery stores, vegetables and fruit sellers, building material shops, and outlets in industrial areas.
Commercial stores figuring in this list must enable cashless payment services in the form of credit card readers, (point of sale)

POS terminals, and other facilities.
The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said it will ensure facilities required by commercial outlets are provided by local banks and service providers without imposing any cost burden on the business community.
Fees for electronic transactions were regulated by the Central Bank and must not exceed 1.5 per cent of the billed amount where payment is made by credit card. Fees levied on payments made by mobile wallets will be limited to a maximum of 0.75 per cent.

Orphans to celebrate day of happiness

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousuf

Several children from the Al Rahma Society for Orphans in Muscat will celebrate a day of happiness on Thursday, thanks to a CSR initiative by the Mysk Al Mouj.
August is considered to be the month happiness and a particular day was chosen to make this children enjoy the various activities of the hotel which is aimed at leaving life-long memories in the tender minds.
"We are humbled in giving back to society as a part of our corporate social responsibility. As the month of August is also the month of happiness, there couldn't



be a better way than to celebrate the children of the Al Rahma Society," a spokesperson from the Mysk Al Mouj told the Observer.
The hotel team will spend an entire day with the children in and around the hotel keeping the children engaged in various

activities like pizza making, swimming, movies and lots of games.
"We are happy for our children to be hosted by the Mysk Al Mouj hotel that will let them enjoy a day in a totally different, luxurious environment that will inculcate

them valuable lessons of life," a spokesperson from Al Rahma Society said. Efforts are currently under way to ensure that they derive maximum fun and enjoy the day to the fullest while safety is given a priority.
These children will be engaged in bicycle ride around the Al Mouj property, immerse themselves in games and sports, board games and activities are planned for children of all age groups to enjoy the day.
The hotel menu will be revised befitting the needs of the kids as food and beverage offerings will also include various options for kids such as kids' menu, their favourite ice creams, pizza and much more.



■ CREDENTIALS OF UNICEF
REPRESENTATIVE RECEIVED



Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Affairs Under-Secretary, has received the credentials of Sumaira Chowdhury, Representative of the UNICEF. Al Harthy wished the UNICEF official success in performing the tasks of her mission. — ONA

Special packages under job security system

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 16

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), in cooperation with service providers, has provided special facilities to citizens whose services have been terminated for reasons beyond their control, as part of the government's efforts to provide social protection under the job security system.

Omantel has provided a special package to its subscribers of this category in both postpaid and prepaid services, which includes a 50-per cent discount on the monthly bills and a postponement of the claim for payment of any dues for previous

bills or instalments resulting from for six months. No fines will be imposed for cancelling the contract or reducing the subscription package in any of the available packages.

There will also be a cashback on Hayyak packages, which will be valid for 28 days.

The job security system, launched in 2020, is a national project to provide social protection for citizens whose services are terminated from work for reasons beyond their control.

The authority's efforts in this field stem from its social responsibility towards this category and its regulatory role in the field of telecommunications, TRA said.

Awareness campaign under way to keep animals off the roads



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Camels are lovable but not when they are near roads. Awareness campaigns have been held by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in South Al Batinah on keeping animals from straying away from the farms.

A series of awareness campaigns is currently being held on various topics and experts from the ministry are constantly conducting field trips in addition to distributing brochures and leaflets and having conversations with livestock breeders and owners. The message is to protect their animals by maintaining them in their pen.

According to the ministry representatives in South Al Batinah, for example, letting animals to graze can lead to change in landscape as well, but most importantly cause traffic accidents or be hindrance to pedestrians.

In 2019, 520 accidents were caused by stray camels alone. Vehicle collisions with camels have proven to be fatal in many cases.

In 2020, the ministry had issued regulations on stray animals — RO 100 for each camel or horse, RO 50 for each cow and RO 30 for each goat, sheep or other animals.

This is if they are found stray, grazing in cities and residential areas or less than one km from sub-roads.

If the animals are seized they



will be looked after in enclosures but the owner will have to bear the cost upon the animal's release.

Yet another awareness campaign that is being held is on dumping agricultural waste into wadis.

The ministry stated on social media, "Dumping waste into wadis lead to flooding or changing their course."

According to the authorities, the ideal way to dispose of unrooted dead trees or other farm waste is to contact be'ah company. They stated that the improper disposal of farm waste on the roadside or burning them can cause environmental pollution.



Dhofar sees first Watchman device implant



SALALAH: A medical team at the Cardiac Centre in Salalah succeeded in implanting Watchman devices in two patients suffering recurrent thrombosis due to atrial fibrillation.

Dr Said bin Musallam al Maashani, Director of the Cardiology and Surgery Centre, said that the facility succeeded in this type of catheterisation operations for the first time in the Governorate of Dhofar. Earlier,

such cases were treated either abroad or at The Royal Hospital (Muscat).

A Watchman device is planted in the atrial appendage of the left atrium in patients suffering atrial fibrillation and cannot take blood-thinning treatments due to frequent bleeding, Al Maashani added.

The two operated persons were aged above 60 years.

— ONA

Oman Air adds more flights to Istanbul, Trabzon



MUSCAT: In response to exceptional demand, Oman Air has increased flights between Muscat and its Turkish destinations (Istanbul and Trabzon).

Based on the table below, the airline has increased frequencies between Muscat and Trabzon from 3 weekly flights to 5 weekly flights, and between Muscat and Istanbul from 7 weekly flights to 8 weekly flights.

Oman Air is renowned for its exceptional award-winning products and services, both in the air and on the ground, and for the signature Omani hospitality accessible to guests on every

flight. The airline offers wide-body service, including Boeing 787 Dreamliner in addition to the Boeing 737 between Muscat and Istanbul. The airline's single-aisle Boeing 737 fleet runs flights between Muscat and Trabzon. Guests should check omanair.com for the most up-to-date flight schedules and times, as they are subject to change.

Guests can also book a customised Istanbul and Trabzon holiday package through Oman Air Holidays. Guests travelling to/from Muscat should ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country.

Treasury bills worth RO 10m issued

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 142, worth RO 10 million was issued this week.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are as follows: The total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 10 million, for a maturity



period of 28 days, from 17 August 2022 until 14 September 2022.

The average accepted price reached 99.830 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price

arrived at 99.830 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 2.21607 percent and 2.21985 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 3.00 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 3.50 per cent.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA



VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The social media in the Sultanate of Oman has been abuzz with the money-chain scam by a company in which several people lost their hard-earned money, which is estimated to be in thousands of rials.

Sources indicated that a few people have lost money after making initial profits from such investments in the company.

The opinion is divided with some stating that there are people willing to take risks with such companies even though there is a possibility they can be deceptive.

Speaking to the Observer, a citizen said, “Through my personal experience I can say that, initially, the money starts to come as soon as one joins the scheme. Subsequently, the problems started to appear as the participants had to pay a certain amount to some fake accounts in exchange for the money to flow again. The agenda seems clear as the attempt to collect as much money and escape with it.”

Mohammed, who just managed to save himself from being a victim of such a scheme, said, “These programmes depend on forming a chain with the help of community, neighbours, family members, and even friends. The desire to make quick money attracts people to such programmes. Initially, as a person wins, he lures others to participate one after another.”

Several people who spoke to the Observer said that the urge to make quick profits exposes people to fraudsters, which include fake companies and individuals.

Last year, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) prohibited selling, advertising, or promoting goods, products and services through network marketing and pyramid schemes. The ministry said it will impose a minimum fine of RO 5,000 against violators.

The decision was expected to significantly help in limiting commercial fraud, MoCIIP said.

“The decision will help in protecting competition between institutions and companies, and protecting individuals from engaging in such practices,” MoCIIP said.

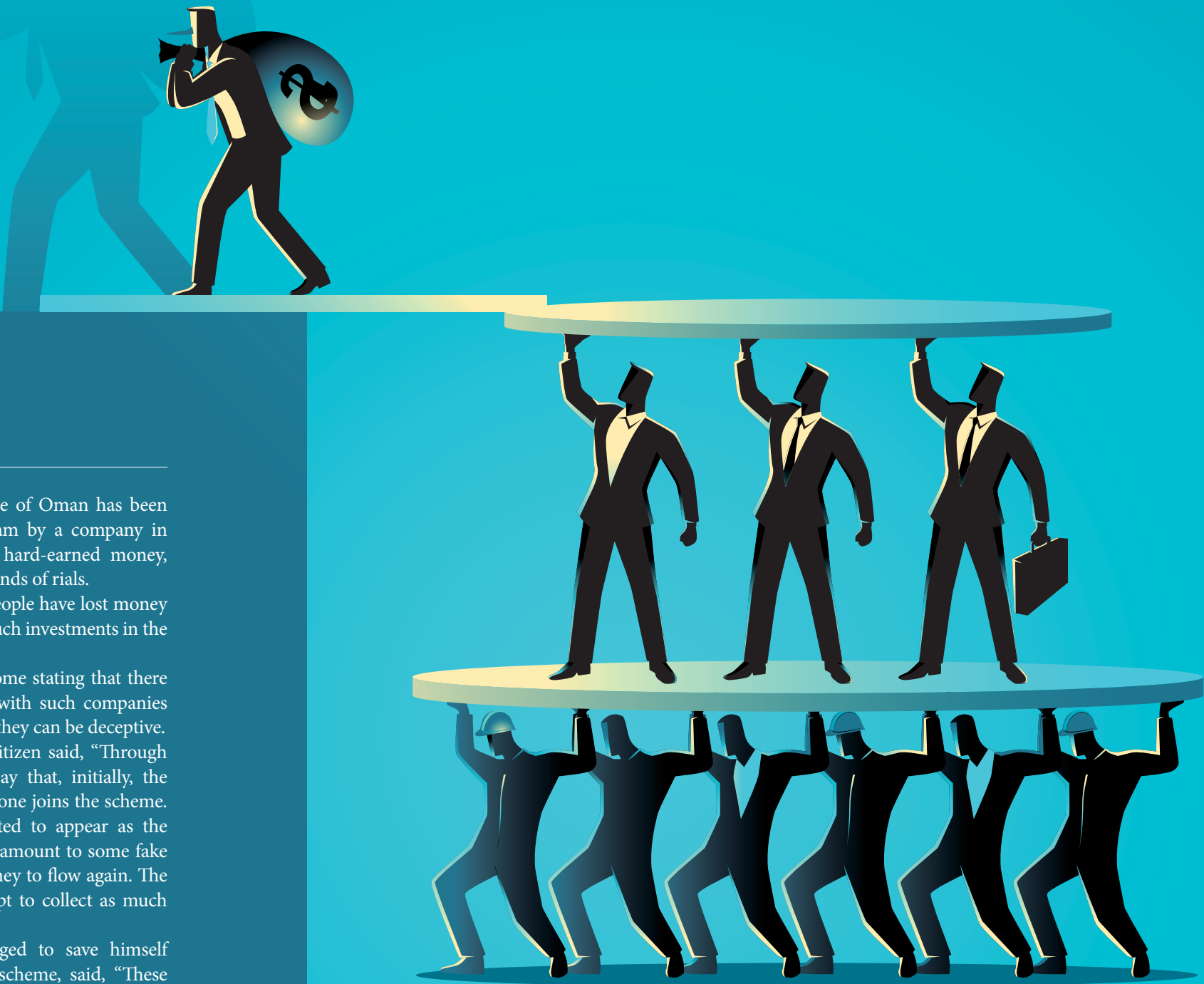
According to MoCIIP, network or hierarchical marketing activity begins with an individual or by a company at the top of the pyramid, who persuades people to buy a product or subscribe to the group by paying a certain amount of money, with the promise of giving him services or a symbolic profit if he/she can convince others to join his/her list, where the biggest beneficiary is the one who is at the top of the hierarchical group.

“It must be noted that there is a lot of confusion among the public regarding hierarchical or network marketing, as most of these concepts are different components of the concept of direct selling,” MoCIIP said.

“Despite the popularity of direct selling, there are many types of distributors with different motives. The multi-level marketing is considered a part of network marketing and has a multi-level commission reward structure based on the volume of sales of products at competitive prices.”

BEWARE OF MONEY-CHAIN FRAUD

URGE TO MAKE QUICK PROFITS EXPOSES
PEOPLE TO FRAUDSTERS, INCLUDING FAKE
BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS





In brief

■ BAGHDAD



SADR BACKTRACKS ON CALL FOR HUGE PROTEST

Iraq's cleric Moqtada Sadr backtracked on Tuesday after earlier urging his supporters to join a massive rally as a standoff with his political rivals appeared to be getting worse.

The populist cleric's announcement came amid behind the scenes talks aimed at steering Iraq out of crisis, with the country's two sections jockeying for supremacy.

More than 10 months on from elections, Iraq still has no government, new prime minister or new president, because of disagreement between factions over forming a coalition.

■ CAIRO



TWINS, TRIPLETS AMONG CHILD VICTIMS OF BLAZE

Mourners in Egypt attended a memorial service on Tuesday for victims of a Coptic church fire in Cairo that killed 41 people — among them many children, including twins and triplets.

The electrical fire on Sunday ripped through the Abu Sifin church in Imbaba, a working class district west of the Nile River, part of Giza governorate in greater Cairo.

At least 10 of those killed during Sunday mass, when families flock to the church and its daycare services, were minors aged under 16, according to a list from just one hospital circulated by local media.

■ TUNIS



TUNISIA INTERCEPTS NEARLY 100 EUROPE- BOUND MIGRANTS

Tunisia said on Tuesday it had foiled several attempts by almost 100 migrants to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea since the previous day.

Tunisia and Libya are the main points of departure for migrants trying to reach Europe from Africa. Sea crossing attempts tend to increase during spring and summer.

Tunisia's National Guard said it had prevented five maritime crossings and rescued 80 people, mostly Tunisians and including 35 migrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

It said "preventive operations" were also carried out near Menzel Temime in the north, Mahdia and Kerkennah on the central coast and Zarzis in the south, leading to 11 arrests.

Kenya's Odinga vows to pursue 'legal options' over vote defeat

NAIROBI: Kenya's defeated presidential candidate Raila Odinga vowed on Tuesday to pursue "all constitutional and legal options" after rejecting the outcome of elections that awarded victory to his rival William Ruto.

The 77-year-old veteran politician branded the result of the August 9 race a "travesty" but stopped short of explicitly announcing that he would mount a challenge at the Supreme Court.

"What we saw yesterday (Monday) was a travesty and a blatant disregard of the constitution and the laws of Kenya," he told a press conference in Nairobi, blaming the head of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) which oversaw the poll.

"I do not want to fully address our strategies going forward but... we will be pursuing all constitutional and legal options available to us."

Odinga narrowly lost his fifth bid for the top job to Deputy President Ruto, 55, who was proclaimed president-elect Monday after a nail-biting wait for results.

His supporters cried foul over the outcome, which also triggered divisions in the IEBC.

Odinga lost by around 230,000 votes despite the support of his old



Kenya's defeated presidential candidate Raila Odinga speaks during a press conference, flanked by his running mate Martha Karua, at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre in Nairobi on Tuesday. — AFP

foe, the outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta, and the weight of the ruling party machinery behind him.

He has previously said he was cheated of victory in the 2007, 2013 and 2017 elections, and the poll's aftermath is being keenly watched as a test of democratic maturity in the East African powerhouse.

No presidential poll outcome has gone uncontested in Kenya since 2002, and the disputes have

led to bloodshed in the past.

In August 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the election after Odinga rejected Kenyatta's victory. Dozens of people were killed by police in post-poll protests.

Kenya's worst electoral violence occurred after the 2007 vote, when more than 1,100 people died in bloodletting between rival tribes.

On the campaign trail, both frontrunners pledged to resolve any disputes in court rather than

on the streets. Violent protests nevertheless erupted in Odinga's strongholds in two Nairobi slums and the lakeside city of Kisumu on Monday evening, although the situation was calm on Tuesday.

While many businesses in Kisumu kept their doors shut on Tuesday, waiting for tensions to blow over, Odinga commended his supporters "for remaining calm and keeping the peace".

— AFP

Death toll from Sudan floods rises to 75

KHARTOUM: The death toll from flooding triggered by torrential rains in Sudan has risen to 75 and destroyed or damaged tens of thousands of homes, police said on Tuesday.

"The number of people killed by the floods rose to 75, and left 12,551 houses completely destroyed, and another 20,751 partially damaged," a National Council for Civil Defence statement said. It also said that around 30 people had been injured.

