

Oman crude price crosses \$125

Oman oil price for May delivery on Monday reached \$125.16, comprising an increase by \$16.29 from the price of last Friday, which was \$108.87. The average price of Oman oil for March delivery has stabilised at \$83.62, thus \$10.48 per barrel higher than February delivery. Brent, the international benchmark, briefly hit more than \$139 a barrel, its highest level since 2008. Nickel soared 30 per cent, gold broke through \$2,000 an ounce and wheat jumped to a 14-year high. **DETAILS ON P13**



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A ROAD TRIP ALONG THE RUGGED NATURE



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO EMIR OF KUWAIT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the death of Shaikha Shuaa Salim Al Hamoud al Sabah. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience. — ONA

TEHRAN

IRAN SEEKS 'DETAILS' OF RUSSIAN DEMANDS

Iran said on Monday it is awaiting "details" of Russia's demands for US guarantees on restoring Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, but blamed Washington for talks dragging on. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday that, before backing the Iran nuclear deal, Moscow wants written assurances from Washington that Western sanctions imposed on it over the Ukraine war will not affect its economic and military cooperation with Tehran. **DETAILS ON P6**

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STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The increasing number of obesity cases in the Sultanate of Oman currently is the same as in other countries around the world. Obesity is one of the biggest challenges being faced by Omani society and that more than half of them are overweight or obese, with a high increase especially among women and children, according to the latest survey carried out in 2008.

This was stated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, when he attended virtually the World Obesity Day, convened by the World Obesity Federation.

He said that obesity increases the risk of diseases and health problems associated with chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and strokes, along with causing severity and deaths among Covid-19 patients.

Dr Al Saeedi added that the precautionary and preventive measures taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in inactivity, hence the incidence of obesity and overweight has increased.

He suggested that the solution to bring change starts with individuals and ends with governments and world countries by finding social, preventive and educational solutions beyond health sector.

50% ARE OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE

FOSTER HEALTHY HABITS TO FIGHT THE MENACE



In his speech, Dr Al Saeedi said that the Sultanate of Oman has made tremendous achievements to enhance dietary habits such as taxing the sugar-sweetened beverages, soft drinks and energy drinks, reducing sodium

intake in bread by 20 per cent, in addition to carrying out food drives to reduce sugar, fats and salt consumption. The Sultanate of Oman, Dr Al Saeedi added has conducted awareness campaigns to foster healthy eating habits,

along with organising obesity management courses, and has established obesity clinics at the level of primary healthcare. It also continues to work with non-health sectors to develop healthy cities and villages, and to ensure supportive environments that encourage active lifestyles and healthy habits.

EFFORTS
The health minister commended the country's efforts in the prompt global response on obesity crises, welcoming any new suggestions to develop global action plan on obesity.

The event dealt with a number of important topics on priorities and perspective to addressing obesity.

The World Obesity Day is a unified day of action which calls for a cohesive, cross-sector response to obesity crisis. Hundreds of individuals, organisations and alliances across the world contribute to World Obesity Day every year. Previous World Obesity Days have encouraged people to recognise the root causes of obesity, increase knowledge of the disease, tackle weight stigma and foreground the voices of people with live experiences.

SEE ALSO P2



VODAFONE OMAN CELEBRATES OFFICIAL LAUNCH

After commencing its trial operations on December 30, 2021, Vodafone commemorated the official launch of its operations in the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday. The event took place at a festive ceremony held at the Royal Opera House Muscat, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, alongside the presence of several guests, as well as members of the company's Board of Directors and executive management in attendance. **DETAILS ON P15**

Rise in SMEs by over 35%

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) registered at the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) stood at 66,769 till the end of January 2022 compared to 49,337 SMEs during the same period of 2021, constituting a growth by 35.3 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Governorate of Musandam recorded the highest increase by 87 per cent. The Governorate of Dhofar come second with a growth rate of 44.2 per cent, followed by the

Governorate of Al Wusta by 41.6 per cent, while the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah recorded the lowest growth in terms of the number of SMEs by 27.8 per cent by the end of January 2022 compared to the end of January 2021.

As for the Governorate of Muscat, it registered the largest number of SMEs by the end of January 2022 by reaching 22,601, constituting 34 per cent of the total number of SMEs. The Governorate of North Al Batinah came second with 16 per cent, reaching 10,494 enterprises. The number of SMEs in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah reached 7,944 enterprises, comprising an increase by 12 per cent. **TURN TO P2**

Artwork to symbolise International Women's Day

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Shine like a diamond, she says and she believes the statement too and proof of it is her art works.

Her thoughts about woman and life are depicted through her art works.

The work was shown at the Stal Art Gallery and is the first artwork that she displayed with a group of promising artists in the 'Promising Artists Award 2016' section.

The artwork talks about the woman and she conveys to the world, 'I hope you will look to me, how I look at you, where I used the symbols of honour, which is

The artwork tackles the contradictions facing women in modern society who are often trapped in traditional habits rooted in bygone era. She would like to use yet another artwork to symbolise the International Women's Day and that is the 'Barcode'



one of the old windows through which the woman looked outside in to the neighbourhood without anyone noticing her presence, as if she was lurking while she was saying to the world, "I wish you would see me and hear me."

According to Sara, "This is a permanent call within the woman's inner self. The ancient wedding as a symbol inherent to it, no matter how far it reached from what it was, it remains as before with deep roots."

She would like to use yet another artwork to symbolise the International Women's Day and that is the 'Barcode'.

The artwork tackles the

contradictions facing women in modern society who are often trapped in traditional habits rooted in bygone era.

"Modern society tries to liberate women from the shackles of history and bring them forward into the 21st century in the midst of this ongoing ideological conflict and the liberation of women from certain restrictions, there are some forms of reactions that influence women's thinking still — conforming to the traditional beliefs that are not free and are controlled by others who try to manipulate them emotionally and physically." **TURN TO P3**



Obesity soared during pandemic

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Monday marked the World Obesity Day, in a celebration convened virtually by the World Obesity Federation, and witnessed wide participation worldwide.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, participated in a recorded speech where he affirmed that the increasing rates of obesity cases in the Sultanate of Oman are currently the same as in different countries of the world.

The health minister added that the precautionary and preventive measures taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19 for the past period have resulted in inactivity, hence the incidence of obesity and overweight has increased. He suggested that the solution



to creating change starts with the individuals and ends with governments and world countries by finding out social, preventive, and educational resolutions beyond the health sector.

The event dealt with a number

of important topics on priorities and perspectives to addressing obesity.

World Obesity Day is a unified day of action that calls for a cohesive, cross-sector response to the obesity crisis. Hundreds

of individuals, organisations and alliances across the world contribute to World Obesity Day every year.

Previous World Obesity Days have encouraged people to recognise the root causes of obesity, increase knowledge of the disease, tackle weight stigma and foreground the voices of people with lived experience. This year, it is focusing on the simple message that ‘Everybody Needs to Act’ to improve the world’s understanding, prevention and treatment of obesity. Moreover, World Obesity Day aims at improving policies and creating a healthy environment that prioritises obesity as a health issue to build the right support systems for the future.

Controls on sale of tobacco products discussed

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In its meeting on Monday, the Health and Environmental Committee of the Majlis Ash’shura discussed controls of selling tobacco products in public markets and commercial centers. The Committee, headed by Hilal bin Hamad al Sarmi, hosted experts from the ministries of Health, Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and from the Muscat Municipality to seek their opinions and observations on the topic.

The meeting looked into the legislative and regulatory aspects of practicing the activity of selling tobacco products in

public markets and commercial centers. It also discussed efforts of the concerned authorities in combating all types of tobacco use through a number of decisions and provisions, including preventing advertisement and promotion of tobacco products in media, and determining a specific distance for practicing this activity in residential areas.

In addition, the members reviewed the efforts made to educate the community about the health, social, economic and environmental harms of all types of tobacco, and to strengthen community and civil partnerships to combat the dangers of the spread of the phenomenon of smoking.

RO 1.3 million for aflaj maintenance in N Al Batinah



YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The total cost of maintenance and restoration of aflaj affected by cyclone Shaheen in North Al Batinah Governorate amounted to RO 1.350 million. A total of 98 tenders have been awarded including 96 tenders for maintenance and rehabilitation of aflaj and

two tenders for digging two wells linked to aflaj, according to the Directorate-General of Agriculture and Fisheries in North Al Batinah Governorate.

Financial allocations for 52 water projects have been completed to the tune of RO 1,020,467, while the financial allocations for another 46 projects costing RO 331,135, are currently under processing.

Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Haddabi, Director-General of Agriculture and Fisheries in North Al Batinah Governorate, said the maintenance of aflaj involved diversion of some aflaj away from wadi pathways, affirming that the ministry is committed to maintaining the original passageways of aflaj which can be changed only in rare cases.

Asian currencies at record low

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Even as oil and gold soared, currencies and stocks witnessed the biggest fall of the recent years following frantic trading on Monday.

In Asia, most currencies fell with the Indian rupee bearing the brunt after being hit against the US dollar following the global economic turmoil caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

According to reports from money exchanges in Muscat, Indian Rupee fetched a record 199.50 against one Omani rial although currency converter XE.com indicated Rs 200.532 at the end of trading on Monday.

The rupee opened at 76.85

Indian rupee nears 200 mark against one Omani rial

against the US greenback, then slipped further to 76.98, registering a decline of 81 paise from the last close.

While the Pakistani Rupee got 456 against one rial Omani, Bangladeshi takka and Philippines peso received 223 and 134.50 respectively on Monday evening.

“There has been a fall across the board in all Asian currencies. And the reasons include a surge in oil prices and sanctions against Russia following its war with Ukraine”, said Amit Talukder, General Manager, Global Money Exchange.