Heavy rains usually fall in Sudan between May and October, and the country faces severe flooding every year, wrecking property, infrastructure and crops.

The eastern state of Kassala, North and South Kordofan state, River Nile state, and South Darfur were among the most badly affected, according to the United Nations. — AFP



Around 136,000 people had been affected by rains and flooding since this year's rainy season began. — AFP

Astronaut Jessica Watkins sets sights on Moon... and Mars

WASHINGTON: If you had the choice, would you rather go to the Moon or Mars?

The question is utterly theoretical for most of us, but for US astronaut Jessica Watkins, it hits a bit differently.

"Whichever comes first!" Watkins says with a laugh, in a lengthy interview from her post on the International Space Station (ISS).

At 34, Watkins has many years ahead of her at the US space agency Nasa, and could very well be one of the first women to step foot on the Moon in the coming years, as a member of the Artemis team preparing for upcoming lunar missions.

Missions to Mars are off in the future, but given that astronauts often work into their 50s, Watkins could conceivably have a shot.

Either way is just fine, she says. "I certainly would be just absolutely thrilled to be able to be a part of the effort to go to another

planetary surface, whether it be the Moon or Mars."

In the meantime, Watkins' first space flight was a history maker: she became the first Black woman to undertake a long-term stay on the ISS, where she has already spent three months as a mission specialist, with three months to go.

The Apollo missions that sent humans to the Moon were solely staffed by white men, and Nasa has sought over the years to widen its recruitment to a more diverse group of candidates.

The agency now wants to put both women and people of colour on the Moon.

"I think it is an important milestone for the agency and the country, and the world as well," Watkins says. "Representation is important. It is true that it is difficult to be what you can't see."

The Maryland native added that she was "grateful for all of those who have come before me... the women and Black astronauts who



Watkins says she dreamed of going to space when she was young, and always kept it in the back of her mind — without ever thinking it could be a reality. 'Don't be afraid to dream big,' she says. 'You'll never know when your dreams will come true.' — AFP

have paved the way to enable me to be here today."

GEOLOGIST AT HEART

Born in Gaithersburg in the suburbs of Washington, Watkins grew up in Colorado before heading to California to study geology at Stanford University.

During her doctoral studies at

the University of California, Los Angeles, her research focused in part on Mars and she worked on Nasa's Curiosity rover, which just celebrated 10 years on the Red Planet.

Watkins still has a soft spot for Mars. In fact, she has published a scientific study on the planet

WHO turns to public for monkeypox name change

GENEVA: The World Health Organization, which is looking to rename monkeypox, called on Tuesday for help from the public in coming up with a less stigmatising designation for the fast-spreading disease.

The UN health agency has for weeks voiced concern about the name of the disease that emerged onto the global stage in May.

Experts warn the name can be stigmatising to the primates it was named after, but who play little role in its spread, and to the African continent that the animals are often associated with.

Recently in Brazil, for instance, there have been reported cases of people attacking monkeys over disease fears.

"Human monkeypox was given its name before current best practices in naming diseases," WHO spokeswoman Fadela Chaib told reporters in Geneva.

"We want really to find a name that is not stigmatising," she added, saying the consultation is now open to everyone through a dedicated website: <https://icd.who.int/dev11>.

Monkeypox received its name because the virus was originally identified in monkeys kept for research in Denmark in 1958, but the disease is found in a number of animals, and most frequently in rodents.

The disease was first discovered in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the spread among humans since then mainly limited to certain West and Central African countries where it is endemic.

But in May, cases of the disease, which causes fever, muscular aches and large boil-like skin lesions, began spreading rapidly around the world, mainly among men who have sex with men. — AFP

during her stint on the ISS.

"I would certainly call myself a geologist, a scientist, an astronaut," she says.

Watkins remembers the moment that she realised space and planetary geology — the composition of formation of celestial bodies such as planets, moons and asteroids — would be her life's work.

It came during one of her first geology classes, in a lecture about planetary accretion, or when solids gradually collide with each other to form larger bodies, and ultimately planets.

"I remember learning about that process... and realising then that that was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and what I wanted to study," she recalls.

"The notion of being able to be a part of an effort to actually do field work on the surface of another planetary body is super exciting, and I look forward to being a part of it" — AFP



EU says studying Iran response to ‘final’ nuclear text

TEHRAN: The European Union said on Tuesday it was studying Iran's response to a "final" draft agreement on reviving a 2015 nuclear accord with major powers it presented at talks in Vienna.

The United States had already said on Monday that it was informing EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell of its response to the text he submitted on August 8.

The possibility of a deal which might lead to the lifting of US sanctions on Iran's oil output of 2.5 million barrels per day has already helped trigger a fall in prices on world markets, with US oil futures dropping nearly three per cent to finish below \$90 a barrel.

A spokesperson for Borrell — who coordinated talks to bring Iran and the United States back into the deal — said the Iranian response was received late on Monday and the EU was consulting with the United States and the other parties "on the way ahead".

"Everybody is studying the response and this is not the time for the moment to speculate on timing," Borrell's spokesperson Nabila Massrali later told a press briefing.

Iran's official IRNA news agency reported earlier on Tuesday that "an agreement will



A newspaper with a cover picture of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, is seen in Tehran, on Tuesday. — Reuters

be concluded if the United States reacts with realism and flexibility" to Iran's response.

Iran's ISNA news agency cited an "informed source" as saying that Tehran "expects to receive the response of the other side in the next two days".

IRNA had said on Friday that Iran might accept the "final" text drawn up by the European Union

Iran's ISNA news agency cited an "informed source" as saying that Tehran "expects to receive the response of the other side in the next two days"

to save the deal, which aimed to curb Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

The deal has been moribund since the 2018 withdrawal of the United States under then president Donald Trump whose administration reimposed crippling sanctions.

An unidentified Iranian diplomat said, according to

IRNA, that "the European Union's proposals are acceptable provided that they provide assurances to Iran on various points, related to sanctions and safeguards" as well as pending issues with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

THREE ISSUES

IRNA said that the remaining differences centred on three issues.

"The United States has expressed flexibility on two of them verbally but that needs to be incorporated into the text," the news agency said without elaborating.

"The third issue has to do with a guarantee that the deal will be lasting, and that depends on realism from the United States to reassure Iran."

None of the parties have spelt out in details the points of contention that are still blocking a deal.

Iran's demand for an end to US blacklisting of its ideological army, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as a "terrorist organisation" has been dropped from the discussions and will instead be handled after the deal, a senior EU official said earlier this month.

The official said progress had also been made on Tehran's call

for guarantees that there will be no repeat of Washington renegeing on the deal as it did under Trump in 2018. Tehran and Washington still have to agree on "issues related to sanctions lifting and a couple of nuclear questions that did not exist in March as the Iranians advanced their programme", the EU official said.

Iran also wants the UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, to end its long-running investigation into traces of enriched uranium found at sites not declared as having hosted nuclear activities.

Britain, China, France, Germany, Iran and Russia, as well as the United States indirectly, resumed talks on the nuclear accord earlier in August after a months-long hiatus. The EU-coordinated negotiations to revive the deal known as the JCPOA began in April 2021 before coming to a standstill in March.

The EU said last Tuesday it expected Tehran and Washington to "very quickly" respond to the "final" text aimed at salvaging the deal.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said that, after the lengthy negotiations, "what counts for us is verification" that sanctions are lifted in practice.

— AFP

Court rejects retrial for Malaysia's Najib

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia's highest court said on Tuesday it would hear former leader Najib Razak's final bid to overturn his 12-year jail sentence for corruption, with an acquittal potentially clearing the way for his return to power.

The appeal is the last high stakes court gambit left open to Najib — but if he is unsuccessful he will have to start serving his jail sentence after years of legal wrangling.

The Federal Court's decision to proceed with an appeal, which will begin on Thursday, came after it rejected the former prime minister's plea for a retrial.

Najib, 69, and his ruling party were unceremoniously tossed out of office in 2018 elections following allegations of their involvement in a multi-billion dollar scandal at state fund 1MDB.

The former prime minister and his associates were accused of stealing billions of dollars from the country's investment vehicle and spending it on everything from high-end real estate to pricey art.

Following a lengthy High



Najib Razak attends a news conference at the Federal Court in Putrajaya on Tuesday. — Reuters

Court trial, Najib was found guilty of abuse of power, money laundering and criminal breach of trust over the transfer of 42 million ringgit (\$10.1 million) from a former 1MDB unit to his bank account.

He was sentenced to 12 years in jail in July 2020, and an appellate court last December rejected his appeal, prompting him to mount a final plea before the Federal Court, where any ruling will be final.

Najib had been hoping the court would grant a full retrial but that request was unanimously rejected by a panel of five judges on Tuesday. — AFP

Chinese research vessel docks in Sri Lanka

HAMBANTOTA: A Chinese research vessel bristling with antennas and communication gear docked at Sri Lanka's Chinese-run port of Hambantota on Tuesday.

The Yuan Wang 5 entered the deep-sea port after securing permission to enter Sri Lankan waters on the condition it would not engage in research, port officials said.

It was originally due to arrive last week, but Colombo asked Beijing to defer the visit following objections by India.

But on Saturday, after intense negotiations, Sri Lanka announced a U-turn, saying permission was restored to dock at the southern port and remain for six days for refuelling and taking in other supplies.

"We are granting the same facilities that we extend to all other countries," government spokesman Bandula Gunawardana told reporters. "All these countries are important to us."

Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong said the visit of Yuan Wang 5 was part of "normal exchanges between

the two countries". "China and Sri Lanka enjoy outstanding friendship," Qi told reporters at a ceremony to welcome the ship.

Shipping analytics websites described the Yuan Wang 5 as a research and survey vessel, but according to Indian media it is a dual-use spy ship.

There was no customary military band to welcome the vessel, but a small group of traditional Kandyan dancers and drummers performed on a red carpet.

Also dockside were several lawmakers, but there were no senior politicians or other dignitaries in attendance.

"Long live China and Sri Lanka friendship," read a red-and-white banner on an upper deck of the vessel, which had at least four satellite dish antennas pointed skywards. Men in white shirts and black trousers stood on deck waving Chinese and Sri Lankan flags as the vessel was pushed alongside the main jetty.

Both India and the US have raised security concerns over the ship's visit to Sri Lanka, with New Delhi lodging a complaint with Colombo. — AFP



Crew members onboard China's research and survey vessel, the Yuan Wang 5, hold Chinese national flags upon their arrival at Hambantota port on Tuesday. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Turkish troops, Kurdish fighters exchange fire

Turkish troops and US-backed Kurdish fighters exchanged heavy shellfire on Tuesday in the northern Syrian border town of Kobane, leaving one civilian dead as the conflict escalated.

In Sanliurfa province on the Turkish side of the frontier, some 25 km west of Kobane, a Turkish soldier was killed and four were wounded in a mortar attack on a military border post, Turkey's defence ministry said.

The artillery salvos in Kobane hit within the town and around



its edges, starting overnight and intensifying throughout the day, according to residents and the semi-autonomous local administration governing the town.

KABUL

Taliban add more compulsory religion classes

Afghan university students will have to attend more compulsory Islamic studies classes, education officials said on Tuesday while giving little sign that secondary schools for girls would reopen.

Many conservative Afghan clerics in Taliban are sceptical of modern education.

"We are adding five more religious subjects to the existing eight," said Abdul Baqi Haqqani, minister for higher education, including Islamic history, politics and governance. The number of



compulsory religious classes will increase from one to three a week in government universities. He said Taliban would not order any subjects to be dropped from the current curriculum.

KUTUPALONG

Rohingya in Bangladesh demand security

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh on Tuesday implored the United Nations rights chief for protection after recent murders that have again left members of the stateless minority fearful for their safety.

Michelle Bachelet spent the day meeting with residents of the sprawling and squalid relief settlements housing nearly a million ethnic Rohingya who fled persecution in neighbouring Myanmar.

Security in the camps came back



into focus this month when two refugee community leaders were shot dead, allegedly by an insurgent group active in the camps. "She wanted to know about murders in the camps.



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

WEDNESDAY | AUGUST 17 | 2022

7

In brief

■ WASHINGTON



FIRST LADY JILL BIDEN TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID: WHITE HOUSE

US First Lady Jill Biden has tested positive for Covid-19 and developed mild symptoms, the White House said on Tuesday, two weeks after her husband Joe Biden contracted the virus for a second time. The 71-year-old wife of the president tested negative on Monday but developed “cold-like symptoms late in the evening,” her communications director Elizabeth Alexander said in a statement. A subsequent rapid antigen test was negative, but a more detailed PCR test was positive, Alexander said. The first lady has been prescribed a course of the oral antiviral pill Paxlovid and will isolate for at least five days.

■ HELSINKI



FINLAND TO DRASTICALLY CUT RUSSIAN TOURIST VISAS

Finland will limit Russian tourist visas to 10 per cent of current volumes as of September 1 due to rising discontent over Russian tourism amid the war in Ukraine, the government said on Tuesday. “Tourist visas will not stop completely, but their number will be significantly reduced,” Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said. Tourist visas from neighbouring Russia will be limited by restricting the allotted opening hours for tourism visa applications, as an outright ban based on nationality is not possible, Haavisto said. “This means that other types of visas will be given preference and more time,” the minister said.

■ LONDON



BRITAIN BRACES FOR A WEEK OF STORMS, HEAVY RAINS

Britain can expect days of thunder as heavy rain and floods are set to continue over the coming days. The Met Office has issued a yellow thunderstorm warning for most of the UK on Tuesday with conditions potentially causing more flash flooding as well as transport disruption and power cuts. The warning will stay in place for southern England on Wednesday, where communities could be cut off by flooded roads, and the chance of fast-flowing or deep flood water could cause danger to life. Heavy showers caused flooding in Cornwall and Devon on Monday afternoon.



An employee looks through the debris of a destroyed French sporting goods retailer, Intersport, at a shopping mall in Bucha, Kyiv region, on Tuesday. — AFP

Blasts at Russian base in Crimea show possible Ukrainian fightback

KYIV: Moscow denounced sabotage and Ukraine hinted at responsibility for new explosions on Tuesday at a military base in the Russian-annexed Crimea region that is an important war supply line.

The blasts engulfed an ammunition depot at a Russian military base in the north of the peninsula, disrupting trains and forcing 2,000 people to be evacuated from a nearby village, according to Russian officials and news agencies.

Plumes of smoke were later seen at a second Russian military base in central Crimea, Russia's Kommersant newspaper said, while blasts hit another facility in the west last week.

The explosions raised the prospect of new dynamics in the six-month war if Ukraine now has capability to strike deeper

into Russian territory or pro-Kyiv groups are having success with guerrilla-style attacks.

Russia has used Crimea, which it annexed from Ukraine in 2014, to reinforce its troops fighting in other parts of Ukraine with military hardware, a process Kyiv is keen to disrupt ahead of a potential counter-offensive in southern Ukraine.

Crimea is the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet and also popular in the summer as a holiday resort.

In Tuesday's incident, an electricity substation also caught fire, according to footage on Russian state TV. Russia's RIA news agency said seven trains were delayed and that rail traffic on part of the line in northern Crimea had been suspended.

'DEMILITARISATION'

Ukraine has not officially

confirmed or denied responsibility for explosions in Crimea, though its officials have openly cheered incidents in territory that, until last week, appeared safe in Moscow's grip beyond range of attack.

After Tuesday's blasts, Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak and chief of staff Andriy Yermak both exulted on social media at “demilitarisation”: an apparent mocking reference to the word Russia uses to justify its war.

“Operation ‘demilitarisation’ in the precise style of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will continue until the complete de-occupation of Ukraine's territories. Our soldiers are the best sponsors of a good mood,” Yermak wrote on Telegram.

Russia's defence ministry said the explosions at the ammunition depot were “a result of sabotage”.

With the war raging since

February 24, attention has also focused in recent days on shelling in the vicinity of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in southern Ukraine.

Both sides have blamed each other for risks to Europe's largest nuclear facility, which Russia has seized though Ukrainian technicians operate it.

The region's governor, Oleksandr Starukh, said up to 400,000 people would need to be evacuated in the event of an accident.

The Ukraine conflict has caused millions to flee, killed thousands, and deepened a geopolitical rift between Moscow and the West.

Russia calls its war a “special military operation” to demilitarise its neighbour, protect Russian-speaking communities and push back against the Nato military alliance's expansion.

— Reuters

Sri Lanka to end state of emergency: President

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's state of emergency imposed in the middle of last month will not be extended beyond this week, President Ranil Wickremesinghe's media office said on Tuesday, as protests against the country's economic devastation petered out.

Lawmakers voted Wickremesinghe in as president on July 20 after his predecessor, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fled a popular uprising against months of acute shortages of fuel, food and medicine.

Six-time Prime Minister Wickremesinghe imposed the emergency from July 18 when he was acting president, after tens of thousands of people stormed into government buildings, seeking solutions to the country's worst economic crisis in more than seven decades.

Wickremesinghe's office cited the president as saying at an event in the main city of Colombo that the emergency would lapse this week. He has sought peace and political support to help advance bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund. The country has already defaulted on its sovereign debt.

The country is considering restructuring its local and foreign debt in the hope of securing a \$3 billion IMF loan.

— Reuters/AFP

Defeat looms for Trump's biggest Republican critic

JACKSON, US: Republican dissident Liz Cheney looks set to lose her US Congress seat on Tuesday to an election-denying conspiracy theorist, in the latest signal of her party's disavowal of traditional conservatism in favour of Donald Trump's headline “America First” movement.

Once considered Republican royalty, the lawmaker from Wyoming has become a pariah in the party over her role on the congressional panel pursuing Trump over the plot to overthrow the last election that culminated in the 2021 assault on the US Capitol.

All eyes are on the Wyoming Republican primary, where defeat for the 56-year-old elder daughter of former vice-president Dick Cheney would mark the end of the family's four-decade political association with one of America's most conservative states.

Even her loyal backers have privately accepted that Cheney will likely lose to 59-year-old lawyer Harriet Hageman — Trump's hand-picked candidate who has amplified his false claims of a “rigged” 2020 election.

The latest survey from the local Casper Star-Tribune has Cheney



Voters depart the Old Wilson Schoolhouse Community Center in Wilson, Wyoming, on Tuesday as Wyoming holds its Republican primary election. — AFP

with just 30 per cent support compared with 52 per cent for Hageman, reflecting all recent polling.

'WE WILL WIN'

Yet there is already speculation that Cheney may challenge Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024 — or even run as an independent — and insiders are expecting her to deliver a concession speech that will double up as the launchpad for her political future.

“No matter how long we must fight, this is a battle we will win,”

she said in a video message posted before the weekend.

“Millions of Americans across our nation — Republicans, Democrats, independents — stand united in the cause of freedom.”

Cheney has framed her campaign as a battle for the soul of a party she is trying to save from the anticonstitutional forces of Trumpism.

She is the last of 10 Republicans in the lower House of Representatives who backed Trump's second impeachment to be facing primary voters. — AFP



Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak

UK PM nominees seek to undermine Scottish push

LONDON: The two candidates battling to be Britain's next prime minister vied to present themselves as defenders of Scotland's place in the United Kingdom on Tuesday, promising more scrutiny of Scotland's government to undermine a new push for independence.

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which heads Scotland's semi-autonomous government, wants to hold a second independence referendum next year, which could rip apart the world's fifth-biggest economy.

The bonds holding together the four countries that make up the United Kingdom - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - have been severely strained over the last six years by Brexit and the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Liz Truss, the foreign minister, and Rishi Sunak, a former finance

minister, who are competing to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson, set out their policies for Scotland before the only Conservative Party hustings in the country on Tuesday.

Both candidates want more focus on the Scottish government's record on health and education. Scotland has the highest drug deaths in Europe and two thirds of the population is either obese or overweight, while a report last year said its education system is the weakest in the United Kingdom.

Truss promised to give parliamentary privilege to members of the Scottish parliament to allow more scrutiny of the government, and said she would push to sign a trade deal with India to end longstanding 150 per cent tariffs on Scotch whisky, the country's biggest single product export.

— Reuters

When a picture is worth more than a thousand words



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

August 19 is celebrated as World Photography Day and this is a good reason to revisit the power of photography and its capacity to reflect, opine and even change our world.

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but in these times of information overflow, it seems even more powerful than that. Think of the effect a single photograph in one corner of the world impacts another corner within minutes. This is true of human events, natural disasters and even mundane every life.

In a fundamental way, photographs help to capture the present, but also to re-understand the past. While, in the past, important events have been

captured in paintings, those always tended to be impressions of the artist who is choosing to focus on one thing and can just erase the background and everything surrounding the main frame.

Not so in photographs. A more objective medium, we go back to old, historic photographs today and see more than what a photo was originally intended for. For example, in a procession led by a famous personality, while the photo may focus on the main dignitaries, today we can look at those in the background, the carriage coachman, surrounding common people, the buildings, some grand and others not, even the pavement lights, hand lit every night. Each frame gives us a story of

THERE ARE COUNTLESS EXAMPLES OF THE POWER OF PHOTOGRAPHS TO CHANGE THE WORLD, IF ONLY TEMPORARILY. TRENCH WARFARE, NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS, PHOTOS OF AERIAL BOMBINGS, ALL SUCH IMAGES BROUGHT A DISTANT WAR INTO HOMES, MAKING COMMON PEOPLE AWARE OF PAIN AND SUFFERING FAR AWAY

a time which we do not know much about. In short, we choose what we want to focus on, even if the photo is the same as the one taken almost

200 years ago.

There are countless examples of the power of photographs to change the world, if only temporarily. Trench warfare, nuclear explosions, photos of aerial bombings, all such images brought a distant war into homes, making common people aware of pain and suffering far away. This led to many anti-war campaigns and calls for social changes around the world.

Nowhere is photography more powerful today than in documenting climate change. Powerful visuals of recurring wildfires, melting glaciers, parched fields and empty taps are a potent reminder of the damage that is being inflicted on the planet. Pictures of a baby duck stuck in a plastic bag,

upturned cars swept away like paper boats in a flash flood or even half burnt children's toys left by somebody fleeing a forest fire are all images that, unfortunately, crowd our social media sites.

This is not to take away from the sheer beauty and poetry of photography. More than any other medium, photos have connected the world. As we see how other cultures greet, cook, work and laugh together, it is a reminder that all humans share the same experience of life, its struggles and its beauty. The stillness of a photo reflects the depth, meaning and endless potential of life and our surroundings. It is also a reminder that the medium, sometimes, can be the message.

Cheney sacrifices career to lead anti-Trump Republicans

FRANKIE TAGGART

Liz Cheney's dogged pursuit of Donald Trump over last year's riot at the US Capitol has cemented her status as the sole Republican to gamble her career as she breaks ranks with her party in the fight for US democracy.

And it is looking like a near-certain losing bet for the 56-year-old congresswoman — for now, at least — as she is set to relinquish her seat representing Wyoming in the House of Representatives to a Trump-endorsed conspiracy theorist.

A daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney — and once seen as the tax-cutting, gun-loving, God-fearing, small-government apotheosis of American conservatism — Liz Cheney has become a pariah in her own party.

Her refusal to accept Trump's false claims of a stolen 2020 election put her on a collision course with modern Republicans, who booted her out of the leadership and have disowned her at home in the "Cowboy State."

Cheney was one of just 10 Republicans in the House to vote to impeach the former president for inciting the January 6, 2021 insurrection.

Yet Washington-watchers are speculating that her widely expected defeat to Harriet Hageman in Tuesday's Wyoming Republican primary will mark a beginning rather than an end.

Cheney hasn't ruled out the possibility of a tilt at the presidency in 2024, either by taking on Trump in the race for the Republican nomination or by running as an independent.

POISONOUS LIES

"I haven't made a decision about that yet. I'm obviously very focused on my re-election. I'm very focused on the January 6 committee. I'm very focused on my obligations to do the job that I have now," she said during an interview with ABC News.

In her closing argument for the primary campaign, she sounded like someone looking beyond Wyoming to a bigger stage.

"The lie that 2020 presidential election was stolen is insidious. It preys on those who love their country... This is Donald Trump's legacy, but it cannot be the future of our nation," she said in a video posted online last week.

"History has shown us over and over again how these types of poisonous lies destroy free nations."

Despite being defeated by Joe Biden, Trump retains an iron grip on the Republican Party, which in February adopted as part of its official policy platform the falsehood that the mayhem at the Capitol constituted "legitimate political discourse."

"They say January 6 won't be much of a voting issue in 2022. —AFP

Why Republicans turned against the environment



Paul Krugman

The writer is a columnist for The New York Times

In 1990 Congress passed an amendment to the Clean Air Act of 1970, among other things taking action against acid rain, urban smog and ozone.

The legislation was highly successful, greatly reducing pollution at far lower cost than business interest groups had predicted. I sometimes see people trying to use acid rain as an example of environmental alarmism — hey, it was a big issue in the 1980s, but now hardly anyone talks about it. But the reason we don't talk about it is that policy largely solved the problem.

What's really striking from today's perspective, however, is the fact that the 1990 legislation passed Congress with overwhelming, bipartisan majorities. Among those voting Yea was a first-term senator from Kentucky named Mitch McConnell.

That was then. This is now: The Inflation Reduction Act — which, despite its name, is mainly a climate bill with a side helping of health reform — didn't receive a single Republican vote. Now, the IRA isn't a leftist plan to insert Big Government into everyone's lives: It doesn't coerce Americans into going green; it relies on subsidies to promote low-emission technologies, probably creating many new jobs. So why the scorched-earth GOP opposition?

The immediate answer is that the Republican Party has turned strongly anti-environmental over time. But

I CAN'T HELP POINTING OUT THAT REPUBLICAN BELIEF THAT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION HURTS THE ECONOMY SOARED PRECISELY DURING THE PERIOD WHEN REVOLUTIONARY TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY WAS MAKING EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS CHEAPER THAN EVER BEFORE

why?

Surveys from the Pew Research Center show the widening partisan divide over environmental policy. In the 1990s self-identified Republicans and Democrats weren't that different in their environmental views: Republicans were less likely than

Democrats to say that we should do whatever it takes to protect the environment, more likely to say that environmental regulation hurts the economy, but the gaps were relatively modest.

Since then, however, these gaps have widened into chasms, and not in a symmetrical way: Democrats have become somewhat more supportive of environmental action, but Republicans have become much less supportive.

Most of the divergence is fairly recent, having taken place since around 2008. I can't help pointing out that Republican belief that environmental protection hurts the economy soared precisely during the period when revolutionary technological progress in renewable energy was making emissions reductions cheaper than ever before.

Republican voters may be taking their cues from politicians and media figures. So why have conservative opinion leaders turned anti-environment?

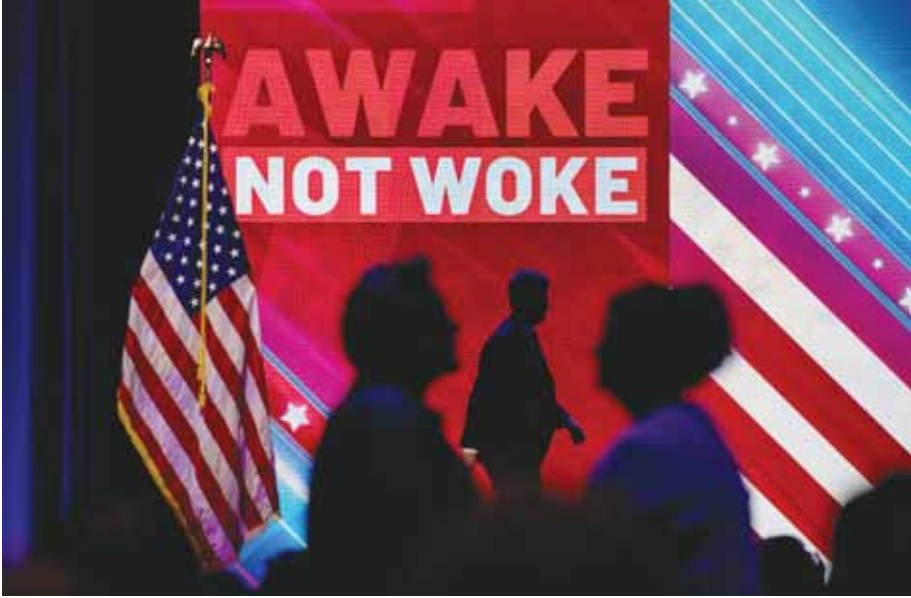
It's not about belief in free markets and opposition to government intervention.

One of the most striking aspects of recent energy disputes is the extent to which Republicans have tried to use the power of the state to promote polluting energy sources even when the private sector prefers alternatives. The Trump administration tried, unsuccessfully, to force electric utilities to keep burning coal even when other power sources were cheaper. Currently, as The New York Times has reported, many Republican state treasurers are trying to punish banks and other companies seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

What about the cynical view that the GOP is simply in the pocket of fossil fuel interests? Obviously money talks, and contributions from coal and, to a lesser extent, oil and gas do flow mainly to Republicans.

But the Inflation Reduction Act — which will open up many business opportunities — was endorsed by a number of large corporations, including energy companies like BP and Shell. Republicans were unmoved.

— *New York Times*



Guests are silhouetted against colourful digital video graphics on the stage during a break between speakers at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Orlando, on February 24.

Oman’s inflation to remain in check



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Even as inflation has been rising faster than expected throughout the world since the beginning of 2022, households in the Sultanate of Oman remained shielded from the risk of changing prices thanks to positive fiscal and monetary measures.

According to Pew Research Center analysis, in 37 countries out of 44 countries examined, the average annual inflation rate in the first quarter of this year was at least twice what it was in the first quarter of 2020, as Covid-19 pandemic was beginning its deadly spread.

In 16 countries, first-quarter inflation was more than four times the level of two years prior. Among the countries studied by the agency, Turkey had by far the highest inflation rate 54.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2022. Annual US inflation in the first quarter of this year averaged below 8.0 per cent with the first-quarter rate almost four times its level in 2020’s first quarter.

Countries in the GCC have generally lower levels of inflation compared to the rest of the world. According to the International Monetary Fund, inflation specifically in the UAE is expected at 3.7 per cent this year, before it softens to 2.8 per cent the following year.

Regardless of the absolute level of inflation in each country, most showed variations on the same basic pattern — relatively low levels before the Covid-19 pandemic struck in the first quarter of 2020 — flat or falling rates for the rest of that year and into 2021.

This occurred as many governments sharply curtailed most economic activities, and several central banks raised rates as the world struggled to get back to something approaching normal. The heightened uncertainty and tightening of monetary policy cast negative overtones on the recovery.

To tackle the mounting inflationary trends, the US Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate thrice during the first half of 2022.

Following the lead of the Fed, the Central Bank of Oman also raised its repo rate to 2.25 per cent by mid-June 2022 in three successive rate

revisions albeit inflation expectations in Oman remained moderate. According to Oman’s apex bank, inflation expectations for over half of the consumer basket in Oman remain low. Moreover, higher oil revenues have provided more fiscal space to the government for providing subsidies, which is expected to offset inflationary pressures.

The inflation rate in Oman in June rose to 2.85 per cent on an annual basis driven mainly by the increase in food and beverage prices. Every month, the rate increased by 0.45 per cent in June compared to May this year to 2.4 per cent during the corresponding month in 2021.

Unlike in many other economies where property prices and rents grew at record rates during the Covid-19 pandemic, the prices in Oman dropped due to a decline in the number of expats who left the country. But the prices started stabilising towards the end of 2021.

Due to ample supply, housing costs are not expected to see a sharp increase in the near term.

Moreover, the prices of utilities like water, gas, electricity are administered, the price of fuel for the year 2022 has been capped at the October 2021 level, and the communication sub-index has been almost flat though slightly declining for almost a decade.

“Although landed cost of some food items in particular grains and edible oil will contribute to higher prices, the inflation will remain benign for over 50 per cent of the consumer basket”, the Central Bank points out in its Financial Stability Report 2022.

As an oil exporter, rising commodity prices are a net positive for Oman as the higher proceeds from hydrocarbons have provided ample fiscal space to the government to counterbalance any inflationary pressures with targeted interventions to complement the impact of monetary policy actions.

A recent Credit Conditions Survey reveals that in 2022 financial institutions foresee an increase in the demand for credit from households and businesses, and they anticipate easing of credit availability to both segments.



RECEDING WATERS

An aerial view shows the peninsula of Sirmione on Lake Garda, northern Italy, as the lake’s waters recede due to severe drought. – AFP

Can gender equality be saved?

KHADYJA SY AND LINDSAY GLASSCO

Sudanese protester Alaa Salah became a symbol of her country’s revolution after standing atop a car, dressed in white, and singing to her fellow demonstrators. Ugandan climate-justice activist Vanessa Nakate went from protesting alone at the gates of her country’s parliament to demanding action from world leaders at the United Nations. Senegalese activist Oumou has harnessed digital tools to start taboo-breaking conversations about intimate health, sexuality, contraception, and period poverty.