Rise in SMEs by over 35%

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the Board of Directors of the General Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones held its first meeting for the year 2022, headed by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Board, at the Authority’s headquarters in Muscat.

The meeting approved the new commercial registration fee for SMEs after the Authority obtained the necessary approvals from the competent authorities. The fee for issuing or renewing

commercial registration in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm is same as the operating fee approved for these activities in the “Invest Easy” system taking into account the institutions operating within the region.

The board was briefed on the efforts and contributions made by the Authority towards social responsibility in all its regions and its plans to enhance the lifestyle in the SEZD in particular, and the efforts made by operating companies to localise investments in the Duqm, Suhar, Salalah, as well as Mazyona free zones.

Fuel stations must opt for automatic, self-cleaning toilets

VINOD NAIR
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Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has urged owners of fuel filling stations and fuel products marketing companies to pay attention to providing basic public facilities such as toilets and others.

“Owners of filling stations must provide the best services, especially keeping in mind the needs of tourists, by adhering to the regulations in place for the establishment of filling stations.”

MoCIIP said that traditional toilets (restrooms) shall be replaced with automatic or self-cleaning toilets and these projects

have been already implemented at some fuel stations. There has been an agreement between one of the companies and the companies involved in supplying such automated toilets.

The ministry said it has been conducting inspections of filling stations to ensure that they provide the best services keeping in mind the number of tourists who come to the country.

The ministry indicated that during inspection visits to the fuel filling stations it ensures that the following facilities are functional – toilets, air filling machines, car wash centers and foodstuff stores

When establishing new fuel filling stations on highways, the



projects must include basic public utilities (a prayer room for both men and women, a commercial building with a restaurant or café, a shop, public toilets, a pharmacy, ATMs, car wash facility, an

information desk, primary mechanical services, parking, parking spaces for the disabled.

The ministry also called for the establishment of rest houses and lodges on roads used for

long drives for the benefit of all motorists and travelers, including tourists.

The statistics provided by MoCIIP said the number of commercial fuel filling stations

in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman was 660, including five that were opened in 2021.

These stations are operated by Omanoil, Al Maha Company, Oman Shell Company, and the Hormuz Energy Company.

It added 12 temporary licenses were issued last year, some of these projects are their implementation stages in various governorates. The ministry also said that 28 applications were received last year.

MoCIIP said that most of these fuel stations are situated in the governorates of Muscat and North al Batinah mainly because of the population density and economic activities.



WOMEN TAKE UP GREATER RESPONSIBILITIES



Jumana bint Saeed al Busaidi



Sumayya al Shehhi



Syeda Tabinda Bukhari



Nasra al Adawi

BALQEES AL ARAIMI MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Sultanate of Oman is joining the rest of the world in celebrating the International Women's Day marking major strides in the empowerment and development of qualified and skilled women in alignment with the Royal efforts of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik who always emphasised on encouraging women in Omani society to empower themselves and scale greater heights in personal as well as professional lives.

The Royal directives also make sure that Omani women enjoy their rights and work side by side with their brother men in building the nation. He said: "The partnership of citizens in the industry of the country's present and future is an essential pillar of national action, we are keen for women to enjoy their rights guaranteed by law and to work side by side with men in various fields in the service of their country and society, emphasising our constant care for these national constants that we do not deviate from nor tolerate."

On International Women's Day, we celebrate some successful Omani women at the national and international levels and in a tête-à-tête with the Observer, some of them open their minds sharing the secret recipe of their success with the fellow readers.

Jumana bint Saeed al Busaidiyah, a PhD student in the debate stage in the United Kingdom and an employee at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, says she has reached where she is now by several main factors, the most important of which is the desire and ambition to achieve the goals that she aspired to achieve.

"Likewise, family support and my father have a great role in overcoming many of the difficulties. If it were not for the obstacles and difficulties, people would be equal. Obstacles are challenges that filter abilities between one person and another, and in particular, at the same time, skills are refined," a contented Jumana said.

She feels that there is a difference in the role that Omani women play in the past and present. "There is a difference in roles being played by different women in different situations. The first is due to the impact of the world order on the Sultanate at the beginning of the renaissance in 1970, built by late Sultan Qaboos.

It is the combined efforts of both men and women that build the state and this transformation has evolved, monitored, and documented over a period of time since the First Renaissance and continued through the Renewed Renaissance.

She feels that the Modern Renaissance of

the Sultanate of Oman has allowed a wider freedom allowing them to excel in science, technology and knowledge.

Nadhira bint Ahmed al Harthiyah, the first Omani woman to climb Mount Everest (the highest mountain peak in the world). With a Master's degree in geography, she works as the Assistant Director-General for Girl Guides at the Ministry of Education (MoE). She says that the difference lies in the means between the past and the present.

"We learned from childhood about many Omani women personalities which were able to have a great impact in various fields, such as literature, medicine, politics and others. Today, Omani women are making the same positive impact in society with different fields such as sports, law, education, among many others," Nadhira said.

Sumayya al Shehhi is one of many Omani women who passionately chased her dreams and graduated from Al Zahra College for Women with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She is currently employed at the 'Aquarium Tourist Company' located in Muscat Mall.

She had great difficulty finding a suitable

job that corresponding to her specialisation after her graduation. Initially, she was trained in a private company for 3 months and her journey began after a year of patience and waiting when she was employed as customer service executive in the Aquarium Company.

After a while, she was promoted as a tour guide and encourages Omani women looking for work not to lose their passion and to continue searching for job opportunities in the private and government sectors.

Syeda Tabinda Bukhari, newly appointed External Relations/Media & Communications Strategist at the CMA, said that women in Oman excel in the soft skills needed for business leadership keeping pace with the women around the world and now that the world is moving towards an inclusive corporate structure it is time to recognise the power that lies in our diversity.

"Women in Oman need to come together with our male counterparts and partners to carve the niche of an exclusive inclusive society in our home base and not to be hesitant to step up our representation in key fields whether it be scientific discovery to law making to construction. Let's build a solid inclusive foundation for a future progressive

society together for our children," Tabinda adds.

Nasra al Adawi, renowned poet and the brain behind the initiative of 'Healing Pen' says that while our grandmothers were homemakers, their husbands and sons, the sole breadwinners for the families sailed across the globe for days and months seeking a living.

"We need to remind ourselves to stick to community ties and uphold family relations so that we can have a stronger generation. It worries me that the rate of divorce is on an increasing mode and the impact of technology has a toll on our kids. We, as parents, need to know that raising the generation is not only in the hands of mothers but the responsibility of fathers as well," said Nasra.

The shades that protect us from the heat today, the facilities that we enjoy today, and the oases that we see amid the deserts are the results of the sweat and pains endured by our forefathers and one shouldn't forget the hardships of living in an era without technology or any advanced facilities and continue to uphold the rich traditional and cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman.



Nadhira al Harthiya

Artwork to symbolise International Women's Day

FROM PAGE 1

Ask her about International Women's Day and how she relates to the concept, this is what she has to say: "We women have a distinctive character and it became clear through what the world has witnessed today, the challenge is confrontation and walking in a certain tone so that I can reach my goals in a short

way, without the need to go through wasted efforts, I can pump energy into myself through the achievements that I perform as duties towards myself, my country and my social environment, and many people around me support my path and we women need it. Finally, I thank everyone who contributed to the success of women in this generous country."





Japanese Traditional Theater Arts 能 - NOH -

The year 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Sultanate of Oman. Throughout the past five decades, their bilateral relationship has expanded through various engagements and cooperation, and the half-century milestone of this year will be an opportunity to look forward to new avenues toward future collaboration.

On the occasion of celebrating this special anniversary year, the Embassy of Japan in the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Hosho School of Noh and International Association for the Global Agenda, presents one of Japan's proud traditional performing arts, NOH.

What is "NOH"?

Noh is one of the oldest theatre arts in Japan with more than 600 years of history, and has fascinated people from around the world. Japan is a country surrounded by magnificent nature, but also exposed to many natural disasters. Art is used as an instrument to calm the minds of the Japanese citizens and nurture their resilience. Noh was born to serve this purpose.

The noh performers wear unique lacquered facemasks and magnificent kimono, move quietly on a special stage along with traditional music and songs, and express humans' emotions in a highly sophisticated style. It is indeed a philosophical world of subtle and profound beauty. The artistic qualities of s have long been recognised globally, and thus registered as the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2008.



Kazufusa Hosho, 20th Grand Master of the Hosho School of Noh

Mr Kazufusa Hosho was born in Tokyo in 1986. He made his stage debut as a child performer in the noh play. In 2008, he took over as the 20th head of the Hosho School. While he focuses on traditional performances, he also performs in competitions with other schools and recreations. He has been involved in cultural exchange programs in the world, Italy, Hong Kong and UAE, for example.



Noh masks

The actors can show an infinite variety of expressions, such as crying, smiling and raging, through their performance and subtle changes of angles and lighting.



Noh music

Noh music consists of three types of drums (waist drum, shoulder drum and stick drum) and a flute. The noh plays help the audience relax by striking at a tempo close to the human heart rate.



Noh theater

was originally played outdoors. The main stage is approximately six meters square with a pillar in each corner.

The audience watches noh being performed on the stage in front of the performed of it tree. According to the historical explanation, it is said that the pine tree was standing behind the audience and the stage back panel reflected the tree like a mirror. The pine tree is green throughout the year, so the art of noh also shows the beautiful contrast between the Japanese changing seasons and evergreen pine trees.



International Association for the Global Agenda

The association is a bridge between Japan and the world. It is built on the principle that we should all work together towards women empowerment, diversity and cultural understanding, and it has adopted the slogan "Learn, Act, Share and Grow".