These young women are fighting for better lives for themselves, their communities, and the world – and they are not alone. Thousands of girls and young women in Africa and around the world are fighting to change the power dynamics that perpetuate inequality and prevent marginalised groups from exercising their fundamental rights. They are making speeches, creating non-profits and community programmes, and participating in marches to catalyse transformative change. This is good news for everyone: countless studies have shown that when girls and women are empowered, entire communities benefit.

But hard-won gains on gender equality are now in jeopardy. The Covid-19 pandemic has undone years of progress on poverty reduction and fuelled a sharp rise in inequality, with disproportionate consequences for girls and women.

Studies show that amid economic hardship, families are more likely to marry off their young daughters, thereby denying girls the right to choose whom they spend their lives with and when and how many children they have. Unicef estimates that 10 million girls worldwide are at risk of child marriage over the next decade because of Covid-19. Moreover, girls and women are more likely to face sexual and gender-based violence during times of crisis – a trend that has been borne out during the pandemic.

Making matters worse, as UN Special

THE PANDEMIC HAS WIPED OUT DECADES OF PROGRESS TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY, WITH THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS – SUCH AS DISPLACED WOMEN AND GIRLS – BEING HIT THE HARDEST. YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS, BUT THEY CANNOT OVERCOME THE POWERFUL FORCES WORKING AGAINST THEM ALONE

Rapporteur on the Right to Health Tlaleng Mofokeng has pointed out, lockdowns, movement restrictions, and the diversion of funds to pandemic-related programmes jeopardised access to sexual- and reproductive-health services, from information about menstruation and fertility to contraception. Specialised services for victims of gender-based violence also became inaccessible to many.

All of this has contributed to a sharp rise in unwanted and early pregnancies, and drastically reduced girls’ chances of returning to their studies once schools reopened. According to Unicef, more than 11 million girls may never return to school after Covid-19.

Simply put, the pandemic has wiped out decades of progress towards gender equality, with the most vulnerable groups — such as displaced women and girls — being hit the hardest. To be sure, even in the face of such massive setbacks, young women and girls are not giving up. But they cannot overcome the powerful forces working against them alone.

Meaningful engagement from men is crucial here. Initiatives like the clubs des pères (father’s clubs) or the écoles de maris (husband schools) in Senegal can

make a significant difference. The goal is to foster positive (rather than toxic) masculinity, encourage men to share more of the burden of unpaid care work, and bring about improvements in child and maternal health.

Engagement with community and religious leaders, as well as with health-care workers and women’s rights organisations, also is essential. Given the proven power of female role models to inspire younger generations, elevating the platforms of older women leaders and activists — such as “super granny” Aminata and midwife Madame Badji — can boost younger women’s ambition and impact.

Likewise, amplifying the voices of young leaders can inspire and invigorate their peers. Ubah Ali, a Somaliland activist, was persuaded that she too could lead, that she could “raise her voice” and “be an agent of change,” when she saw other girls in positions of leadership. Today, she is working to eradicate all forms of female genital mutilation across Somaliland, and to support survivors of the practice.

But perhaps nothing will do more to ensure that young women and girls can fulfil their potential as forces of change than protecting and respecting their rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights. This is a job for governments, first and foremost, though everyone has a role to play.

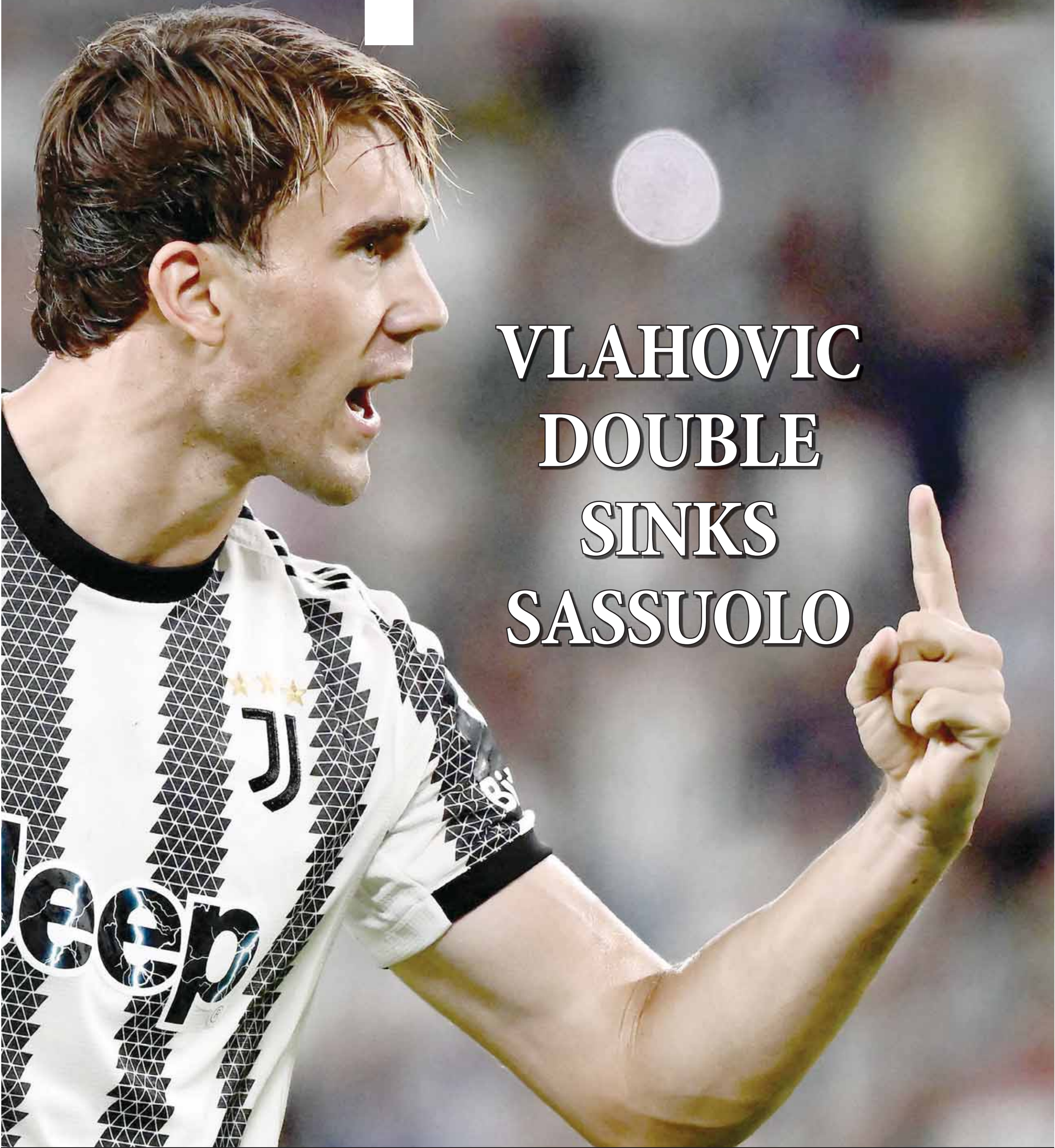
The pandemic is just the beginning. With climate change and rising food insecurity also set to hurt women and girls disproportionately, the barriers to progress on gender equality are as high as the stakes. The first step towards overcoming them is to acknowledge the challenges girls and women face, and to amplify the difficult and important work they are doing.

A world where all girls and young women hold equal power would be better for everyone. That is why it is in everyone’s interest to help them achieve it.

©Project Syndicate, 2022



Sudanese protester Alaa Salah became a symbol of her country’s revolution.



VLAHOVIC
DOUBLE
SINKS
SASSUOLO

JUVE MAKE EASY START IN SERIE A OPENER

MILAN: Dusan Vlahovic fired Juventus to a comfortable 3-0 win over Sassuolo with a brace in Monday's Serie A opener while Victor Osimhen was racially abused by Verona fans in a thumping 5-2 win for Napoli.

Serbia forward Vlahovic put Juve two ahead just before the break from the penalty spot after being fouled by Gian Marco Ferrari, and ended the match as a contest following a smart Angel Di Maria pass six minutes after the restart.

Argentina winger Di Maria had set Juve on the road for a low-key win with his first Serie A goal, a miscued volley in the 26th minute of his debut after arriving as a free agent this summer.

"It's really a great feeling and

a pleasure to play with such a great player," said Vlahovic of Di Maria, who was substituted with a thigh injury midway through the second half. "I should thank him for the assist he gave me. I'm very happy and hope to be on the end of others. I think we can work well together."

Massimiliano Allegri's side were missing returning hero Paul Pogba, out with a knee injury until next month, and injured starting goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny.

However, Allegri gave Filip Kostic his Juve debut off the bench, a new face who along with the excellent Di Maria could rejuvenate a sluggish team who came up against the weak resistance at the Allianz Stadium.

Juve are also interested in

Leandro Paredes and Memphis Depay as they try to make a proper title bid after finishing 16 points behind champions AC Milan last season.

Sassuolo, whose key players

such as Giacomo Raspadori and Domenico Berardi are transfer targets for bigger clubs, have already suffered the ignominy of being knocked out of the Italian Cup by local rivals Modena this

season and they didn't perform much better in Turin.

Alessio Dionisi's side didn't wake up until they were three goals down and by then Juve were content to sit back and see out the result, a big enough cushion already established that the away side were never going to overturn.

OSIMHEN RESPONDS TO CROWD TAUNTS

Osimhen was among the scorers for Napoli who before kick-off honoured their former goalkeeper Claudio Garella, a Serie A title winner in the 1980s with both southern Italy's biggest club and Verona.

An AFP reporter at the game heard a section of the home support launch monkey chants at the Nigeria forward midway

through the first half, before he stretched to jab home Giovanni Di Lorenzo's knockdown in stoppage time to put the away side 2-1 ahead at half-time. It was the latest episode of racist chanting at Verona who have a long history of far-right sympathies among their hardcore support.

After netting his first goal of the season, Osimhen took off his protective face mask and mimicked crying into a pitch-side camera, suggesting he had heard abuse before his goal even though he did not speak about it afterwards to DAZN.

"I think it's important to start well because we lost some key players, real leaders in the team. And of course it is left to us to step up," said Osimhen. — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS ON MONDAY

Juventus 3 (Di Maria 26,
Vlahovic 43-pen, 51) Sassuolo
0
Verona 2 (Lasagna 29, Henry
48) Napoli 5 (Kvaratskhelia
37, Osimhen 45+3, Zielinski
55, Lobotka 65, Politano 79)

On Sunday
Fiorentina 3 (Bonaventura
16, Jovic 34, Radu 90+5-og)
Cremonese 2 (Okereke 19,
Buonavita 68)
Lazio 2 (De Silvestri 69-og,
Immobile 79) Bologna 1

(Arnatovic 38-pen)
Salernitana 0 Roma 1 (Cristante
33)
Spezia 1 (Nzola 36) Empoli 0

On Saturday
AC Milan 4 (Hernandez 12-pen,
Rebic 15, 68, Diaz 46) Udinese 2
(Becao 2, Masina 45+4)
Lecce 1 (Ceesay 48) Inter 2
(Lukaku 2, Dumfries 90+4)
Monza 1 (Mota 90+3) Torino 2
(Miranchuk 43, Sanabria 66)
Sampdoria 0 Atalanta 2 (Toloi
26, Lookman 90+4)

Can claims second European 10,000m title in Munich

MUNICH, Germany: Turkey's Kenyan-born Yasemin Can won her second European 10,000m title in Munich on Monday as a trio of world-class heavyweights guaranteed their spots in respective finals.

Fresh from sealing the Commonwealth title, Britain's Eilish McColgan forced the pace in the 25-lap race, but Can hit the front with just under 3km to go.

Can, who previously won the 10,000m title in Amsterdam in 2016, was merciless as she turned the screw at Munich's Olympic Stadium, clocking a winning time of 30min 32.57sec.

McColgan claimed silver more than 8sec behind while a second Kenyan-born athlete, Israel's defending champion and world marathon bronze medallist Lonah Chemtai Salpeter, took bronze.

In the first field medal of the Euros, world bronze medallist Jessica Schilder of the Netherlands won the women's shot put with a best of 20.24m on the second of her six attempts.

Portugal's Auriol Dongmo took silver with a national record of 19.82m, Schilder's teammate Jorinde Van Klinken claiming bronze (18.94).

That was closely followed by Croatia's Filip Mihaljevic claiming victory in the men's shot with a best of 21.53m, Serbia's Armin Sinancevic taking silver with 21.39m and Czech Tomas Stanek bronze (21.24).

TEST IS GOOD

Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen kept his bid for a repeat double gold on course after winning his 1,500m heat in 3:38.48.

The Norwegian was one of the stars of the Berlin Euros in 2018 when he went home with gold in both the 1,500 and 5,000m.

It will be a quick turnaround for Ingebrigtsen, who had to settle for silver behind surprise British winner Jake Wightman in the 1,500m at the world champs.

The 5,000m final is scheduled for 19:08 GMT on Tuesday, with the 1500m final to be held on Thursday.

"Today was a first test for me and the test result is: very good," Ingebrigtsen said.

"The Olympic stadium is a beautiful arena and the track is



Turkey's Yasemin Can celebrates winning gold in the women's 10,000m final during the European Athletics Championships at the Olympic Stadium in Munich, southern Germany. — AFP



Netherlands' Jessica Schilder competes in the women's shot put final. Schilder won the gold. — AFP



Croatia's Filip Mihaljevic celebrates winning gold in the men's shot put final at the Olympic Stadium in Munich. — AFP

really good and fast."

Croatia's Sandra Perkovic, bidding for a record sixth continental title, also qualified for the final of the women's discus throw.

"The European championships are always very special to me because my first major medal was a European gold medal in Barcelona in 2010," said the two-time Olympic and world champion.

EASY AND RELAXED

Cuban-born Portuguese triple jumper Pedro Pichardo, the reigning world and Olympic champion, also sailed through qualifying for Wednesday's final

with a best of 17.36m.

"I know I am in very good shape, and my only goal today was to get the big Q to the final — it was easy and relaxed," Pichardo said.

Poland's Aleksandra Lisowska claimed the first title at the European championships, winning the women's marathon on the streets of Munich.

The men's marathon title went the way of host nation Germany as Richard Ringer produced an extraordinarily well-judged final burst past Ethiopian-born Israeli Maru Teferi for gold.

The opening day had kicked

off in dramatic style as world decathlon champion Kevin Mayer's bid for a first European title came to a shuddering halt as he pulled up in the opening 100m.

World record holder Mayer, twice world champion and a two-time Olympic silver medallist, said he had made the decision to ease up "before injury".

In the Frenchman's absence, Switzerland's Simon Ehammer goes into Tuesday's second day of action in pole position on the back of a massive 8.31m in the long jump, an event in which he won world bronze in Oregon.

— AFP

Fifa suspends Indian football federation over third-party influence

NEW DELHI: Fifa has suspended the Indian football federation meaning that the country will not currently be able to host the under-17 Women's World Cup in October.

Football's world governing body said its council unanimously decided to suspend the All India Football Federation "due to undue influence from third parties, which constitutes a serious violation of the Fifa statutes".

Federations must be free from legal and political interference, according to Fifa rules.

The AIFF is in disarray and being run by administrators after former chief Praful Patel stayed in office beyond his term without fresh elections, which courts ruled invalid.

Fresh elections are to be held on August 28 and the poll process began last week after India's Supreme Court approved a timeline prepared by the administrators.

India is due to host the U-17 tournament on October 11-30 but Fifa said on Monday that because of the suspension it "cannot currently be held in India as planned".

Fifa said that it was "in constant constructive contact with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in India and is hopeful that a positive outcome



to the case may still be achieved".

Indian men's and women's national teams also cannot play junior or senior international games during the suspension.

Former men's captain Bhaichung Bhutia called the suspension "very harsh".

"At the same time I think it's a great opportunity to get our system right," he told Indian sports news outlet Sportstar.

"And very important that all the stakeholders — the federations, state associations, sport ministry — come together to get the system right and everybody work for the betterment of the sport."

India captain Sunil Chhetri had recently advised his players "not pay too much attention" to the Fifa ban threat as the situation was out of their control.

"The suspension will be lifted once an order to set up a committee of administrators to assume the powers of the AIFF Executive Committee has been repealed and the AIFF administration regains full control of the AIFF's daily affairs," Fifa said. — AFP

World Cup 2022: the official ball

Al Rihla Means "the journey" in Arabic. Designed to travel faster in flight to support peak game speeds

20 panels In treated polyurethane, the form and texture allows a high level of stability and precision

CRT-Core Maximises shape retention, air inflation, and rebound accuracy

"Speedshell" technology Makes the ball more aerodynamic, increases speed in flight, improves rotation in the air

A selection of previous balls

Year	Country	Ball Name	Key Features
1930	Uruguay	T-Shape	Brown leather with removable air chamber
1970	Mexico	Telstar	32 black and white panels. More visible for the first televised World Cup
2006	Germany	Teamgeist	First ball without stitches
2010	South Africa	Jabulani	Eight heat-joined panels, criticised by players
2014	Brazil	Brazuca	Six heat-joined panels for a better performance in the rain
2018	Russia	Telstar 18	A new form of panel for improved stability in the air, and an integrated computer chip

Source: FIFA

Ireland all-rounder Kevin O'Brien calls it a day



DUBLIN: Ireland all-rounder Kevin O'Brien on Tuesday announced his retirement from international cricket after falling out of contention for this year's T20 World Cup in Australia.

O'Brien played three Tests, 153 one-day internationals and 110 T20 internationals during a 16-year international career and had spells with a number of English county clubs and T20 franchise sides around the world.

The 38-year-old famously blasted the Irish to victory over England in a 2011 World Cup group match in India with a 50-ball century — still the tournament's quickest.

The Dubliner scored 9,048 runs in total for Ireland, including the country's first Test hundred, a second-innings knock of 118 against Pakistan in 2018, and took 276 wickets.

In a statement on Twitter, O'Brien, who for many years played alongside older brother Niall, said: "Today I announce my retirement from international cricket after 16 years and 389 caps for my country."

"I had hoped to finish my career at the T20 World Cup in Australia, but having not been picked for the Irish squad since last year's World Cup, I feel the selectors and management are looking elsewhere."

"I have enjoyed every minute playing for Ireland, have made many friends off the pitch and I have so many happy memories to remember from my time playing for the national side."

Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie said he was "lucky" to have played with O'Brien.

"Cricket in this country owes a lot to what Kev achieved on and off

the field and he has left the game in a better place," he said. O'Brien has signalled his intention to develop his coaching career.

"I want to continue to grow my own coaching academy here in Ireland and I have some exciting opportunities coming up in the near future," he said.

"I also want to continue to gain coaching experience overseas and hopefully will have more opportunities with some international and professional sides in the near future."

Andrew White, chairman of national men's selectors, said: "It's hard to put into words the impact that Kevin has had on our game in Ireland."

"Through all the amazing and defining moments over the last 16 years he played an integral part and on plenty of occasions the lead role." — AFP



Oman win silver, bronze in Arab bowling

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Oman bowlers impressed at the 10th edition of Arab Men and 6th edition of Women's Bowling Championships which is underway in Cairo, Egypt, from August 11 to 19.

The national team bowlers managed to capture two medals including silver medal in the women's doubles event and a bronze medal in the men's trio event.

In the women's doubles, Omani duo of Sara al Maskari and Razan al Hinai bagged silver after a tough competition against the hosts bowlers. They scored a total of 2,187 points with an average of 387. The gold medal went to Egypt bowlers Shreen



Saleh and Menna Sultan as they registered a score of 2,335 points with an average of 455. Bahrain's Noora Sultan and Layla al Janahi claimed the bronze medal after

they accumulated a score of 2,098 points with an average of 374.

Oman's men bowlers were very close to snatch another silver medal in the trio event but they

ended in third place to claim the bronze medal. Khalid Ahmed, Ghalib al Busaidi and Hassan al Kharousi managed to score 3,867 points with an average of 706. The UAE bowlers scored a total of 3,931 points with an average of 698 to pick the gold in the men's trio event. The silver was bagged by Qatar's bowlers as they recorded 3,885 points with an average of 696.

Oman's delegation comprised of six bowlers for men team while the women squad featured four players. The Arab Bowling Championships competitions began last Thursday and will run until coming Friday. The eight-day event features participation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, UAE, Qatar, Oman, Yemen and hosts Egypt.

Oman shooting team concludes campaign

WALEED AL JAHWARI
KONYA, AUGUST 16

Oman national shooting team completed their participation in trap and skeet competitions held during August 10 to 16 at the fifth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games at Konya, Turkey, on Tuesday.

Oman completed mixed trap competition on Friday and finished ninth.

In the mixed competitions (men and women), Oman hit 128 targets out of 150.

In the skeet individual category, Omani shooter Naghmoush al Hatali qualified to the semifinals and ended fifth in the competition.

In mixed skeet competition, Oman claimed the fifth place after hitting 136 targets out of 150 on Tuesday.

Oman team includes men shooters Salim bin Salem al Nasiri, Abdullah bin Saif al Mandhari, Hussein bin Rashid al Shahoumi, Naghmoush bin Adnan al Hatali, Mohammed

bin Hamad al Gharbi and Yasser bin Salem al Nasiri. Omani women shooters are Fatima bint Abdullah al Sulaimiyah, Reem bint Juma al Hosniyah and Fakhriya bint Khamis al Jahafiyah.

Other delegates include Mohammed bin Suleiman al Hatali as administrator, Saud bin Salem al Abadi as skateboard trainer, and Marco Conti as shotgun trainer.

The Islamic Solidarity Games is being held in Konya from August 5 to 18 with 5,000 athletes representing 55 Islamic countries taking part in 24 events.



Murray downs Wawrinka in Cincinnati battle of veterans

CINCINNATI: Andy Murray won his first hardcourt match of the summer on Monday, defeating Stan Wawrinka 7-6 (7/3), 5-7, 7-5 in the opening round of the ATP/ WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The 35-year-old Scot was facing his 37-year-old Swiss rival for the 22nd time with both treble Grand Slam champions still coming back to full form after long-term injuries over the past few seasons.

Murray lost in the first round at Washington and last week in Montreal while Wawrinka's last win came on grass two months ago at Queen's Club, London; he has not won on cement since the Australian Open last year.

Murray needed four match points to advance at a tournament he has won twice, in 2008 and 2011. The veteran was competing here for the 17th time.

"We're not young anymore," Murray said. "Both of us gave our best right until the end.

"Matches like this are a lot tougher than when we were in our mid-20s.

"Both of us love this sport,



we've had our issues with injuries the last few years. "The sport has been a huge part of my life, I started playing when I was four."

Compatriot Cameron Norrie joined Murray in the second round with his 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4 defeat of Dane Holger Rune.

The Scot began to well up as he described his love for the game.

"When I was out injured and not sure if I would be able to come



back, I remembered the reasons why you play the game," Murray said.

"It's taken a lot of effort and struggles to get back (after two hip surgeries) and play at this level again.

"I want to make the most of it while I'm still able to."

Murray claimed the opening set in the tie-breaker as he faced his longtime rival.

RYBAKINA OFF MARK

The Scot went down a break in the second set but got it back before finding himself at a set apiece after being broken in the final game.

The third set featured another pair of early service breaks; but Murray brought an end to hostilities with a break for 6-5 followed by a laboured concluding hold of serve.

John Isner, the 2013 finalist against Rafael Nadal, who advanced past France's Benjamin Bonzi 7-6 (13/11), 3-6, 7-6 (7/4).

Italy's 12th seeded Matteo Berrettini, the 2021 Wimbledon finalist, lost his second straight match as his return to hardcourt stalls.

The 2021 Wimbledon finalist was beaten by Frances Tiafoe 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5).

In the WTA draw, Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina defeated Egyptian Mayar Sherif 6-3, 6-2.

The world number 25 set up a second-round clash with eighth seed Garbine Muguruza, title-winner here in 2017.

The 23-year-old Kazakh lifted her game in the second set to end with five aces and 13 winners against Sharif.

"I was slow at the beginning but I got my rhythm and served well," Rybakina said. "But my serve always helps me."

American Amanda Anisimova beat ninth seed Daria Kasatkina 6-4, 6-4. — AFP

business

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
4,651.87



CRUDE OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$92.30
Brent Crude \$94.17
Light Crude \$88.83



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business

You can now activate your newly opened account via Maisarah & BankDhofar CDMs across the Sultanate!

☎ 2477 5777 🌐 www.omanobserver.om 📱 /MaisarahOman 🐦 @MaisarahIslamic 📺 @Maisarah.Islamic

Ratings boost reflects effective fiscal policies of Omani govt: MoE

Positive reviews: Higher crude and condensate output set to raise hydrocarbon output to record 1.1 million bpd: Fitch

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

The pace at which the Sultanate of Oman has received ratings upgrades from international rating agencies has been welcomed by Omani authorities, notably the Ministry of Economy. On Monday, Fitch Ratings upgraded Oman's Long-Term Foreign-Currency (LTFC) Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to 'BB' from 'BB-'; while dubbed the outlook as 'stable'.

Just earlier, in April, S&P Global issued a ratings upgrade of BB- with a stable outlook - the first such ratings boost since 2015. This is in addition to positive reviews from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization, and a host of other international institution that have applauded measures by the Omani government to support foreign capital investment, privatisation, public-private partnerships and bankruptcy protection.

In posts on Tuesday, Oman's Ministry of Economy attributed the ratings upgrade to the prudent policies of the Omani government.



A higher rating enhances prospects for investment inflows, while also boosting investor confidence in the country, adding that the ratings boost also fuels the diversification of national income sources.

"In recent years, the Government of the Sultanate of Oman has made great achievements in the roll-out of electronic services as part of the country's digital transformation, thereby facilitating procedures for investors, as well as small and medium enterprises, on an ongoing basis, to enable them to obtain a suitable environment for their business," the Ministry stated.

Many of these electronic services, it further noted, can be accessed online, sparing the need for investors to visit government offices for permits and approvals. Besides, the budgetary surplus

generated from high oil prices, the Ministry said, would help pay off Oman's public debt.

In issuing its ratings upgrade on Monday, Fitch noted: "The upgrade reflects significant improvements in Oman's fiscal metrics, a lessening of external financing pressures and ongoing efforts to reform public finances.

Higher oil revenue will underpin budget surpluses in 2022 and 2023 and a sharp fall in government debt/GDP to below the 'BB' median. While we expect oil prices to trend down over the medium-term and there has been some dilution of fiscal reform in 2022, we believe that commitment to fiscal consolidation via the state's medium-term fiscal plan (MTFP) will be sufficient to limit renewed deterioration in public- and external-finance metrics."

According to Fitch, Oman will continue to benefit from buoyant oil prices over the foreseeable future.

Brent crude prices are projected to average around \$105/barrel in 2022 and \$85/barrel in 2023, while crude and condensate output will grow by 8.8 per cent in 2022 and 3.5 per cent in 2023, boosting hydrocarbon output to a record 1.1million barrels/day.

Favourablepriceswillalso boost budget revenue from gas, it said. "In 2024 we forecast a small budget deficit as lower oil prices (assumed to average \$65/barrel) and modest GDP growth offset gains from ongoing fiscal reforms that will boost non-oil revenue and lower overall spending.

Non-hydrocarbon tax revenue will increase, following the introduction of VAT in April 2021; personal income tax planned for 2023; and the likelihood of stronger corporate tax revenue," Fitch further added.

OPAZ launches e-service for registering SMEs in SEZs and Free Zones

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) has announced the opening of an electronic service for registering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the One-stop shop (OSS), through the Digital Investment Portal of the Authority <https://eoss.opaz.gov.om>.

Through this service, entrepreneurs registered with the SMEs Development Authority, holding (Riyada) card, can get more opportunities in procurement, tenders, and works assigned to SMEs from the projects operating in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and the Free zones.

In this context, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hinai from OPAZ, said there are many prospects and opportunities in SEZAD and the Zones affiliated to the Authority for entrepreneurs to benefit from.

This service which has been converted to e-service in the One-Stop Shop aims to create a database that facilitates reaching out to entrepreneurs, with Riyada card and those registered in the Zones affiliated to the Authority.

Al Hinai added that these enterprises can benefit from the



opportunities offered (which represent 10 per cent of the value of the projects implemented in the zones). Through its digital transformation plans, OPAZ seeks to automate its procedures for the benefit of entrepreneurs and to facilitate OPAZ access to entrepreneurs by creating a database that classifies the types of activities offered by SMEs.

Through this database, SMEs will have the opportunities to take part in the tenders and contracts of the projects implemented in OPAZ's various zones through the Digital Investment Portal of the Authority.

The works assigned to (SMEs) in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) from 2016 to 2022 amounted to RO 68 million, with more than 230 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) benefiting from these amounts which registered with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), while the OPAZ seeks to develop all electronic services provided to entrepreneurs.

CBO's Tawasul drive to promote savings culture, e-payment systems

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) launched on Tuesday, the Tawasul initiative at Sultan Qaboos Youth Compound for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

Tahir bin Salim al Amri, the Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, asserted in his speech that the aim of CBO's Tawasul programme in the Governorate of Dhofar is to instil a set of values related to the banking sector, including CBO's focus on raising awareness within the community on the importance of saving and the principles of responsible financing through a series of lectures and specialised workshops by a group of institutions in Dhofar, along with discussions about the banking sector's top developments and highlighting CBO's roles and



responsibilities.

Al Amri added that the steps and measures taken by CBO in the scope of e-payment systems in the past period have contributed in boosting economic development through facilitating fast, real-time and advanced e-payment operations, as well as supporting the National E-Commerce Strategy implemented by the various public and private sector institutions to enhance the National Digital Economy Programme in the Sultanate of Oman.

Statistics indicate an increase in the use of retail e-payment gateways in Oman in the past period. The number of ACH transactions transcended 14 million at a value of over RO 9 billion, a 39 per cent rise in 2021 compared to 2020 in overall transactions.

Moreover, ATM cash withdrawals saw a decrease from overall card payment transactions, standing at 19 per cent in 2021 compared to 26 per cent in 2020. In contrast, POS and online payment transactions increased from 66 per cent in 2019 to 81 per cent in 2021.

Al Amri further asserted that CBO is moving forward with

its efforts to develop e-payment systems and set forth measures to provide cutting-edge, affordable and easy-access payment systems, supported by an intact and safe infrastructure that contributes in achieving the Sultanate of Oman's digital economy objectives.

During the launch ceremony, Ali bin Hamad al Jabri, Manager of Payment System Operations at CBO, gave a presentation on the National Strategy for E-Payment Systems and Services and CBO's role in the national payment systems, alongside the evolution of national payment and other systems implemented in Oman, expansion in the use of e-payment services and gateways and the top initiatives and future projects in this respect.

On the other hand, Saud bin Saif al Busaidy, Acting General Manager of Surveillance at CBO, gave a presentation on responsible borrowing and how it is considered an essential practice that aids individuals in making the proper borrowing or financing decision and prompts financial

institutions to create products compatible with actual consumer needs, individual lifestyles and solvency.

CBO's Tawasul initiative aims at enhancing active communication between the institutions and the community, as well as raising awareness and knowledge on CBO's top roles and responsibilities and top developments in the banking sector and creating a dialogue with community members to discuss their feedback on the sector's performance.

Tawasul initiative's first stop in the Governorate of Dhofar will witness discussions of several topics, mainly responsible borrowing and the e-payment systems that contributed to boosting economic development in the Sultanate of Oman in the past period, in addition to supporting the National E-Commerce Strategy implemented by the various public and private sector institutions to enhance the National Digital Economy Programme.

Lulu’s India Utsav ends



MUSCAT: The ‘India Utsav’ at Lulu to commemorate 75 years of Indian Independence will come to a close today (Wednesday). The week-long festival, which began with the Independence Day celebrations on August 15, showcased the rich and diverse culture, heritage, traditions and regional flavours of the country.

The festival was inaugurated by Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of a host of officials from the Indian community and Lulu dignitaries at Lulu Hypermarket, Bausher. The festival will be held till August 17, 2022 at selected Lulu outlets across the Sultanate of Oman.

The ‘India Utsav’ festival will offer customers a unique opportunity to experience Indian extravaganza in every category from fresh food and grocery to lifestyle and fashion. The festival will also showcase the close commercial ties between Oman and India.

There will also be amazing promotions and offers on a wide range of Indian products on display. Special stalls will be set up to familiarise and promote Indian fresh produce and other food products.