Global Agenda
Learn, Act, Share, Grow

Embassy of Japan hopes to celebrate this landmark year with people in Oman

For more information, please contact
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Official website: https://www.oman.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html
Instagram: [embjapan_oman](https://www.instagram.com/embjapan_oman/),
Facebook: Embassy of Japan in Oman,
Twitter: [@japanembassyOMN](https://twitter.com/japanembassyOMN)





Lord Astor addressed an Omani delegation that visited London in January. He discussed the goal of increased cooperation on trade and investment, mutual prosperity and job creation.

British PM's trade envoy to discuss various topics

MUSCAT: Lord Astor of Hever, the British Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to the Sultanate of Oman, is currently on a visit to discuss various topics, aimed at boosting the already strong bilateral relations.

Apart from attending the official launch of the Vodofone Oman, he was also present at the inauguration of Cheltenham Muscat school on Monday.

In a statement issued on Sunday, he said, "I am privileged to be returning to the Sultanate of Oman in my capacity as the UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy. Ever since my days as a UK Defence Minister, I have thoroughly enjoyed my many interactions with this marvellous country -- and my visit comes at a key time as UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiations advance, Oman progresses with the brilliantly ambitious Oman Vision 2040, and the UK-Oman continue to strengthen trade and investment ties through avenues like the Sovereign Investment Partnership."

He said the visit will focus on defence cooperation, education, tourism and engagements with the full spectrum of UK companies.

Lord Astor said, "The UK-Oman defence relationship is the cornerstone of our recent history, and I will be celebrating and strengthening the ties that the UK's world-leading defence and security sector drive here in Oman. Defence is the first responsibility of any

country, and I am proud of the deep relationship our two countries share."

UK-Oman educational ties allow world-leading British expertise to be shared; but most importantly, it strengthens the bonds and outlook of our two countries within future generations. "I am delighted that the UK educational market is increasingly investing in Oman -- and my visit will coincide with the official opening of Cheltenham Muscat, with Downe House Muscat following next year."

He added, "Tourism underpins the wider engagement between our countries and is an area of great potential, which I (as a keen tourist of Oman previously) want to promote more widely. Oman offers an almost unique blend of culture, history, hospitality, natural wonder and outdoor adventure -- all in one place! I am delighted that tourism is named as a key sector in Oman Vision 2040."

Lord Astor added that his visit will involve engagements with the full spectrum of UK companies who are operating and investing in Oman, as well as interactions with the Omani stakeholders who are using this to drive partnerships and innovation -- creating growth, jobs and further prosperity within the Omani economy.

"I know that the UK Prime Minister and UK Government Ministers will be keeping a close eye as our bonds develop."

180-year-old British school forays into Oman

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The Ministry of Defence Pension Fund-sponsored Cheltenham Muscat, Oman's first premium British international school which has 180 years of experience in the United Kingdom, was officially opened in Muscat on Monday.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, alongside the presence of several top ranking officials including representatives of the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund, Lord Astor, the British Prime Minister's trade envoy to the Sultanate of Oman, a member of the Qatari royal family, members of the school board, faculty and other guests.

"The official opening of the school is one of the cornerstones of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Strategy for Education 2040, which acts as a primary source for the development of policies for the reform of the local educational sector," said Dr Madeeha.

She further added that the government of Oman is committed to mould quality student population as it aims to enable education in its various forms to enhance the spread of knowledge, capitalise and utilise technology as well as encourage research and innovation to build enlightened generations capable of making a positive contribution to the country's development and to engage effectively in the international sphere.

"Additionally, the presence of such a school of this standard based on formal appraisals reinforces the strong ties between Oman and the UK besides further strengthening the bilateral



relationship between both countries," she added.

Founded by one of the UK's finest schools, Cheltenham College UK, Cheltenham Muscat which opened its doors for admission in September 2021 provides a first-class, all-round education from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to iGCSEs and A-Levels. The school is run in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence Pension Fund and is situated in Al Bandar Muscat, a contemporary mixed-use development project.

Cheltenham College in the UK is consistently rated as 'outstanding' by the British Independent Schools Inspectorate and is part of the prestigious Eton Group of schools.

"The opening ceremony at Cheltenham Muscat has been a wonderful event showcasing the success of this first-class school," opined Lord Astor of Hever. "It is a testament to the strong relationship between the UK and Oman that Cheltenham have chosen to locate in the Sultanate, and demonstrates their keen commitment to having the traditionally strong bilateral

relationships," he added.

Speaking at the opening, Claire Adbry, Executive Principal at Cheltenham Muscat, said the team believe that the gift of education is vital for children, to enable them to learn more about themselves, the community and the world at large.

"The educational approach we embody at Cheltenham seeks to develop our students through a comprehensive curriculum with a modern and inspirational touch, aimed at catering to their overall requirements, both in-school and through virtual learning programmes alike. This way, we can fuse the concepts of culture, tradition and heritage with advancements, innovation and technology, allowing all children to develop self-confidence, express their ideas and opinions in every possible way," she added.

Cheltenham Muscat is the first key component of the Al Bandar mixed-use complex which is an upscale and exclusive destination, made up of modern residential and commercial neighbourhoods that bring together authentic Omani architectural design and sustainable smart urban modernity.

Omani business delegation meets Lanka labour minister



COLOMBO: The Omani business delegation headed by Eng Ridha Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Monday discussed the recruitment of Sri Lankan labour in Oman.

During a meeting with Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Labour of Sri Lanka, the two sides presented various initiatives that covered recruiting workers specialized in taking care of the elderly and people with disabilities.

The two sides agreed on a new mechanism that aims at reducing the cost of recruiting domestic workers.

Another meeting is scheduled to be held tomorrow (Tuesday) with officials of the Sri Lankan recruitment sector to find a new mechanism for labour recruitment in different specializations including domestic workers. The Sri Lankan Minister of Labour confirmed to the Omani side that a new mechanism for labour insurance in Sri Lanka will be implemented next May 2022, and it will cover labourers who are currently working in Oman.

He also commended the strength of the bilateral relations binding the two countries. He hoped that the Omani Business delegation's visit would achieve good results that meet aspirations of businessmen in both countries. The meeting was attended by Omar Libi Amar Ajod, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Oman.

Earlier, Al Saleh said he look forward to an expansion of commercial and investment exchange, which experienced a stage of fluctuation over recent years.

By 2021, commercial exchange between the two countries stood at about \$113 million, said Al Saleh, noting that the volume of exports accounted for \$99 million and import \$13 million. In 2020, commercial exchange between Oman and Sri Lanka stood at \$44 million, compared to \$75 million in 2019. — ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (6/2022)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Documents Fee	Deadline for Inquiries Submission	Deadline for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Tender Submission
53/2021/MM/PA-14 Recall-1	Supply of Stationary for Muscat Municipality	25/- OMR	22/03/2022	24/03/2022	27/03/2022
9/2022/MM/PA-1	Supply of Spare Parts for Chain Saw Machines	25/- OMR	27/03/2022	13/04/2022	17/04/2022
10/2022/MM/PA-2	Supply of Spare Parts for Pest Control Machines	25/- OMR	27/03/2022	13/04/2022	17/04/2022

- Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.
- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.
- Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.**
- Clarifications and support:**
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
 - For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos Private School

Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos PVT School is currently seeking teachers to fill the following vacancies for the academic year 2022/2023:

- 1) Female English Teacher
- 2) Female Physics Teacher
- 3) Female Math Teacher (5-10)
- 4) Female Economics Teacher / Business Studies

Requirements: candidates must have

- ❖ B.A. in the subject / B.Ed.
- ❖ Minimum 3 Years experience.
- ❖ Must be resident in Oman.
- ❖ Minimum score 6 in IELTS.

Please submit your CVs in via E-mail:
info@msqps.edu.om or schoolhr@gmail.com

Note: CV from outside Oman will not be considered



HALCYON CAPITAL

AGENDA OF ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC invites all Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Thursday, 24th March 2022 at 11:30 am through the electronic platform of the general meetings, which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following Agenda.

However, in case the AGM was not held on the said date, the Company will hold a second AGM on Thursday, 31st March 2022 at 11:30 am to discuss the same following agenda :

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2021.
2. To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2021.
3. To consider and approve transactions entered into by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2021 (as per the Annexure 1).
4. To consider and approve transactions that the Company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31st December 2022 (as per Annexure 2).
5. To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors of the company during the year ended on 31st December 2021. (As per the Annexure 3).
6. To consider and approve the directors remuneration of OMR100,000/- for the year ended on 31 December 2021.
7. To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the company during the next financial year ended on 31st December 2022. (As per the Annexure 4).
8. To appoint new auditors for the Company for the year ending 31st December 2022 and to fix their remuneration.

According to the Articles of Association of the Company and the regulations for convening general meetings via electronic means by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- (a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the general meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that the proxy person has an investor number in the MCDC.
- (b) Voting on any of the items presented on the agenda starts three days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and if the shareholder's share is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and he must re-vote again on the meeting day.

For further information, please contact
Mr. Badar Mahfoudh Khalaf Al Wahaibi on telephone 22004507.

Chairman
Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC
P.O. Box 1273, P.C. 114, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: (968) 22004500, Fax: (968) 22004546, E-mail: info@kitarcapital.com



Iran seeks ‘details’ of Russian demands on N-deal

TEHRAN: Iran said on Monday it was awaiting “details” on Russia’s demands for US guarantees that could potentially delay reaching an agreement in talks aiming to restore Tehran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday that Moscow wants written guarantees from Washington that Western sanctions imposed on it over the Ukraine conflict will not affect its economic and military cooperation with Tehran, ahead of any conclusion of a revived Iran nuclear deal.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday dismissed these demands as “irrelevant”. Sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine “have nothing to do with the Iran nuclear deal”, he said on CBS talk show “Face the Nation.”

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Monday “we have also



seen and heard Mr Lavrov’s remarks in the media.”

“We are waiting to hear the details of that through diplomatic channels,” he added, during his weekly news conference.

“Iran’s peaceful nuclear cooperation should not be affected or restricted by any sanctions,

Iran’s peaceful nuclear cooperation should not be affected or restricted by any sanctions

SAEED KHATIBZADEH
Iranian foreign ministry spokesman

including Iran’s peaceful nuclear cooperation with Russia, China and other countries,” he said.

Russia, which was slapped with wide-ranging economic sanctions by the US and the EU following its invasion of Ukraine, is party to ongoing talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the 2015 nuclear deal, along with Britain, China, France and Germany. The United States is participating indirectly.

The 2015 agreement gave Iran

sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, but the US unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump who reimposed heavy economic sanctions on Tehran.

That prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

The Vienna talks aim to return the US to the nuclear deal and lift sanctions on Iran, while Tehran would in turn return to full compliance with its commitments.

As with the original agreement, Moscow is expected to play a key role in the implementation of any fresh deal with Tehran, for example by receiving shipments of enriched uranium from Iran.

“Russia’s approach so far has been a constructive one in order to reach a collective agreement in Vienna,” Khatibzadeh stressed.

— AFP

Scramble for transport as Yemen’s severe fuel shortage worsens

SANAA: Yemenis are riding on the roof or hanging out the sides of taxi vans as severe fuel shortages in the capital Sanaa and other Ansar Allah-held areas raise demand for public transportation, with people queuing for days to fill the tanks of their cars.

University students Amjad al Amari and Ahmed al Muthahar complain the fuel crunch is further disrupting their education in the war-torn Arabian peninsula country.

“When we arrive for lectures, we arrive late. We miss half and the professor considers us absent,” said Al Amari. “We can’t even find (taxis) and (the ones we get) are overcrowded.”

People also struggle to reach markets and health centres. Twenty litres of petrol at fuel stations costs 9,500 rials (\$16) and more than four times that on the parallel market.

Few people can afford this. Around 80 per cent of Yemen’s population needs assistance because of economic collapse in the seven-year war and a sea and air blockade by a coalition on areas held by the Ansar Allah.

“The (fuel) crisis affects the whole population, from the ordinary to those on top. Neither officials nor dignitaries are excluded,” civil servant Fawaz al



People ride atop a crowded taxi van amid acute fuel shortages in Sanaa. — Reuters

Sayaghi said.

Air and sea access to Yemen is controlled by the coalition that intervened in Yemen in early 2015 after the Ansar Allah ousted the government from Sanaa. The alliance says the restrictions are needed to prevent arms smuggling,

and accuses the Ansar Allah of using ports for military purposes, charges the group denies.

Ansar Allah officials said no fuel vessels have been allowed to berth at the country’s main Hodeidah port since January 3.

“We call on the concerned authorities, international organisations and the United Nations to lift the siege on oil derivatives and basic food commodities for people to have a minimum livelihood,” said Muhsen al Shahary, another civil servant in Sanaa. — Reuters

South Korean party leader attacked at campaign rally

SEOUL: The leader of South Korea’s ruling party was hospitalised on Monday after being attacked while campaigning for this week’s presidential election, a race already overshadowed by controversy and in which early voting has been marred by irregularities.

Democratic Party leader Song Young-Gil was attacked in Seoul by a man wearing a traditional robe who approached him from behind and struck him on the head with a smaller hammer, a video uploaded to YouTube by a Democrat campaigner showed.

Reuters could not independently verify the images, but party officials said Song was in a stable condition and a suspect was in police custody.

In a contest characterised by scandals, smear tactics and gaffes, the Democrats’ Lee Jae-Myung and Yoon Suk-yeol of the conservative main opposition People Power Party are running neck-and-neck.

Both men on Monday condemned the attack on Song, who is also Lee’s campaign manager.

“Violence harms democracy, it can never be accepted,” Lee told another rally in the southeastern port city of Busan and wished



Democratic Party leader Song Young-Gil

Song a rapid recovery.

Yoon issued a statement saying any violence interfering in the election could not be justified, and hoping for Song’s speedy recovery and all campaigners’ safety.

President Moon Jae-In called the attack a “terror against democracy,” his spokeswoman said.

The attack came after early balloting that ended on Saturday was blighted by long waits for coronavirus sufferers, while some voters received used ballots.

The two days of voting drew a record of nearly 37 per cent of the electorate but also tarnished South Korea 35-year democratic history of tight and relatively transparent management of elections and a mostly successful fight against Covid-19. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka’s most sacred elephant dies

Sri Lanka’s most sacred elephant passed away aged 68, prompting an outpouring of grief and a presidential order for the huge cadaver to be stuffed and preserved for posterity. Nadungamuwa Raja was the most important among 100 elephants used in an annual pageant involving fire-eaters and drummers, tasked with carrying a golden casket of Buddhist relics on its back.

On Monday a procession of mourners — including



schoolchildren, priests in saffron robes and an elderly lady with a Zimmer frame — paid their respects to Raja, praying and touching its mighty tusks in reverence. — AFP

DENPASAR

Bali eases quarantine in re-opening push

Bali scrapped quarantine for vaccinated tourists from more than 20 countries and reintroduced visas on arrival as the Indonesian holiday island pushes ahead with re-opening after two years of Covid curbs. The loosening comes as a wave of Omicron infections wanes across the Southeast Asian archipelago and after some international airlines resumed direct flights in recent weeks.

“President Joko Widodo has agreed to trial a no-quarantine



policy for overseas travellers to Bali starting on March 7,” maritime affairs and investment minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan said in a briefing.

— AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq’s National Museum reopens after closure

Iraq’s National Museum reopened to visitors after a three-year closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic and political unrest. Treasures dating back 2,500 years to the neo-Assyrian empire alongside 9th century Islamic antiquities went back on display, including two winged bulls from the Nimrud site. “We’ve waited a long time to come here,” said Tijen Kayralci, 65, part of a tour group from Turkey. “It’s beyond my expectations, these are priceless, very valuable pieces,”



she said. The Iraq Museum was closed three years ago “because of the demonstrations and for security reasons,” said Laith Majid Hussein, the head of Iraq’s antiquities authority. — AFP

Putin calls on Ukraine to surrender

LVIV/KYIV: Fighting stopped about 200,000 people from evacuating the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol for a second day in a row on Sunday, as Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed to press ahead with his invasion unless Kyiv surrendered.

Most people trapped in the port city are sleeping underground to escape more than six days of near-constant shelling by encircling Russian forces that has cut off food, water, power and heating supplies, according to the Ukrainian authorities.

In a phone call with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, Putin said he was ready for dialogue to end the fighting but that any attempt to draw out talks would fail, according to the Kremlin.

The suspension of what Moscow describes as a special operation, “is only possible if Kyiv stops military operations and carries out well-known Russian demands”, the Kremlin said in a readout of the Putin-Erdogan call.

The civilian death toll from hostilities across Ukraine since Moscow launched its invasion on February 24 stood at 364, including more than 20 children, the United Nations said on Sunday, adding that hundreds



A destroyed car is seen in front of a house damaged by shelling during Ukraine-Russia conflict in the village of Marhalivka in the Kyiv region. – Reuters

more were injured.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said most civilian casualties were caused by the use of “explosive weapons with a wide impact area, including shelling from heavy artillery and multi-launch rocket systems, and missile and air strikes.”

Russia has launched about 600 missiles so far, according to a senior US defence official.

The general staff of Ukraine’s armed forces said the Russians were “beginning to accumulate resources for the storming of Kyiv.”

— Reuters

Russia, Ukraine start talks

MOSCOW: Delegations from Russia and Ukraine have started a third round of talks in Belarus, the Interfax news agency reported on Monday, the 12th day of Russia’s war with Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba have agreed to meet at a forum in southern Turkey on Thursday, the first potential talks between the top diplomats since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine.

Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey’s Foreign Minister, made the announcement on Monday and said he would attend the meeting in the resort city of Antalya. Russia’s foreign ministry confirmed the plan.

Nato member Turkey, which shares a maritime border with Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea, had been offering to mediate between the sides. Ankara has good relations with both Moscow and Kyiv, and has called Russia’s invasion unacceptable even as it opposes sanctions against Moscow.



In Ukraine rivers of blood and tears are flowing. This is not only a military operation but a war which is leading to death, destruction and misery
POPE FRANCIS

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova confirmed the meeting on Telegram.

Kuleba had said on Saturday he was open to talks with Lavrov but only if they were “meaningful”.

Russia announced new “humanitarian corridors” on Monday to transport Ukrainians trapped under its bombardment — to Russia itself and its ally Belarus, a move immediately denounced by Kyiv as an immoral stunt.

The announcement came after two days of failed ceasefires to let civilians flee the besieged city of Mariupol, where hundreds of thousands of people are trapped without food and water, under relentless bombardment and unable to evacuate their wounded.

— Reuters

Russian humanitarian corridors offer rejected

KYIV: Ukraine dismissed Moscow’s offer to create humanitarian corridors from several bombarded cities on Monday after it emerged that exit routes would lead refugees into Russia or Belarus.

The Russian proposal of safe passage for people from Kharkiv, Kyiv, Mariupol and Sumy came after terrified Ukrainian civilians came under fire in previous failed ceasefire attempts.

Violence raged 12 days into the war, even as a third round of peace negotiations was starting

on Monday and the Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers eyed talks in Turkey later this week.