Shoppers can experience the genuine flavours of India in a variety of dishes that speak for themselves in terms of the authenticity and rich history of India. There will be special stalls for customers to savour a selection of melt-in-the-mouth

Indian sweets and snacks.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director, Oman stated, “We are glad to organise India Utsav to showcase the beauty and diversity of Indian culture. It is also an opportunity for us to foster the cultural ties between Oman and India and strengthen and enrich the longstanding bilateral relations between the two countries.

We have also flown in many exclusive Indian products from our network of food processing and logistics centres across India as part of the festival,” he added.

The festival will showcase a wide range of food products, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as meat and seafood. The event will allow the customers to enjoy many of the products that they have been accustomed to. Many branded garments will also be on offer during the festival.

Shoppers can grab trendy fashion garments as well a unique collection of designer wear suitable for festivals and weddings for a complete Indian culture experience. To add entertainment to the overall shopping experience, various cultural programmes and shows as well as live cooking demos and other fun activities will be held during the festival period.

The ‘India Utsav’ festival is part of Lulu’s commitment to interact with customers on a regular basis and bring the best of the world to shoppers, no matter where they are.

Bank Muscat launches new trade portal for corporate customers

MUSCAT: In line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’, and the commitment to digitalisation for enhanced banking services and solutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched the Bank Muscat trade portal for online initiation of trade transactions such as issuance/ amendment of letters of credit, guarantees and trade financing.

The portal is an e-channel that also helps customers access required information / reports online. Instead of customers visiting branches and submitting their requests in person, the same can now be sent to the bank online, thereby enhancing customer convenience and accessibility.

Customers can access the new portal through the bank’s online banking platform. The digital platform is easy to navigate and allows corporate banking customers to log in from anywhere and at any time.

It enables paperless transaction



processing for a range of trade products and real-time tracking of transactions.

Customers shall also benefit from a single sign-on using their Online Banking credentials, and will receive auto notifications / email alerts upon processing of transactions by the bank, and can generate electronic copies of all transaction advice / related swift messages.

Easy to use templates, an in-built search tool for easy retrieval of records, and a calendar menu option to schedule transactions are some of the other main features of the Bank Muscat trade

portal. Corporate customers are reassured of the portal’s world-class security.

Fatma Khalifa al Maskiry (pictured), Senior Assistant General Manager – Global Trade Services, Bank Muscat, said: “Global Trade Services play an important role in facilitating trade and economic development across the globe.

As one of the leading Trade Finance providers in the region, Bank Muscat has been continually digitising services and has now launched this new portal that will enable speedier, efficient and highly-secure trade-financing solutions for our corporate clients.”

Global Trade Services at Bank Muscat through its tailor-made products and services provide an entire gamut of trade financing solutions that are simple to use with competitive pricing structure.

With its strong global network of over 500 correspondent banks and highly-experienced pool of trade specialists, Bank Muscat

offers a number of customised solutions to meet the challenging demands of exporters, importers and local traders in the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank issues letters of credit, all types of guarantees, standby LCs, handles documents under collection, offers document checking services under export Letters of Credit, confirms Letters of Credit and provides various trade financing solutions including forfeiting, receivables finance, trust receipt financing etc., and facilitates secured trade payments and receipts between buyers and sellers.

Corporates may approach the Head Office or Corporate Banking branches in Ruwi, Al Nahda Towers (Ghala), Suhar and Salalah to enjoy a whole new experience of Bank Muscat’s Global Trade Services. They may also contact the Global Trade Services Help Desk at the Head Office by email at gtshelpdesk@bankmuscat.com for more details.

Enjoy distinctive luxury in the Lincoln Navigator Presidential experience

MUSCAT: The exceptionally detailed and uniquely themed Lincoln Navigator Presidential experience is remarkable in every sense. Every aspect in the Presidential range of the Lincoln Navigator is in place to envelope occupants in some of the most remarkable luxury experiences ever.

In Oman, the Lincoln Navigator Presidential

experience is available as the Yacht Club theme which consists of seat surfaces which are holstered with coastal blue Venetian leather and detailed with elegant micro-perforations, giving you a charisma of a Captain.

Whitewashed teak detailing balances the theme’s blues with shades you might find during a warm day on the water.



Powering your journeys is a twin-turbo V6 engine producing 450 horsepower delivered through a 10-speed transmission.

Navigator’s lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride.

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

Commodity correction may have exhausted itself



OLE S HANSEN

The correction that for some commodities already started back in March has since the end of July increasingly been showing signs of reversing.

According to the Bloomberg commodity sector indices, the correction period triggered peak to bottom moves of 41 per cent in industrial metals, 31 per cent in grains and 27 per cent in energy. The main reason for the dramatic correction following a record run of strong gains was the change in focus from tight supply to worries about demand.

Apart from China’s slowing growth outlook due to its zero-Covid policy and housing market crisis hitting industrial metals, the most important driver has been the way in which central banks around the world have been stepping up



efforts to curb runaway inflation by forcing down economic activity through aggressively tightening monetary conditions.

This process is ongoing but recent economic data strength, dollar weakness and signs inflation may have peaked have all helped support markets that have gone through weeks and in some cases months of sharp price declines, and with that an aggressive amount of long liquidation from financial traders as well as selling from macro-focused funds looking for a hedge against an economic downturn.

An economic slowdown, or in

a worst-case scenario a recession, would normally trigger a surplus of raw materials as demand falters and production is slow to respond to a downturn in demand.

However, during the past three months of selling, the cost of commodities for immediate delivery has maintained a healthy premium above prices for later deliveries.

Crude oil: The downward trending price action in WTI and Brent for the past couple of months is showing signs of reversing on a combination of the market reassessing the demand outlook amid continued worries about

supply and who will and can meet demand going forward.

The recovery from below \$95 in Brent and \$90 in WTI this week was supported by signs of softer US inflation reducing the potential peak in the Fed fund rates, thereby improving the growth outlook. In addition, the weaker dollar and improving demand, especially in the US where gasoline prices at the pumps have fallen below \$4 per gallon for the first time since March.

In addition, the International Energy Agency (IEA) lifted its global consumption estimate by 380 kb/d, saying soaring gas prices

amid strong demand for electricity is driving utilities to switch from expensive gas to fuel-based products.

Meanwhile, OPEC may struggle to raise output in the coming months due to limited spare capacity. While pockets of demand weakness have emerged in recent months, we do not expect these to materially impact on our overall price-supportive outlook.

Supply-side uncertainties remain too elevated to ignore, not least considering the soon-to-expire releases of crude oil from US Strategic Reserves and the EU embargo of Russian oil fast approaching. With this in mind, we maintain our \$95 to \$115 range forecast for the third quarter.

Gold was heading for a fourth weekly gain, supported by a weaker dollar after the lower-than-expected US CPI and PPI data helped reduce expectations for how high the Fed will allow rates to run.

However, rising risk appetite as seen through surging stocks and bond yields trading higher on the week have so far prevented the yellow metal from making a decisive challenge at key resistance above \$1800/oz, and the recent decline in ETF holdings and low open interest in COMEX futures points to a market that is looking

for a fresh and decisive trigger. We believe the markets newfound optimism about the extent to which inflation can successfully be brought under control remains too optimistic and together with several geopolitical worries, we see no reason to exit our long-held bullish view on gold as a hedge and diversifier.

The grains sector traded at a five-week high ahead of Friday’s supply and demand report from the US Department of Agriculture.

The Bloomberg Grains Index continues to recover following its 28 per cent June to July correction with gains this past week being led by wheat and corn in response to a weaker dollar and not least hot and dry weather in the US and another heatwave in Europe raising concerns about yield and production.

Hot and dry weather at a critical stage for yield developments ahead of the soon-to-be-harvested crop has given the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report some additional attention with surveys pointing to price support with the prospect of lower yields lowering expectations for the level of available stocks ahead of the coming winter. *(The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank)*



US green energy tech firm Plug Power sets up Oman office

Pioneer: Nasdaq-listed Plug is already a well-established player in the international green energy space

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

US hydrogen technology major Plug Power Inc has established a presence in the Sultanate of Oman with an eye on opportunities in the country's nascent, yet hugely promising, green energy industry.

A high-level executive of the New York-headquartered group was recently in Muscat to celebrate the opening of Plug Power's office, as well as explore opportunities for business tie-ups with leading companies behind Oman's multibillion dollar green hydrogen investments.

Nasdaq-listed Plug is already a well-established player in the international green energy space. It is currently helping build an end-to-end green hydrogen ecosystem, from production, storage and delivery to energy generation, aimed at assisting businesses in the US and around the world decarbonise their operations.

Customers include Amazon, BMW, Carrefour, and Walmart. Furthermore, having pioneered the creation of the first commercially viable market for hydrogen fuel cell technology, the company has deployed more than 50,000 fuel cell systems and over 165 fuelling stations, more than anyone else in the world, and is the largest buyer of liquid hydrogen.



Frans Roozendaal (pictured), Executive VP of Plug System Solutions, says the company is well-positioned to meet the green hydrogen needs of companies operating in Oman's power, energy, and transportation sectors. "We are one of the few companies with that kind of capability in the green hydrogen space," Roozendaal noted. "So we are quite excited to meet with various proponents of green hydrogen use and see how we can assist them in addressing their needs. We are well-placed to not only design, build and deliver green hydrogen production and storage systems, but we could do that locally as well. I think the added value that we as Plug can bring to Oman is considerable,

because we have here our own office, we have competent people, we know what is required in this country."

While green energy is a promising new industry for Plug in Oman, the company's wholly owned subsidiary Frames already enjoys an operational presence in the country, largely within the upstream hydrocarbon sector.

Netherlands-based Frames, which was acquired by Plug last year, designs, builds, and delivers processing equipment, separation technologies, flow control and safeguarding systems, for water and renewable energy solutions.

Frames is currently undertaking the fabrication of a fleet of 40 gas well hook-up skids for Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). Deployment of the skids will commence this quarter, with all 40 of them due to be brought into operation, in phases, in the near future. Significantly, the contract is being executed based on PDO's In-Country Value (ICV) guidelines, mandating significant local content sourcing, Omanisation,

and local skills development, says Rajesh Malhotra, General Manager – Frames Oman.

"ICV is an important aspect of this project. To this end, Frames has hired local staff and contracted local suppliers, while all fabricating, assembly and testing are done in a local workshop.

Further, as an integral part of this endeavour, Frames is currently imparting on-the-job training for two young Omani engineers in association with PDO Project and ICV teams. Frames believes that such real time exposure to these engineers will highly increase their future employability in the local Energy industry," Malhotra stated.

According to Roozendaal, Frames' acquisition by Plug Power will potentially enable the group to localise its electrolyser manufacturing capacity should an opportunity arise in the future.

"Plug will be able to combine its world-class stack technology with Frames' system integration capabilities to deliver a range of turnkey electrolyser solutions from one megawatt (MW) containers to 1,000 MW standalone plants. It will also enable us to reach an installed electrolyser capacity of 3 GW by 2025," he added.

Plug is currently building out a green hydrogen generation network and aims to achieve a cumulative daily output of 1,000 tonnes by 2028 at its sites around the world. Over the past year, the company has signed agreements to support hydrogen generation for customers in Canada, Belgium and other parts of Europe.

Britain's hot labour market cools and inflation eats pay



A employee arranges produce inside a Sainsbury's supermarket in Richmond, west London, Britain. – Reuters

LONDON: Britain's super-hot labour market showed signs of cooling in official data published on Tuesday, as businesses became more cautious about hiring and workers suffered a record fall in their basic wages when adjusted for soaring inflation.

The unemployment rate of 3.8 per cent in the three months to June was unchanged from last month's report, close to a half-century low despite Bank of England warnings that the economy is likely to slip into recession later this year.

The number of people in work grew by 160,000 in the April-June period compared with the quarter before, but this was a lot less than expected in a Reuters poll of economists, which had pointed to an increase of 256,000.

The number of unemployed people rose slightly, pushed up by people returning to the labour market to look for jobs. Job vacancies in the three months to July fell for the first time since mid-2020 but stayed close to a record high at 1.274 million.

Jake Finney, an economist at accountancy firm PwC, said he expected the continued shortage of workers available to fill vacancies would keep a lid on the jobless rate. "Though hiring efforts

are slowing, we expect the unemployment rate to remain relatively stable for the rest of this year," he said.

"In the face of labour shortages, UK firms are more likely to hoard than shed labour." The BoE expects the jobless rate will only start to rise from mid-2023 before increasing to 6.3 per cent in three years' time.

The central bank raised borrowing costs by the most since 1995 earlier this month and said it remained ready to act forcefully if that pressure became more persistent.

Britain's labour market emerged from the coronavirus pandemic with unemployment at its lowest levels since 1974 due in large part to a shortage of domestic and foreign workers.

In response, employers have increased their pay to attract and retain staff. The ONS data showed wages excluding bonuses in the second quarter were 4.7 per cent higher than a year earlier, picking up pace from the three months to May and potentially adding to concerns at the BoE.

But despite the acceleration in core pay, workers are increasingly feeling the hit from the surge in inflation. Earnings adjusted for the consumer prices index fell by 4.1 per cent, the biggest drop since 2001. — Reuters

Oil extends losses as weak demand outlook persists

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Tuesday as bleak economic data from top crude buyer China renewed concerns of a global recession and the market monitored talks on a reviving deal that could allow more Iranian oil exports. Brent crude futures fell 84 cents, or 0.9 per cent, to \$94.17 a barrel by 09:53 GMT. WTI crude futures dipped 45 cents, or 0.5 per cent, to \$88.83 a barrel. The oil future benchmarks fell about 3 per cent in their previous sessions.

China's central bank cut lending rates to try to revive demand as the nation's economy slowed unexpectedly in July after Beijing's



A oil field worker works at a pump jack in PetroChina's Daqing oil field in China's northeastern Heilongjiang province. – Reuters

zero-Covid policy and a property crisis slowed factory and retail activity.

"In our view, problems in the real estate sector, plus the government's zero-Covid strategy, are likely to continue to weigh on the economy in the short to medium term, meaning that oil prices will probably face persistent headwinds from this side," Commerzbank said in a note.

China's fuel product exports are expected to rebound in August to their highest in nearly a year after Beijing issued more quotas, adding pressure to already-shrinking refining margins. — Reuters

Sunak, Truss looking for backing from financial sector



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

In their bid to be the next prime minister of the UK, both Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss regard the backing from the financial district of London – known as the 'City' – as imperative.

Key politicians and financial services leaders have been revealing who they want as PM. These supporters are in a bid to sway the Conservative Party leadership race in favour of their candidates.

The ballot of Conservative Party members will close at 5pm 0n 2 September. The new prime minister will be revealed on 5 September when MPs return to Westminster from their summer recess.

While Sunak and Truss continue their war of words over the future of tax policy – with both having different views on it at

present – and the role of the Bank of England in overseeing the City, key figures for financial services have been pinning their colours to their respective masts.

Hedge fund manager Andrew Law has come out in favour of Truss, as has Lord Spencer of Alresford, founder of electronic markets firm Nex Group. Law, who is chief executive officer of Caxton Associates, is helping finance the Truss campaign and has previously donated more than £3m to the Conservative Party. Law told The Times that it was "entirely appropriate and democratic" for Truss to want to review the Bank's remit and her economic policies had received "unfair criticism".

Sir John Redwood, the chief global strategist at fund manager Charles Stanley and Conservative MP for Wokingham, is also getting

behind Truss. He wrote on twitter, branding Sunak "Mr. Flip Flop" on taxation: "Liz Truss offers us the fresh air of a pro-growth economic policy to sweep away the suffocating pessimism of Treasury Orthodoxy."

Allies of Sir John, a staunch Brexiteer who served in Margaret Thatcher's policy unit in his early career, are urging Truss to appoint him as her chancellor should she win, according to The Express. Truss has also found an ally in Iain Anderson, the executive chair of influential City public affairs agency Cicero and former government LGBT Business Champion.

Meanwhile, she has scooped the support of several top politicians with a financial services brief, including former chancellor Sajid Javid, who accused Sunak

of "sleep-walking into a high tax, low-growth economy", and Brexit opportunities minister Jacob Rees-Mogg, the founder of Somerset Capital.

However, the weight of financial services support has not swung completely behind Truss. Former City minister John Glen and his successor Richard Fuller are backing Sunak.

Treasury committee chair Mel Stride, Pensions minister Guy Opperman, business, energy and clean growth minister Greg Hands and Bim Afolami, the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for financial services and markets, have all pledged to back Sunak as well.