The Russian invasion has pushed more than 1.5 million people across Ukraine’s borders in what the UN calls Europe’s fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II, and sparked fears of a wider conflict.

International sanctions intended to punish Moscow have done little to slow the invasion, and Washington said it was now discussing a

ban on Russian oil imports with Europe.

Oil prices soared to near a 14-year high on the developments while stock markets plunged.

As international pressure mounted over horrifying scenes of civilians cut down while fleeing, Moscow’s defence ministry announced plans for humanitarian corridors and said a “regime of silence” had started at 0700 GMT.

But several routes led into Russia or its ally Belarus, raising questions over the safety of those who might use them. — AFP

Modi urges direct talks between Putin, Zelenskiy

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to hold direct talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskiy, in addition to ongoing negotiations, a government source said. Modi, who spoke to Zelenskiy before a 50 minute-long call with Putin, was briefed by the Russian leader on the status of the negotiations between the two warring countries, the source said.

“Prime Minister Modi urged President Putin to hold direct talks with President Zelenskiy of Ukraine”, the source said, declining to be named in line with government policy. In his call with Zelenskiy, Modi expressed deep concern about the conflict and the humanitarian crisis it had caused, a government statement said. Modi underlined the need to evacuate Indian students trapped in eastern Ukraine, including around 700 nationals in the city of Sumy, according to the source and the statement.

WHO confirms attacks on healthcare

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed seven attacks on healthcare infrastructure in Ukraine since the start of a Russian invasion on February 24, up from four the previous day, the U. agency in an e-mailed response to Reuters.

“As of 7 March, nine verified incidents of attacks on healthcare in Ukraine have been published on the Surveillance System of Attacks on Healthcare (SSA), seven with “Confirmed” certainty level, and two with “possible” certainty level”, a WHO official said in an e-mail, referring to its database. — Reuters



Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
11/2022	Provision of Desktops & Laptops for the Ministry of Social Development Employees	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board that have the activity of supplying information technology services, technology and communications systems and programmes Registered in excellent or first or second	Monday 28-3-2022 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-4-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om**). On Tuesday 8/3/2022.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (24402200).

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

www.mosd.gov.om



Taghleef Industries SAOC

P.O. Box 38, PC 327, Sohar Industrial Estate, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 26751823/24, Fax: 26751822

Invitation and Agenda of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Taghleef Industries SAOC

24th March 2022

The Board of Directors of Taghleef Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held on **Thursday, 24th March 2022 at 4.30 pm** via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository’s website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened on **Wednesday, 30th March 2022, at 4.30 pm** to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
3. To consider and approve the Auditor’s report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
4. To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
5. To consider and approve the related party transactions which will be entered into by the Company during the financial year ending on 31 December 2022.
6. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 at the rate of RO 0.500 for each share from retained earnings to the shareholders.
7. To appoint Auditors for the Financial Year ended 31 December 2022 and specify their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Closed Joint Stock Companies issued by the Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

1. Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
2. Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder’s balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact Mr. Khaled Kharousi on 26650229 OR Mr. Zacharias Chacko on 26650268.

Chairman

Strong cultural, economic ties bind Muscat, Minsk



Awadh bin Said Baqwair

The writer is a journalist and a political analyst

Towards the end of February, the Republic of Belarus witnessed a popular referendum on constitutional reforms related to the system of government. This was especially determining the authority of the President of the Republic, Parliament, the government and the rest of government agencies.

The Council of Ministers, through the outcome of that referendum, was also granted broader powers, and became more independent in making executive decisions.

Through the result of the referendum that took place last Sunday, constitutional amendments were approved after the participation of 78 residents, a percentage that exceeded the required one, which is half of the registered population for holding the referendum.

The draft of the new constitution will be published for public discussion so that those amendments become final, especially those related to

the popular amendment. The amendments approved by the popular referendum included the distribution of part of the president's powers in favour of government agencies.

The powers of the president, the functions of the head of state, and the tasks of the powers of the People's Assembly were determined for all the Republic of Belarus to become the ruling power and the highest representative of the people's power's apparatus. The maximum term of the presidency was set for two consecutive terms.

By looking at the percentage that participated in the popular referendum in the Republic of Belarus, 78 of the total participants is considered high and exceeded the required percentage, which is half of the population eligible to participate in that popular referendum.

Holding a popular referendum is an integral part of the constitutional reforms taking place in the Republic of Belarus and in light of its openness to its complex

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF OMAN AND THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS IN BELARUS ARE EXAMPLES OF THE GROWING RELATIONS IN THE CULTURAL FIELD BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

relations with the countries of the world.

The Republic of Belarus enjoys good and distinguished relations with the Sultanate of Oman since the declaration of diplomatic relations between the two countries on July 23, 1992.

These relations were also strengthened through the state visit of the President of the Republic of Belarus to the Sultanate of Oman in 2007.

Perhaps the most prominent relations between Muscat and Minsk are cultural and economic relations. Also, political consultations between the two countries are continuing.

One of the examples of the growing relations in the cultural field is the close cooperation between The National Museum of Oman and the National Museum of Fine Arts in the Republic of Belarus through a number of cultural events between the two museums.

An Omani corner was also launched in the Belarusian library. This corner is concerned with Omani publications in the Belarusian National Library, including general knowledge books, literature, arts, applied sciences, archaeological studies, children's literature, museum sciences and tourism publications.

The National Library of the Republic of Belarus, however, is considered one of the largest national libraries in the world. Established in 1922, the Library of the University of Belarus has been provided with a number of Omani publications in several languages, including Arabic, English and Russian, through the Omani Center for Arabic Language and Culture.

As for economic and investment cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus, there are a number of agreements in the field of investment protection, avoidance of double taxation and mutual abolition of visas.

There are a number of memoranda of understanding between the different sectors in the two countries. In addition, they both have good relations in the fields of national museums, through the exchange of experiences and the establishment of Joint events.

However, there is no doubt that holding a popular referendum in the Republic of Belarus and achieving the high rate of popular participation will contribute to those constitutional reforms. This may also encourage a number of former Soviet republics to hold such a popular referendum to achieve further development and renewal, involve all government sectors and give greater authority to Parliament, which ultimately represents the people.

Ukrainian city scrambles to defend heritage

THIBAUT MARCHAND

Statues wrapped in foam and fireproof material can be seen all around the historic city of Lviv, where the race is on to protect cultural treasures against possible Russian bombardment. In the western Ukrainian city's Market Square, only a trident can be seen sticking out from a statue of Neptune — the Roman god of the seas — that is entirely covered in a plastic sheeting.

"I got some money, gathered a team and bought some material," said Andriy Salyuk, head of the Society for the Protection of Monuments, and one of the main drivers behind the protection effort.

Volunteers have joined up with city workers and builders in the movement to defend the rich heritage of Lviv, a city of 700,000 people whose centre is on the Unesco World Heritage List.

Salyuk said he was moved to act when an art historian "told me that if there was a bombing, God help us, we could lose the stained glass windows!"

Speaking in an office decorated with Ukrainian flags and the colours of various battalions fighting in eastern Ukraine, he said he has received donations from wealthy benefactors.

The effort has brought together an unlikely coalition, including construction companies which have advised on the best material to use to protect the stained glass windows of various churches.

At the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, which dates back to the 14th century, Andriy Pochevka was overseeing the installation of one such panel.

"We cannot protect from a direct impact but we are trying as much as possible to protect from light damage, whether it's a fire or a shockwave or small fragments," he said, as a crane manoeuvred the panel into position.

On one side of the cathedral, a large sculpture of the Holy Sepulchre has already been covered up under the watchful eye of Liliya Onishchenko from the city's cultural heritage protection department.

"I have devoted my entire life to defending cultural heritage," the 66-year-old said. "I do not want to see the results of our work destroyed by the war," she said. In another part of the city, she said a recently restored wooden altar from the 14th century in an Armenian church has been dismantled and placed under protection "like the First World War". —AFP



Paul Krugman

The writer is an American economist and public intellectual

Putin's other big miscalculation

Despite the astonishingly effective fight that Ukraine has put up against Russian forces, most military experts seem to believe that Russia's sheer advantage in firepower will eventually prevail.

Having no relevant expertise, I see no reason to question their judgment.

Still, it's clear that Vladimir Putin made a huge miscalculation. Russia began the war with a dash for Kyiv and Kharkiv by small, lightly armed forces, obviously expecting to achieve a quick victory as the defenders' resistance collapsed. Instead, the initial attack was repelled, and the follow-up with tanks and artillery has been bogged down — in some cases literally, because it's still mud season in much of Ukraine.

And that wasn't his only miscalculation. Putin evidently believed that Russia could easily weather the economic fallout from his war. Oh, the West might slap on a few sanctions, but Europe needed Russian gas and oil, and he had built up a huge war chest of foreign currency reserves that was supposed to tide him over until things settled down.

His political judgment wasn't entirely wrong. Western economic sanctions have conspicuously and pointedly exempted sales of fossil fuels, which make up most Russian exports. Instead, the sanctions have mainly been financial, excluding major Russian banks from the international payments system and freezing the assets of the Russian central bank — in effect, impounding a large fraction of Putin's vaunted war chest.

How much does this matter? Historically, economic sanctions have tended to be porous: Countries find workarounds, greatly reducing their effectiveness.

But a funny thing has happened in this case. So far, economic pressure against Russia appears to be highly effective, crimping Russian trade even in goods that haven't officially been placed under sanctions. The financial restrictions that have already been imposed have made transactions with

PUTIN'S POLITICAL JUDGMENT WASN'T ENTIRELY WRONG AS WESTERN ECONOMIC SANCTIONS HAVE CONSPICUOUSLY EXEMPTED SALES OF FOSSIL FUELS, WHICH MAKE UP MOST OF RUSSIAN EXPORTS

Russia — even the purchase of oil — difficult; fears of future sanctions, plus the general sense that any Western institutions perceived as helping the Putin regime will face harsh treatment from regulators, have led to widespread self-sanctioning, cutting off even trade that is formally permitted.

We don't know yet how this plays out, but if we see the kinds of mass civilian casualties and reign of terror that seem all too likely in the weeks ahead, the effect may be to largely isolate Russia from the rest of the world economy.

Economists have a rather arcane

term for this kind of isolation: "autarky." And it's likely to be extremely damaging.

You might think that autarky is just a strong form of protectionism, which also tends to reduce trade. But it's actually a lot worse.

The dirty little secret of international economics is that while economists love to sing the praises of free trade, the economic costs of tariffs — even fairly high tariffs — tend to be modest. Why? Because the private sector responds to tariffs by cutting off only the least essential imports. Impose, say, a 20 per cent tariff on imports, and we will stop importing only goods that can be produced at home at a modestly higher cost or for which there are reasonably good domestic substitutes. If an imported good is really needed — for example, if it is a crucial input for manufacturing that we can't quickly start making here — companies will simply pay the tariff and continue buying abroad.

If events cut off a large fraction of a nation's international trade, however, that kind of prioritisation won't be possible. The domestic economy will lose access not just to cheap stuff but also to goods it has a very hard time doing without.

—The New York Times



Ukrainian refugees walk a bridge at the buffer zone with the border with Poland in the border crossing of Zosin-Ustylyh, western Ukraine. — AFP

Let’s break the bias...



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

what the young minds have been exposed to. This generation has been to great extend seeing gender equality, but two centuries ago in some countries it was considered that girls would not be able to handle the same academic subjects boys were being taught. Then it was the myth about the professions that women might not be able to cope with.

Women have come a long way and she has been breaking the glass ceilings but there is so much more to be achieved. Women are present in all fields including politics to defence but it is not something women take it for granted.

HH Sayyidah Basma al Said is one of the speakers at the inauguration of Forbes USA for World’s Most Powerful Women for International Women’s Day. She is the first Omani to take part in this global event for women in history - the Forbes 30/50 Summit which started on March 6 and concludes on March 9.

Baida al Zadjali is an entrepreneur but as a child she loved cycling. As she spoke to us on the Observer’s podcast she reflected on how some of her relatives were uncomfortable seeing her cycling around in the neighbourhood. The family pressure meant no more new cycle as she grew taller but she learnt to cope with her younger sister’s bike until she grew taller and soon forgot about. Years later a friend nudging her to try out triathlon ended up in not just her participating but her organising duathlon and for sure cycling was part of it.

Every woman has a story and each woman is breaking her own barrier. It is not always necessary that barriers are always external but sometimes it is the individual herself who could be the biggest block.

It takes a lot of strength to break free from the limitations set by one’s own self. Sometimes it becomes one’s comfort zone. And when a person breaks free of the limitations there is a world waiting to be explored.

Sara al Balushi is an Omani artist who has been creating her own stage for her art work.

According to her there is no difference just because she is a woman. According to her, we live in a complementary atmosphere to each other, only the difference is what she witnessed in recent times has given her an entity more than the past, no matter how society tries to encrypt it.

Of course there is a difference between men and women but the quest now is to accept the difference and celebrate it too. Women are going to be in all professions and women will continue to thrive in their traditional role as motherhood is an instinct but over the years she has even managed to keep it as two distinct roles but maybe the corporate world will include that part of her as well, as many organisations are thinking of incorporating daycare into their premises.

So March 8 is to celebrate women’s achievements but most importantly it is to accept her the way she is.

Where women work make all the difference. So finally, the objective of the day is about, ‘celebrating women’s achievements and increasing visibility, while calling out inequality is key.’

It is the International Women’s Day today, and the theme this year is ‘Break the Bias.’ The organisers of International Women’s Day want us to think of a world there is no discrimination — a world free of bias and stereotypes.

Is that possible? It is conditioning of the mind resulting in what has been taught at home and



PROTEST AGAINST OCCUPATION

A Palestinian woman holds up a national flag in front of burning tyres during a protest against settlements in occupied territories on the occasion of International Women’s Day in the West Bank village of Burqa, north of Nablus, on Monday. Some 475,000 Israelis live in settlements considered illegal under international law throughout the West Bank, which Israel captured from Jordan in 1967. — AFP

Russian attacks spur debate about nuclear power as climate fix

TIMOTHY GARDNER

Russia’s takeover of Europe’s largest nuclear power plant in Ukraine should spur companies and policymakers to be more careful in plans to build reactors to fight climate change, nuclear safety experts said.

Russian forces seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine on Friday after heavy fighting sparked a huge blaze in a training building at the site. The fire was extinguished and officials said the facility was safe.

But the seizure, a week after Russian troops took over Ukraine’s defunct but still radioactive Chernobyl plant, triggered global alarm about vulnerabilities of nuclear energy to wartime attacks that could unleash deadly radiation.

“You have to take more seriously the need to ensure protection in nuclear plants, not only for natural disasters, but also for man-made ones,” said Edwin Lyman, the director of nuclear power safety at the Union for Concerned scientists.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Ambassador to the United Nations, told an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Friday that the attack on Zaporizhzhia was “incredibly reckless and dangerous. And it threatened the safety of civilians across Russia, Ukraine and Europe.”

The US Embassy in Ukraine called the Russian assault on the plant a “war crime”.

Henry Sokolski, head of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, a nonprofit group, said the attack struck a blow to the nuclear power industry as a whole:

“The nuclear reactor in Ukraine didn’t take a hit last night as big as nuclear power will if officials factor in the military vulnerability of these machines,” he said.

RACE TO NUCLEAR

Plans to develop nuclear power, which generates electricity while emitting virtually no greenhouse gases, have accelerated in recent years as governments pledge to fight global warming.

There are now 58 reactors under construction and 325 proposed around the globe, according to the World Nuclear Association. Many proposed plants are in Eastern Europe.

The White House said in November that US company NuScale Power LLC had inked plans with Romania to build a small modular reactor (SMR) plant, adding the agreement positioned “US technology to lead in the global race for SMR deployment.”

Last month NuScale, majority owned by construction and engineering company Fluor Corp, signed an agreement with Polish company KGHM Polska to build another small modular reactor plant in Poland by 2029 as part of an effort to reduce dependence on coal, which emits large amounts of carbon dioxide and lung-damaging soot when burned. NuScale also signed an agreement in December with Kazakhstan Nuclear Power Plants LLP (KNPP) to explore the deployment of the power plants in that country.

Diane Hughes, a NuScale spokesperson, said the Zaporizhzhia “incident once again highlights the fact that nuclear energy plants have robust, resilient and redundant safety features” and that its technology is even safer.

And in January, Westinghouse Electric Co signed cooperation agreements with 10 Polish companies for the possible construction of six AP1000 conventional nuclear reactors. It also signed a memo with Rafako SA on the possibility of developing nuclear plants in Ukraine, Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

Cathy Mann, a Westinghouse spokesperson, said “nuclear energy is a safe, carbon-free source in Ukraine and around the world.”

Third Way, a Washington-based think tank that supports nuclear power, said the severity of climate change means the world must rapidly increase nuclear energy in the next few decades despite the risks.

“No energy source is entirely without risk,” said Josh Freed, the group’s senior vice president for climate and energy. Lyman from UCS dismissed as “glib talk” contentions that new nuclear reactors will be “so safe and they can be deployed, essentially anywhere in the world with minimal protection.”

The Nuclear Energy Institute, the US industry group, said it believes nuclear reactors are safe and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine only reinforces the need for Europe to expand its nuclear energy capacity.

Russia is currently a major supplier of natural gas to Europe’s power plants.

“We expect that the tragic events of the past weeks will only increase interest in working with the United States on next-generation nuclear energy deployment,” said John Kotek, senior vice president of policy development and public affairs at NEI.

—Reuters



A general view of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station in Ukraine in this file photo. —Reuters

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MCCC Yellow clinch OC Junior U-13 title



MUSCAT: MCCC Yellow U13 beat ISWK-U13 A by 8 wickets in the final of their OC Junior Season 2021/22 on March 5, 2022.

After winning the toss and electing to bat first, ISWK made 147/9 in 20 overs. Opener Yuvraj Rai top scored with a magnificent 60.

His 68-run partnership with Azeel Basheer Ahmed powered ISWK to 114/2 after 14 overs - leaving them well poised to explode over the final 6. Instead, they imploded, losing 7 wickets for the addition of 30 runs. Kriv Rajesh Patel and Shravan Sharat Kurup picked up 3 wickets apiece

for MCCC. In response the MCCC Yellow side made a tricky job at hand look exceedingly simple, chasing down the target with 16 balls to spare. The task was achieved, thanks to an enormous 137-run third wicket stand between Kriv Rajesh Patel and Mathew Samuel Kevin. The

former continued his memorable day on the field with a blistering unbeaten knock of 74 runs in 49 balls and deservedly took home the player of the match award. Mathew Samuel Kevin finished on a well-made 59. In the postseason awards ceremony held after the game, Paul Martin,

the logistics manager of Mazoon Dairy presented Kriv Rajesh Patel of MCCC Yellow with the best batsman award, Nithin Jayarajan of Indian School Muscat with the best bowler award and Arsh Javed Tanashah of Indian School Wadi Kabir with the best all-rounder award.

Kriv Rajesh Patel was the top scorer in the league, making 465 runs in 5 matches. Nithin Jayarajan picked up 6 wickets in the same period.