Former health secretary Matt Hancock, who has taken a keen interest in the cryptocurrency space since his departure from

the cabinet, is another Sunak supporter. But cabinet minister, secretary of state for Wales, Sir Robert Buckland has changed his support. Having previously backed Sunak, is now in favour of Truss. Truss has been criticised by Dave Penman, general secretary of FDA union for her claim she will tackle "woke" civil service culture that in her words, "strays into antisemitism." He said her assertion is "inflammatory and will be viewed as 'insulting and abhorrent'"

Truss has also got the backing of cabinet minister Penny Mordaunt as well as defence minister Ben Wallace and chancellor Nadhim Zahawi. Other leading City figures with the ear of government are yet to go public with who they are backing. Meanwhile, Truss seems to have the edge in the race.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

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

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

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Ask For Free Demo

Cloud Computing Services

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

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

https://www.asiasolutions.net

Tally FOR VAT
TallyPrime

WEDNESDAY

AUGUST 17, 2022

MUHARRAM 19, 1444 AH

Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

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

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

- WORLDWIDE DOOR TO DOOR CARGO
- PACKING & SHIFTING SERVICE
- WAREHOUSE FACILITY

www.pcsinternational.co.in

PCS CARGO
Prompt Cargo Services LLC

TOLL FREE
800 22822

Head Office
AL GHUBRA
Near Makkah Hypermarket
91 787 812
91 787 814

VAT **REGISTRATION, RETURN FILING, TAX CONSULTANCY**
Contact: 97239696 / 95355638

HOTEL FOR RENT/SALE

PRIME LOCATION IN QURUM HEIGHTS

LUXURY HOTEL

7 STORIED BUILDING

Contact Nos. : 99643760/92192020

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN, Male, 48 years, M.Com, 15 years experience in managerial positions in Finance and Accounts in Oman. Looking to join managerial positions. Ready to move to any GCC countries. DL and NOC available. GSM 95392251

CMA qualified finance professional, Indian male with 21+ years of wide ranging managerial experience in budgeting, costing, financial analysis & reporting, cash flows, banking & auditing in major manufacturing, contracting, FMCG & hospitality companies in Oman, available to join immediately with local NOC & valid Oman driving licence. Can reach me on 94839479.

EGYPTIAN Accounts Manager 20 years Experience (15 years in Oman) Very Good in English and dealing with accounting softwares and very good experience in management. Mob. 92170065

SRI LANKAN Accountant Male, 6 years experience in Oman. Well experience until finalisation. Valid D/L and ready to join immediately. Contact 92526361 or 79049355

I AM a fresh graduate with Bachelor degree in Environmental Engineering graduate from German University of Technology in Oman-GUtech. Passionate, committed to applying unique and innovative solutions to environmental problems. I am currently looking for an opportunity to utilise my technical skills in a challenging working environment and become a valuable asset to the organisation that I work for. I believe that I can gain knowledge from your talented employees and acquire new skills to improve my ability and willing to learn more and see what I have learned in a real life situations. Contact: aalmaashari5@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN, male, having 14+ years experience as Civil QAQC Engineer/AutoCAD Draughtsman in Oman, looking for suitable job. Ready to join, NOC available Contact: 96945383

INDIAN male (Civil Engineering) having 14 years GCC experience as Quality Engineer/Inspector (OXY-PDO approved), looking for suitable position. Contact 71012899, 95491261. E-mail: Sovarghese@gmail.com

INDIAN Female, MCom, Good experience in VAT, payroll, Inventory, Book keeping until finalisation. Seeking suitable position and available for join immediately. Contact: 96974566

INDIAN female (M Tech Civil Structural Engineering) having 7 years experience as Quantity Surveyor cum Quality Control Engineer, looking for suitable position. Contact: 96154505.

SALES, marketing & business development executive/ manager, MBA marketing 13 years experience, 8 years in Oman, e-mail: mirzatabrez830@gmail.com, phone: +968 97043494.

PLANNING engineer, PMP. Indian male Civil Eng. Around 10 years experience in construction projects. Softwares: Primavera P6, MS Office, ERP, having Oman driving licence. Ready to join, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com, Call: 78002582.

GENERAL manager with 16+ years experience in Oman, MBA — BE, seeks suitable placement. Contact: 94008034.

INDIAN male graduate Executive Secretary/ Stenography/ Oman DL and Muscat experience available. Contact: 79256679.

LOST

UZAIR Nassor Ally has lost Tanzania Passport No TAE387739. Finder please handover to ROP.

Driving School
Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)
Contact No: 99074072

جميع السلامة الطبية
Modern Al Saloma Polyclinic
DR. NORA BARAKAT MD, MS
DERMATOLOGY AND AESTHETICS MEDICINE SPECIALIST
CONSULTATION AVAILABLE SAT TO WED 10AM TO 6PM THU 9AM TO 2PM
CONTACT US +968 24451726 - +968 79235354
EMERGENCY NO +968 94502100

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?
Advertise with us.
Contact us on: **99639264**

سماء الخضراء للتجارة
SAMA AL KHADRA TRADING
SERVICES:
PIPING SYSTEMS VALVES
DRAINS INTERCEPTORS
Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566
Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com

Saham Ayurvedic Hospital
Al Kishda, Saham, Sohar
AYURVEDA AT ITS BEST!
Saham Ayurvedic Clinic
Bait Al Reem, Al Khuwair, Muscat
GCC'S FIRST IN-PATIENT AYURVEDIC HOSPITAL
AYURVEDA | REHABILITATION | PHYSIOTHERAPY | SPEECH THERAPY | YOGA
26721707 (HOSPITAL) 97000533 (HOSPITAL)
24403783 (CLINIC) 99230005 (CLINIC)
WWW.SAHAMAYURHOSPITAL.COM
INFO@SAHAMAYURHOSPITAL.COM

LAMASAT BUSINESS CONSULTANCY SERVICES

Accounting Services, VAT and Consultancy Services
Contact: **24571454** GSM: **95392251**

MODERN GATEWAY SOLUTIONS LLC
Location: Ruwi Bus Station
Tel.: +968 24706951, Mobile: +968 96210055
E-mail: moderngatewayolutions@gmail.com
• Laptop Repair • Desktop Repair • Printer Repair
• CCTV Installation • Annual Maintenance Contracts

AL NAMANI CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR CARGO
INDIA • BANGLADESH
NEPAL • SRI LANKA • INDONESIA
PHILIPPINES • AFRICA • EUROPE
USA • ALL GCC
TOLL FREE NUMBER 80066766
www.alnamanicargo.com
FREE PICK UP 24/7

RENT A CAR

Buttercup Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
 - Rent for one month and get 5 days free.
- All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts.
☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS
Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

SERVICES

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

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

FOR RENT

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

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.
Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA
PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]
Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman



OMAN DAILY
Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

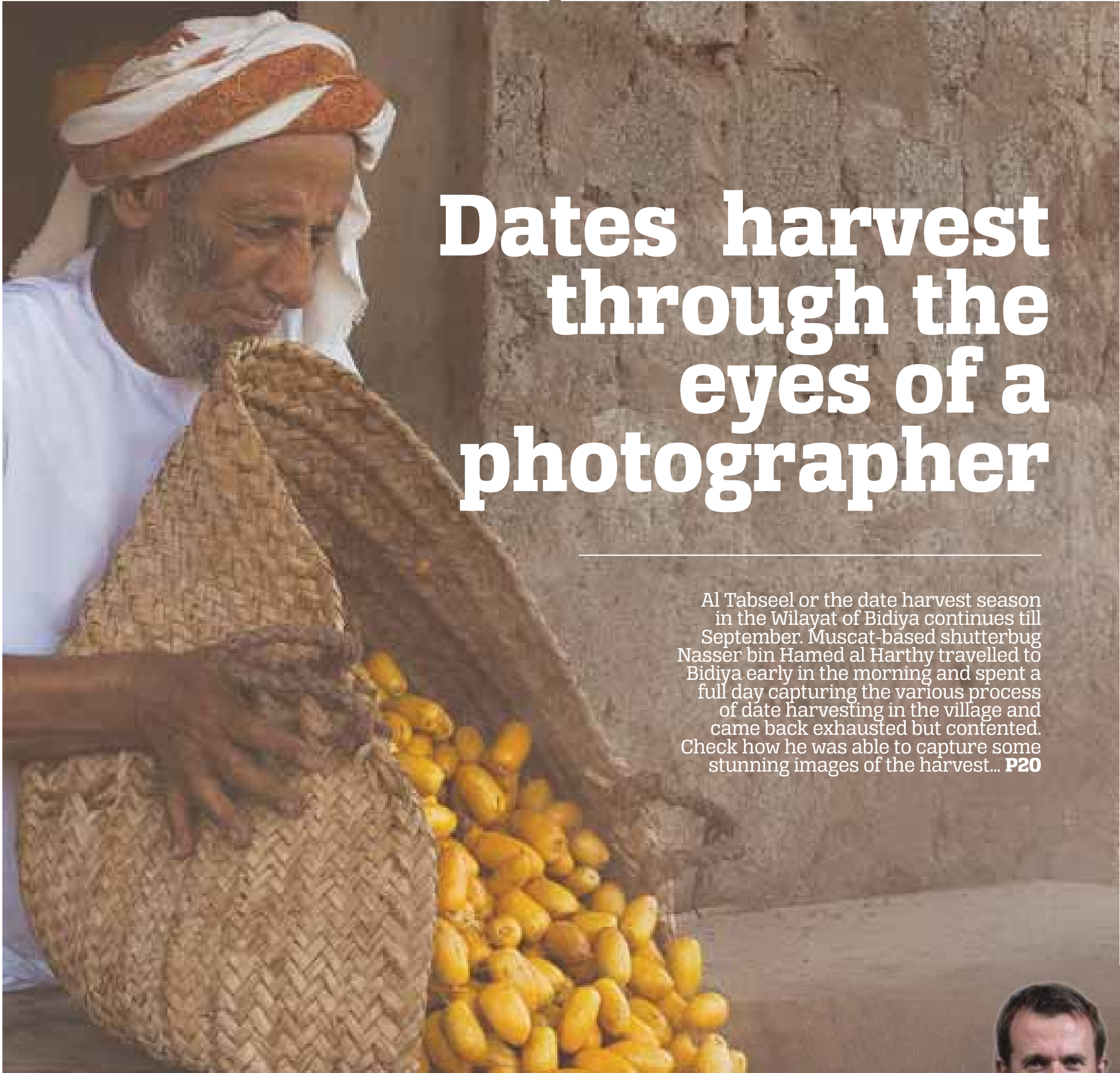
Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



@omanobserver
www.omanobserver.om

#Living_with_COVID19



Dates harvest through the eyes of a photographer

Al Tabseel or the date harvest season in the Wilayat of Bidiya continues till September. Muscat-based shutterbug Nasser bin Hamed al Harthy travelled to Bidiya early in the morning and spent a full day capturing the various process of date harvesting in the village and came back exhausted but contented. Check how he was able to capture some stunning images of the harvest... **P20**



British fashion retailer Joules hires Jonathan Brown as next chief

BRITISH FASHION RETAILER Joules has hired former Compare The Market chief Jonathon Brown as its next boss. The fashion and lifestyle retailer will take over the role from Nick Jones, who revealed plans to leave the business in May.

Mr Jones said he would step down after a torrid start to the year, with profit warnings

following a surge in cost inflation and pressure on consumer confidence.

The company's shares have dropped by more than 80 per cent over the past 12 months.

Joules also confirmed last week that it is currently in talks to sell a minority stake to retail rival Next in a move which could raise around £15 million.

The new chief executive officer will initially join the business on September 7 for a handover period before taking the reins fully on September 30.

Mr Brown was most recently chief executive officer of Compare The Market, part of BGL Group, but had previously held leadership roles across a number of UK retailers.

He was previously chief executive officer of M and M Direct, where he led a turnaround of the firm's operations.

The boss also previously held director roles at B&Q owner Kingfisher and department store giant John Lewis.

"I am delighted to have been selected to lead Joules at such an important time in its development," Mr Brown said.

"Joules is a very strong brand, with a highly relevant purpose and product proposition.

"Whilst there have been some headwinds in the past year, I am very excited by the business' future opportunities.

"The group is making strong progress against its clear plans to improve profitability by simplifying the business and optimising the cost base."

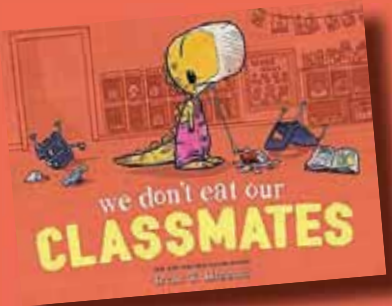
Ian Filby, non-executive chairman of Joules, added: "The board was in unanimous agreement that, amongst some very high calibre candidates, Jonathan was the standout choice to be our new CEO.

"He has significant experience across the retail and digital industries, a proven track-record of delivering business transformation, and the vision and ambition to lead Joules through the next stages of its development." — PA Media/dpa

READ

WE DON'T EAT OUR CLASSMATES!
BY RYAN T. HIGGINS

Penelope Rex must control her urge to eat the children in her class.



MOVING ART

An artist poses during the official photo before the performance at the second edition of Lienzos que Palpitan (Throbbing Cavases), the largest body paint exhibition in the country in the framework of the XXXIII Meeting of Painters and Sculptors of Pradilla, Mesitas del Colegio municipality, Colombia. — AFP



GOATS AND CHEESE

A shepherd fixes a goats' enclosure net in the mountain pasture "Alpeggio Valanghe" in Marmora, Maira Valley, near Cuneo, Alps Region, Northwestern Italy. In the Alps the few snowfall and the prolonged drought on mountains are causing problems to pastures with dry grass, insufficient water to produce electricity with small private power stations used by shepherds to illuminate the huts and produce cheese. — AFP





In the Mile High City, Festivals and Food Are on the Rise

ON A RECENT TUESDAY evening, diners surrounded marble-topped bistro tables at Chez Maggy in the new Thompson hotel, open since February in Denver's LoDo neighbourhood. The draw: the opportunity to taste chef Ludo Lefebvre's classic French fare — garlicky escargot, curry-tinged mussels frites, duck breast à l'orange — at his first venture outside of Los Angeles.

The restaurant and the hotel are among the fresh crop of ventures gaining buzz in this gateway city to the Rocky Mountains, which has reclaimed its pre-pandemic vibrancy. And visitors are welcomed with open arms: By year's end, Denver International Airport — which the trade group Airports Council International recently ranked as the world's third busiest facility — will have 39 additional gates, increasing capacity by 30 per cent.

Tempting travellers are a slew of new cultural offerings, hotels and restaurants, plus the return of favourite events. An anticipated two-year renovation and revitalisation of downtown's 16th Street Mall was launched this spring, and once it is completed, wider sidewalks and new infrastructure should restore the appeal of this 40-year-old pedestrian thoroughfare, which had lost its lustre.

FESTIVALS RESUME

Thanks to Denver's ample sunshine, numerous festivals and events take place outside, and annual favourites returned in full force this year, including June's PrideFest and July's Underground Music Showcase. The year-round First Friday Art Walks in the Art District on Santa Fe, which drew up to 20,000 gallery hoppers before the pandemic, are regaining their popularity, with the heart of the action among the eclectic galleries and boutiques that line Santa Fe Drive between 5th and 11th streets. After two years of mostly drive-in showings, Denver Film presents its annual Film on the Rocks series at the Red Rocks amphitheatre (through August 15) and, after a two-year hiatus, will hold its adults-only Summer Scream event (August 25) at the vintage Lakeside Amusement Park northwest of downtown; besides unlimited rides, actors will spotlight the park's almost 125 years of history. Outdoor film buffs can experience an offshoot of Rocky Mountain Goat Yoga called Goatflix

and Chill at Denver's second-oldest cemetery, Fairmount, which has parkland among its 280 acres. (A herd of goats nuzzles viewers during the screenings.)

From September 5-11, Art RiNo, a new festival, debuts in the RiNo (River North) Arts District with six new outdoor murals (adding to the district's collection of more than 100), light installations and a day-long concert outside the Mission Ballroom, a popular music venue, headlined by the Flaming Lips.

And the Great American Beer

delayed aspect of Ponti's original plan. Inside, one current exhibition showcases Mexican fashion designer and social activist Carla Fernández, who works with Indigenous artisans (through October 16). Elsewhere in the museum, the first major exhibition devoted to Georgia O'Keeffe's photography will run through November 6. Immersive art experiences abound in Denver; lately, the most popular has been the trippy, interactive Meow Wolf, which originated in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2016 and opened last fall in the Sun

ous moments in our lives and are therefore also unreliable," said Byrne in a presentation about the project at the Aspen Ideas Festival in Aspen in June.