BRIEF SCORES: ISWK-U13 A 147/9 in 20 overs (Yuvraj Rai 60(47) 5 x 4; Kriv Rajesh Patel 23/3, Shravan Sharat Kurup 19/3) lost to MCCC Yellow U13 151/2 in 17.2 overs (Kriv Rajesh Patel 74(49)

Ras Al Hamra to host 48th Muscat Open Golf C'ship

MUSCAT: This weekend Ras Al Hamra Golf Club will be hosting the 48th Muscat Open Golf championship on March 11th and 12th. This is the oldest running amateur golf event in Oman and the GCC region, and a signature event for the club. Yet again the event has attracted a strong field of top amateur golfers from Oman, including Oman National team players along with a large contingent of golfers from Bahrain and other neighbouring countries who will all be vying for the prestigious title of Muscat Open champion. There was a tremendous interest in the tournament and a handicap cut off had to be applied. As a result, 88 golfers with handicap of 13.2 and below can compete in this year's prestigious event. The tournament has a waiting list of almost 50 players. These numbers are reflective of the growing interest in golf amongst juniors, ladies and men at the Ras Al Hamra Golf Club. Ras Al Hamra Golf Club has seen major works recently to ensure that the

course is in pristine condition for the club's signature event. Corporate support is a key to hosting a successful event and the Muscat Open has again attracted many prestigious sponsors. This year the event has been graciously supported by Hydro and HSBC as Platinum sponsors as well as CMS, Masirah Oil Limited as Gold sponsors. Seven Seas Petroleum and Ramada Encore are Silver sponsors while Milly O'Brien's golf society is a Bronze sponsor. Jas Dhanju, President of 48th Muscat Open stated, "We are excited to again host the Muscat Open Golf Championship at Ras Al Hamra Golf Club and we are grateful to all our sponsors for their support. We look forward to welcoming the players to Ras Al Hamra. All preparations are now completed. We thank PDO Recreational Centre for their continuous support as well as all the staff at the club and volunteers who have put tremendous effort in preparing for this event."





Preparations in full swing for HM Cup

WALEED AL JAWHARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has started its preparations for the final of the 50th edition of His Majesty the Sultan's Cup for 2021/22 season, which will be held under the patronage of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, at 7:00 pm on Thursday, March 17, 2022, at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Al Rustaq Club was the first

team to reach the final match after its 2-0 second leg victory over Dhofar Club that ensured a 3-2 aggregate victory. It is the first time that Al Rustaq has reached the HM Cup final, while Al Seeb Club completed the final line-up beating Al Nasr 1-0 in the second leg match after the first leg semifinal had ended in a goalless draw.

Basil bin Ahmed bin Amir al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth,

wished both the clubs the best for the final.

"At the outset, I congratulate the Al Seeb and Al Rustaq clubs on their wonderful achievement and qualifying for the final match of His Majesty the Sultan's Cup in its fiftieth edition of the 2021/22 football season.

It is no secret to everyone that the competition since its lunch until now has made a qualitative leap and a great addition to the level of the game in the Sultanate of Oman," he added.

Hisham bin Jumaa al Sinani, Director General of Sports Welfare and Development, chairman of the Committee supervising the final match, explained that the committee had held prior meetings with the stakeholders from the Omani Football Association and the concerned authorities to discuss the administrative and organisational preparations necessary to hold the final cup in order to exit the match in a manner befitting it.

"The committee will complete

its meetings and preparations for the final match to finish all procedures related to it, adding: that precautionary measures will be applied for Corona pandemic," Al Sinani explained.

On the other hand, the Referees Committee of the Football Association will hold an important meeting today, headed by Khaled al Hinai, Chairman of the Committee, to discuss the arrangements for the final match of the Cup competition on March 17. An intensive course will be

held for the five referees who will be selected before the match.

The task of managing the match and an intensive course will be held for the five referees who will be selected before the match date. On the other hand, the Fifa assigned our international referee, Ahmed al Kef, the task of managing the match between the Emirates and South Korea on March 27, and he will be assisted in managing the match by Abu Bakr al Omari and Rashid al Ghaithi.

345 players take part in Shotokan Karate International contest

MUSCAT: The seventh Shotokan Karate Centre International competition concluded at the Al Amal Sports Club hall in Ghala on March 4.

Chief guest Shaikh Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Al Amerat, handed over the trophies to the sports clubs that ranked first in the general standings.

Also present were Brigadier Abdulmalik bin Ghassan al Mazrouei, Chairman of the Oman Taekwondo Committee and member of the Omani Karate Committee Hamoud bin Salim al Touqi.

Ali al Raisi Karate Club came first, Champions Karate Club claimed second spot, the Shotokan Karate Centre finished third and Al Qudra Karate Club came fourth in the overall category.

The international event was organised by the Shotokan

Karate Centre with participation of 345 male and female players representing 24 clubs, centres and a private academy from 7 countries.

The Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan and Iran took part in the event.

The competition was administered by a team of international, continental and national Referees.

The competition programme in the kata and kumite competitions was divided into several age groups, starting with the men's category (over 30 years old) and then (under 30 years old), then the competitions of other groups for males and females followed.

The competition witnessed strong competition and an exchange of experiences between the national competitors and the players of the participating sports clubs from the rest of

the countries, which gave the championship the advantage of the emergence of advanced levels among the players in the fields of kata and kumite for individual and team.

During the concluding ceremony, the chief guest honoured the referees' staff, representatives of sports clubs, academies and private centres participating in the competition, members of the organising committees, the scouting team and the medical staff by handing them commemorative shields.

After that, members of the Shotokan Karate Centre, Sensei Navaz Mukeri, Sensei Yousuf al Siyabi, Sensei Hilal al Abdali, presented a commemorative shield to Shaikh Mohammed al Ghabshi as well as another commemorative shields to Brigadier Abdulmalik bin Ghassan al Mazrouei and Hamoud bin Salim al Touqi.



■ FC SOHAR CLINCH NESTO PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE



MUSCAT: FC Sohar clinched the NPL football title organised by Nesto Management at Al Amal Club stadium, Ghala on March 6 10 Teams participated in the tournament in group stages and the top four were selected to the semifinals. After the thrilling semifinal matches, Astecs FC Wadi and Soccer FC Sohar progressed to the final of NPL. FC Sohar eventually beat Astecs FC Wadi in the final match with a 1-0 margin to win their title.

Al Sumoud Marathon kicks off

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MARCH 6

With the participation of more than 200 competitors, Al Sumoud Marathon was launched on Friday.

The marathon was organised by Al Sumoud Team of Nizwa Club, as part of the team's activities for 2022.

The coach, Mohammad bin Salim al Rashidi, the supervisor of the marathon, said: "Al Sumoud Marathon was organised in order to diversify the team's activities and encourage the team members to take an interest in this game in the wilayat. As well as, to discover the participants and involve them in the upcoming competitions for athletics championships. The idea of the marathon and its diversity in age levels has won the approval of followers. The team seeks to organise similar races for the older age groups. In addition to organising mountain races during the coming period as part of its



sporting activities."

The marathon was held under the auspices of Khalfan bin Khamis bin Mohammad al Busaidy, Director of the Municipal Department in Nizwa, in the presence of Hamad bin Salim al Kindi, head of Al Sumoud Team.



In the junior level, Hamad bin Salim al Ismaili won the first place, Faisal bin Khalfan al Rashidi came in the second place, and Younis bin Khalfan al Kindi in third place.

At the level of youth, Al Bara bin Talal Al Obaidani won the first place, Younis bin Abdulrahman al Mandhari came in the second place, while Muhannad bin Saleem al Jamudi took the third place.

Al Yazan bin Abdullah al Shariqi won the first place at the children's level. While Aws bin Basil al Hinai came in the second place, and Mohammad bin Khalil al Ruqaishi won the third place.

MANCHESTER DERBY GOES CITY’S WAY

ANDY JALIL
MANCHESTER, MARCH 7

An overwhelming, 4-1, win over Manchester United saw Manchester City extend their lead at the top of the Premier League to six points over second placed Liverpool who have a game in hand. Captain Kevin de Bruyne and Riyad Mahrez scored two goals each in City’s brilliant performance with United suffering only their second defeat under interim manager Ralf Rangnick.

City manager, Pep Guardiola, said: “We should have scored more goals. If the second half is not our best, I don’t know what we have to do. United is United – eight games without defeat. In the last years when we lost against them, we were already champions, and we knew today we had to win. We have to win almost all the games to be champions.

He added “Football is emotions It’s tactics, definitely, but it’s also emotions. Without the ball, we are a team with desire and passion to regain the ball from the first minute to the 90th.”

Guardiola was delighted De Bruyne has returned to top form. “Kevin is at his best. After the injuries he was struggling for rhythm but now he is scoring goals, playing with power. He is one of the top players in the world but he still runs and works hard, I’m so proud of this guy.

City opened the scoring early when in the 5th minute Jack Grealish, on the left, passed to Bernardo Silva who despite three United defenders, was able to cross to De Bruyne to slam home a powerful shot.

United found the equaliser midway through the half with Jadon Sancho taking a through pass from Paul Pogba, cutting in and curling a shot home. But within six minutes City had regained the lead after brilliant work by Phil Foden who flicked the ball over Victor Lindelof for a low shot which was superbly saved by David de Gea but from the rebound Silva’s attempt was deflected to De Bruyne who made no mistake with his shot.



Manchester City's Bernardo Silva in action with Harry Maguire and Scott McTominay. – Reuters



Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates scoring their first goal. – Reuters

We should have scored more goals. If the second half is not our best, I don’t know what we have to do. United is United — eight games without defeat. In the last years when we lost against them, we were already champions, and we knew today we had to win. We have to win almost all the games to be champions

PEP GUARDIOLA
Manchester City manager

While United were a match for City in the first half, they were outclassed after the break and City extended their lead in the 68th minute with De Bruyne again playing a roll. Following a corner, he picked out Mahrez whose left-footed half-volley from the edge of the box took a slight deflection and went into the net.