Hotels Galore

The pandemic hasn't slowed hotel openings. Among last year's new properties were the baseball-inspired Rally Hotel next to Coors Field, the Hyatt Centric Downtown Denver, the RiNo district's Catbird — a modern extended-stay hotel with a rooftop bar — and the mid-century-themed Clayton in Cherry Creek. (At the lat-



Festival (October 6-8) returns to the Colorado Convention Center after a two-year pause, celebrating 40 years as the country's largest assemblage of all things related to craft brewing, with a competition, public tastings and two sessions that pair breweries and chefs.

ARTS AND CULTURE

One of the biggest events on the arts scene was the reopening last fall of the Denver Art Museum's Martin Building after a \$150 million renovation. A visual counterpart to the museum's low-slung, angular Daniel Libeskind wing, the glass-tiled tower, designed by Italian architect Gio Ponti in 1971, rises seven stories. The revamped rooftop terrace, where geometric cutouts in the facade frame views of Denver, implements a

Valley neighbourhood. Called Convergence Station, some 70 connected rooms and exhibits lead viewers through a psychedelic dreamscape created by scores of artists in imaginative overdrive (timed entry required). After a two-year pandemic delay, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts' "Theater of the Mind" will run August 31 through Dec. 18. Created over eight years by musician David Byrne with investment banker and writer Mala Gaonkar, the 75-minute production takes audience members (16 and older) on a narrative and sensory journey that unfolds one person's life in reverse chronology as a means of exploring memory, perception and self-identity. "You'll see that your perception is fairly unreliable, and our memories are made of how we perceived vari-

ter, the Five Nines craft cocktail lounge has amped-up nightlife with a dimly lit, velvety interior and burlesque dance performances.) Meanwhile, an \$80 million renovation refreshed the Sheraton Denver Downtown, in an I M Pei building along the 16th Street Mall. Visitors have even more to discover this summer. Cherry Creek's former JW Marriott was transformed into the 199-room Hotel Clio in March (rooms from \$399). In February, the 216-room Thompson Denver (rooms from \$309) opened as the upscale brand's first Colorado outpost. The hotel partnered with Victrola, the turntable manufacturer, to outfit a listening room in the sixth-floor bar and lounge, while a pedicab service ferries guests around the surrounding LoDo neighbourhood.

CHANGING WORLD

French sorghum farmer defies drought with sustainable crop



CORN PLANTS near Paris are stunted and the soil of harvested wheat fields is bone dry, but on Eudes Coutte's sorghum plot the leaves are green and the plants carry a full ear of grains.

Four years ago, Coutte and his brother started growing sorghum, a cereal that is little-known in Europe but used widely in other parts of the world and can be an ingredient for gluten-free baking, couscous or even beer.

For Coutte, the advantages of sorghum are that in much of France it does not need to be irrigated, requires no pesticides and needs only a third of the fertiliser that wheat requires.

"Sorghum allows for a new kind of agriculture, more sustainable, as it preserves resources," said Coutte, 40, standing in a field of waist-high sorghum in Saint-Escobille, 75 km (47 miles) south of the French capital. "We must think about tomorrow's agriculture, and how we can produce food without massive water use."



Under the extreme heat of 2022, even sorghum yields will be impacted, and he expects yields this year to fall to three-four tonnes per hectare, compared to five-six tonnes during a normal year.

But the fact that this yield requires no irrigation north of the river Loire is a "competitive advantage," he said as drought is felt across France, with restrictions on access to water.

In a bid to make his farm more sustainable, Coutte has invested in his own stone mill, which turns part of his crop into gluten-free sorghum flour. He sells the rest as grains, which can be cooked and eaten like lentils.

Gluten-free sorghum is rich in protein and contains eight out of nine essential amino acids, he said, but in Europe it is still a niche market.

With more farmers like the Coutte brothers turning to this crop, French sorghum production grew to nearly 400,000 tonnes in 2021 from 244,000 tonnes in 2016, farm ministry data show.

Of the nearly 800,000 metric tonnes of sorghum produced in Europe in 2021-22, only about a quarter will be for human consumption, the rest mostly for animal feed, EU data show.

Strategie Grains crop analyst Vincent Braak said that sorghum has gained ground in Europe in recent years but is still struggling to find a market, which is not as developed as for corn and other cereals.

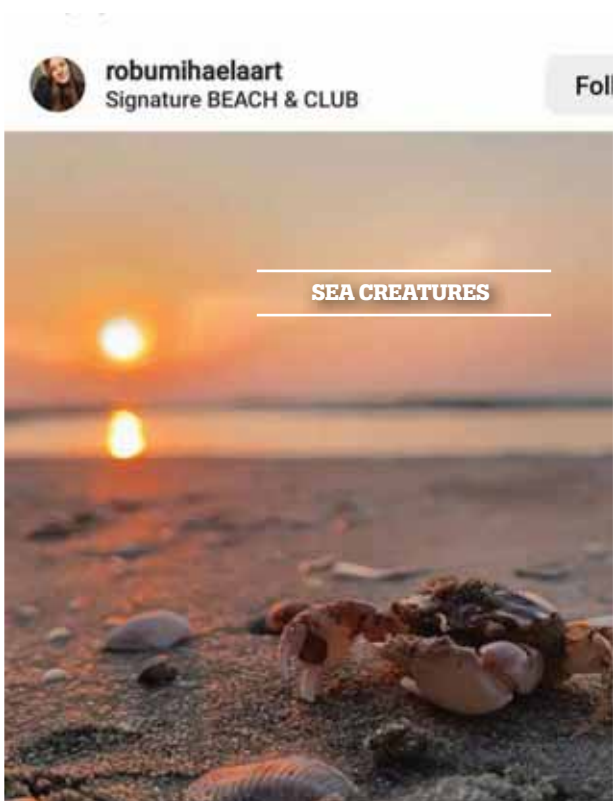
"But as summers are getting hotter and hotter, we can expect that more farmers will start growing sorghum to replace some of their corn," he said.

The Couttes are working hard to find new markets for their crop. In coming years the brothers plan to work with local partners to develop sorghum beer, vegetarian sorghum steak and other products. — Reuters



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

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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

AROUND THE WORLD

SCIENCE

Bionic hand can be updated with new gestures, anytime, anywhere



AUSTRALIAN SWIMMER Jessica Smith has had an uneasy relationship with prosthetics since a childhood accident, but her convictions are being challenged by a British bionic hand that can be updated remotely anywhere in the world.

The 2004 Athens Paralympian was born without a left hand.

Her parents were advised to fit a prosthesis to help with her development, but the device caused her to upset a boiling kettle when she was a toddler, causing burns to 15 per cent of her body.

"There's always been an association between the fact this prosthetic aid didn't actually help, it created the most traumatic event in my life," she said.

But her curiosity was sparked when she was approached by Covvi, based in Leeds, northern England, to try its Nexus hand.

Knowing it would be an emotional challenge, Smith was fitted with the device in April at the age of 37. "I think that I was ready to try something like this," she said.

Bionic hands convert electrical impulses from the muscles in the upper arm into movement powered by motors in the hand, enabling a user to hold a glass, open a door or pick up an egg.

Simon Pollard, who founded Covvi five years ago, said he wanted to add bluetooth to the device to allow the company's specialists to update it via an app.

"The fact we can change some of the things that the customer wants remotely is a really powerful thing and a first to market," the chief executive said.

Some rival bionic hands can be app-controlled, but Pollard said the ability to talk to a single device set the Nexus apart.

To do that anonymised data is collected for every user, a task managed by partner NetApp (NTAP.O).

Pollard said Covvi had signed up 27 distributors globally, including in Australia, China and the United States, and he aimed to increase monthly production to 100.

Smith, who is a speaker and children's author, said Covvi was already creating new movements for her.

"I've had a few kids ask if I can do different hand gestures, some polite some not so polite," she said. "I asked Covvi this morning, and I know that will be done in the next couple of hours."

She said the tech was not just changing her life, it was changing the lives of her three children.

"They think it's amazing and I'm like half human-half robot," she said.

She said the "bionic" appearance of the hand was an attraction, given her pride in difference.

"I'm not trying to hide who I am," she said. "I'm adding and expanding on who I am by being able to access technology that's never been available before." — **Reuters**

LIFESTYLE

UK Yoga 'warriors' fighting to diversify booming industry

LONDON-BASED YOGA instructor Stacie Graham is on a mission to make the ancient practice more racially and socially diverse, urging her charges to become "warriors for change" in the booming industry.

Yoga, which originates from India, and pilates — a form of exercise focused on postural alignment — are now a \$30-billion-a-year industry, according to the Global Wellness Institute.

But this success masks a lack of diversity, which affects the entire fitness sector, argued Graham, who also works as a diversity policy consultant for corporations.

"Here we are in London. If you go to any space where there is a gym or yoga studio, you will likely not see 'London', but typically white, female, able bodies — middle class — participating," she said.

"And my question has been: how is that possible?"

A survey of yoga teachers and practitioners in the UK by the medical studies site BMJ Open found that 87 per cent were women, and 91 per cent white, around 10 per cent higher than the national proportion of white people.

Graham has just published book "Yoga as Resistance," to help industry professionals broaden their clientele.

- 'Subtle exclusion' -

She also convenes regular workshops with other teachers, practising yoga and plotting how to diversify the industry.

"You want to be warriors of change, yoga gives us everything we need for that fight," she tells her charges as they perform the Warrior 2 posture; one leg bent, the other stretched behind, and the arms horizontal, like arrows.

Attendee Ntathu Allen, who specialises in "breathing and healing" sessions for women of colour, said that she is sometimes asked "if I'm really a teacher" when she arrives at a new studio.

Pam Sagoo, owner of Flow Space Yoga in London's multicultural Dalston neighbourhood, was also at the workshop.

"You just have to look outside the window and look at the people... to know you need appeal to a wider audience," giving the examples of black, older and LGBT people.

It is a similar situation in the United States, where "there are not many black women in these spaces, and it does not encourage others to enter," Raquel Horsford Best, a teacher based in Los Angeles, said.

Instructors and owners partly blamed access issues, economic factors and the difficulty of keeping studios afloat.

To be profitable, studios often charge high prices. A single session in London costs around £20, potentially pricing many out.

But Graham points to "more subtle" exclusionary factors, such as a performance-oriented atmosphere that discourages those who are less flexible, less slim and older.

As a result, many people who could "really benefit" from yoga, such as those suffering from pandemic-related mental health issues and long Covid, are missing out, she added.

Despite the awareness generated by the Black Lives Matter movement, Graham believes that economic constraints discourage studio owners from making the necessary efforts and investments to make yoga more inclusive.

"The first step would be to diversify the recruitment of teachers and staff. They should recruit more instructors of colour, LGBT people, Asians," urged Raquel Horsford Best.

And, of course, making the classes more affordable.

Sagoo, for instance, offers substantial discounts to people on benefits, and free classes to certain associations.

— **NYT**

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Get out and explore nature!

WHEN WE SEE nature all around us being its beautiful self, it is sad- dening to realise that while we have all these natural treasures around us, we totally have lost contact with it.

Here, we may under- stand intuitively that this is bad news for happiness and health in general. Thus if you move away from nature, you are sure to reduce your happi- ness and increase your misery. Therefore, the remain- ing weeks of this sum- mer are an ideal opportunity to change things and start breathing fresh air here in Oman, espe- cially in its beautiful governorates, espe- cially the Dhofar Governorate, or by travelling abroad.

What I am talking about is familiar to you in a way. You are busy with your job, whatev- er it is, and are con- nected to your compu- ter all day and night. Other than walking from your house to the car and moving with it daily on crowded roads, you have not spent serious time in nature for months or even years. If so, you are probably experi- encing some noticea- ble malaise, such as stress, anxiety, or even depression.

If your routine is like this, you should know that you might be hap- pier spending more time in nature. But work is work and it provides for your need. Lack of nature and looking at it from time to time can reduce the quality of your work too! Especially since there are several types of

research with the importance of immer- sion in nature – if I may say – for several days without using technology increases people's creativity and even their ability to solve problems.

If nature is absent from your life, you will likely be more unhap- py, nervous and less productive than nec- essary. And here I strongly recommend addressing this mat- ter as soon as possible – perhaps this sum- mer. It is better to spend as much time in the fresh air as possi- ble. Not to mention that using nature to reset your body with your mind is so impor- tant. For example, exposure to natural light (not artificial light) synchronises your internal biological clock with sunrise and sunset. As such you will see how naturally easier your sleep will be than ever before.

Nothing can replace actually going out and feeling the sun and air on one's skin, so con- sider stepping out of your house to get out of your head and relax.

In the end, if you still need persuasion, let me say here: The sun will rise one day and it will shine in our hearts wherever we try to search for light and beauty, even it will illu- minate our whole life with that warmth and all that calmness on the strand of autumn as we see it now in the autumn of Dhofar!

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.

art & life

Local Scene

f t i y w @omanobserver

WEDNESDAY | AUGUST 17 | 2022

Dates harvest through the eyes of a photographer

By Liju Cherian
Photos by Nasser Al Harthy

Noted Omani lensman Nasser bin Hamed al Harthy is an adventurer who loves to explore. He has a passion for landscape, mountains, portraits, people and wildlife.

Recently he completed photographing the vast expansive spread of yellow coloured dates or the Al Tabseel date harvest season in the Wilayat of Bidiya.

Hailing from the nearby Al Qabil village, the harvest season for Nasser brings many childhood memories. As the season winds up soon depending on the type of palm tree and the method of harvesting, Nasser is becoming busier each day.

He mentions how since ancient times the harvesting skills have been passed on from generations who have mastered the process of preserving the dates after the harvest.

Wilayat of Bidiya in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate is famous for Al Tabseel harvesting.

He mentions the first stage of the date fruit when it is green is called 'Khalal.' The second stage called 'Bisr' is when the fruit is yellow in colour and is boiled for further processing. It is during this stage the 'Tabseel' process starts.

When the date attains ripe half way it will be harvested. This is sorted out manually by hand, transported to the cooking place where copper boiling cauldrons with boiling water takes care of it. The task normally is handled by family members. Once the dates are half cooked they are spread out and exposed lavishly to the sun on a dry surface.

Once dried, the harvest is collected, packed and stored as they are dry fruits and have a shelf life of over a year. The dried dates are exported to various countries around the world or sold in the open market for making sweets and pastries.

Nasser captured all these on his Nikon D700 preserving it for posterity.

He meticulously plans his day on how to go about it. He explains that taking pictures is not just a matter of point and shoot like mobile phones, rather it is a matter of planning the shooting scenarios involving time and sequence.

He says that is not an easy task and one needs to invest on equipment's namely a DSLR camera, fast lens, flashes, fast card with memories, extra batteries, tripod and camera bags to name a few.

The equipment and accessories list can be long and depends on the type of photographs one plans. The photographer needs to be physically fit as he or she will be involved in travelling long distances and the whole day one will be out shooting in an open area with little places under a shade.

He mentions the timing factor which is very crucial for every photographer more so for capturing images during Al Tabseel.

"I woke up in the wee hours maybe around 3 am to travel to the village to be on well in time before the sunrise. The winter season is just the opposite when we start late and finish early based on prevailing situations," he recollects.

The next day, yet another important task is downloading all photos and sorting out the good photos. Later he allocates sufficient time for cleaning the equipment, and emptying the memory cards and formatting the drive so as to be ready for the tasks ahead.

Nasser's passion for photography has taken him to many places in Oman and many countries abroad. He has participated in photography groups on Facebook as well as many exhibitions. Recently, two of his photos were exhibited in India and some of his works inspired some artists who took his photos and painted them on canvas.

"It always feels good when your photos are inspired by other artists. Some of my photos have been published by local newspapers, but since then I have been to many local events and always like to share my knowledge with others," says Nasser.

As part of his works, he has travelled abroad to India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangkok. Last year he travelled to Kuwait for photographing migratory birds and also to Salalah each year during the Khareef season scouting for good photographic locations.

Later in the year he plans to hold a solo exhibition in Oman and possibly in the UK with a photo-shoot to Africa as part of a wildlife tour.

Next week he travels to India where as part of the wildlife photography expeditions in Sundarbans, the world's largest area of mangrove forests, and Kerala, south India where he will involve in a full day boat safari and photography of birds, mammals and Bengal Tiger in the Sundarbans.

Nasser is a member of The Omani Society for Fine Arts and his works can be seen on his Instagram handle @omanphoto-focus.