After further late chances were missed by Mahrez and Silva, United were unable to stop Ilkay Gundogan as he broke through, in added time, and passed to Mahrez to hit firmly past de Gea for the fourth goal which had to be confirmed by VAR after it was flagged for offside.

United manager, Rangnick, disagreed with the criticism from former captain Roy Keane of lacking effort. “I didn’t have that impression that they didn’t try. It’s difficult when you are 3-1 down. City are the best team on the ball on the planet. They deserved to win. It was impossible to keep them away from our goal in the second half. I’m happy with the players we have.”

Muscat-based go-karter claims third place in Abu Dhabi

MUSCAT: The tenacious spirit of a ten-year-old Muscat-based racer was exhibited in good measure at the Al Forsan International Kart Circuit in Abu Dhabi, UAE, recently.

Down with fever and the absence of his coach ahead of his race, Shonal Kunimal decided that the best way to beat his illness and his nerves was to climb the podium.

The Indian School Ghubra (ISG) student, who is a regular face in the regional karting circuit over the past four years, put up a spirited show at the Al Forsan Circuit to claim the third place (Micro Max category) in the seventh round of the 2021-22 UAE Rotax Max Challenge.

It was the second successive podium finish for Shonal, who had also claimed the third place in the previous round held at the Yas Marina International Circuit in Abu Dhabi last month.

Russian racer Maxim Bobreshov continued his winning streak to be virtually assured of the championship honours with two



more rounds to go.

Greek racer Leonidas Peruzzi, who is involved with a close battle with Shonal took the runner-up spot to stay marginally ahead.

After seven rounds, Maxim leads the championship standings with 685 points. Leonidas remains in second place with 597 while Shonal, with 557, is third.

Shonal has now been on the podium on four occasions,

including a runner-spot, in this season. He had back-to-back top-three places in round three and four while he missed narrowly a podium in the opening two races and was fifth in the fifth round.

The UAE Rotax Max Challenge is one of the most popular go-karting series in the region and is held in six categories with Micro Max featuring the youngest racers.

Coached by former Oman

go-karting star Sanad al Rawahi, Shonal trailed the winner by 4.099 seconds in the final race. Leonidas finished 0.316secs behind Maxim.

The race was reduced by three laps for a total of eight laps following an incident involving Darek Rivera of Spain. Eight racers lined up for the final race with Oman’s Adam Awan finishing fourth.

Adam came 5.900secs behind Maxim. The Omani racer is

overall eighth in the championship standings after missing previous two rounds.

Shonal’s best lap in the final race was clocked at 1:03.461 while Maxim had the fastest to his credit with a time of 1:02.333.

Shonal managed to bag third place in the qualifying, heat and pre-final races at the Al Forsan Circuit, where he returned after a gap of four years. His previous race

at the venue was in the Bambino category in 2018.

With two more rounds remaining, each racer has a chance to pocket a total of 200 points. A maximum of 100 points is at stake in each round with 40 for a race win and 30 points each for winning the pre-final and heat race.

Later speaking after an exhausting race, Shonal said, “It was an enriching experience at the venue, where I was racing for the first time.

“With my coach guiding me through zoom, it was a tricky round. I am happy that I could finish on the podium. I look forward to the next two rounds and hope to finish higher in the overall championship.

“It is still a close affair with Leonidas as only 40 points separate us. I will try my best to get past him.”

The youngster added, “Special thanks to my aunt, Marsleen Qandeel, who accompanied me as I was unwell. But for her, I wouldn’t have been able to complete the races in the seventh round.”



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India-Norway JV to set up major green ammonia project in Oman

MEGA VENTURE: Phase 1 to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually, expandable to 1.2 million tonnes per annum with about 3.5 GW of electrolyser capacity, powered by 5.5 GWp of the solar PV

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Leading Indian green energy developer Acme Group has signed an agreement with Norway-based Scatec ASA to invest in a 50-50 joint venture to design, develop, build and operate a large-scale green ammonia facility in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first phase of the facility is expected to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually and will be expanded to 1.2 million tonnes per annum with about 3.5 GW of electrolyser capacity, which will be powered by 5.5 GWp of the solar PV plant. The facility will be located in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. Potentially, the facility can be further expanded in later phases at the same location.

Manoj K Upadhyay, Founder & Chairman, Acme Group, said, “We are delighted to partner with Scatec in developing one of the largest and earliest green ammonia projects in the world. Given the strategic location of the project, technical insights and cost-effective solutions that Acme has



developed for the project of this kind, along with internationally proven project development capabilities of Scatec, I believe jointly we will be a formidable player in accelerating the adoption of this green fuel globally. We are grateful to the Government of Oman for their vision in building Oman as Green Hydrogen Export Hub and extending their full support to this project.”

Raymond Carlsen, CEO, Scatec, said, “Oman has excellent solar resources and a strategic location for production of green ammonia. Acme Group has been in the forefront of green ammonia production with this project, and in Scatec we can capitalise on our expertise in renewables, project structuring and financing, execution and operation to accelerate the decarbonisation of the world. As part of JV, we look forward to working with Government of Oman and support them in their endeavour

to make Oman a hub of Green Hydrogen and Ammonia.”

There is a growing need to accelerate decarbonisation of hard-to-abate industries through Power-to-X solutions such as production of hydrogen, ammonia and other critical feedstocks powered by renewable energy. Industry analysts forecast global annual demand for green ammonia to reach up to 200 million tonnes by 2050.

The partners are in advanced discussions with reputable off-takers for 20–25-year contracts which will lay the foundation for financing of the project. The partners expect to fund the facility through equity and project finance debt.

The overall schedule for the project is under development, but the partners share the ambition for this facility to be one of the first commercial large-scale green ammonia facilities in operation globally.

Oman crude hits 14-year high at \$125/b

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The price of Oman crude shot up to \$125.16 per barrel after gaining an unprecedented \$16.29 a barrel overnight on Monday as international benchmarks scaled peaks last seen in 2008.

The spikes were driven by fears of an impending ban by Western powers on Russian crude exports, coupled with concerns about delays in the early return of Iranian oil to the market.

According to Reuters, Brent crude reached \$139.13 a barrel and US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) hit \$130.50, both benchmarks striking their highest since July 2008. By 1204 GMT, prices had eased back, with Brent up 6.3 per cent at



\$125.55 and WTI up 6.7 per cent at \$123.37.

Global oil prices have spiked more than 60 per cent since the start of 2022, along with other commodities, raising concerns about world economic growth and stagflation. China, the world's No 2 economy, is already targeting slower growth of 5.5 per cent this year.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Sunday the United States and European allies were exploring banning imports of Russian oil, while the

White House was coordinating with Congressional committees to move forward with a US ban.

Analysts at Bank of America said if most of Russia's oil exports were cut off, there could be a 5 million barrel per day (bpd) or larger shortfall, pushing prices as high as \$200.

Russia is the world's top exporter of crude and oil products combined, with exports at around 7 million bpd, or 7 per cent of global supply.

Meanwhile, talks to revive Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers were mired in uncertainty after Russia demanded a US guarantee that sanctions it faces over the Ukraine conflict would not hurt its trade with Tehran. China also raised new demands, sources said.

Salalah Mills to form food hub at Khazaen

FOOD SECURITY: Industrial bakery, pastry production lines envisaged as part of Phase 1 investment of RO 12.5m

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Dhofar-based Salalah Mills, the nation's largest flour mill, plans to set up a flour-based food processing hub at Khazaen Economic City near Barka with an initial investment of RO 12.5 million.

The project, due to come into operation in the third quarter of 2023, is expected to augment



Khazaen's appeal as a destination for, among other activities, food

related investments.

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FINANCIAL SERVICES COMPANY S.A.O.G		
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT		
Dear Shareholders, After compliments, We are pleased to present to you an overview of the audited financial results of the company for the year ended 31st December, 2021, accordance with Muscat Stock Exchange performance, where the stock index closed at 4,129,540 points, reflecting an increase of 12.8% from the year ended 31st December, 2020, with an increase in trading volumes to 818 million in 2021, compared to 441 million at the end of 2020, an increase of 85% over the year 2020.		
Revenues:- Total operating income amounted to RO 345,216 (Omani Rials Three Hundred Forty-Five Thousand Two Hundred and Sixteen) compared to RO 232,516 (Omani Rials Two Hundred Thirty-Two Thousand Five Hundred and Sixteen) for the same period last year, showing a 48% increase.		
Net Profit:- This year's total expenses were RO 394,046 (Omani Rials Three Hundred Ninety-Four Thousand and Forty-Six) compared to RO 404,591 for the same period in year 2020, with a decrease of 2.6%, noting that included in the expenses of this year is an amount of 10,000 Omani Rials, being a revaluation of property investments. Thus, the realized losses for this year amounted to RO (48,830) (Omani Rials Forty-Eight Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty), as compared to losses of RO (172,075) (Omani Rials One Hundred and Seventy-Two Thousand and Seventy-Five) in year 2020, a decrease of 72%.		
Shareholders' Equity:- Shareholders' equity amounted to RO 3,121,149 (Omani Rials Three Million, One Hundred Twenty-One Thousand and One Hundred and Forty-Nine) compared to RO 3,163,847 (Omani Rials Three Million, One Hundred and Sixty-Three Thousand and Eight Hundred and Forty-Seven) for the same period last year 2020, a decrease rate of 1.3%.		
Dear Shareholders, In light of the positive movements in most global market indicators during the year 2021 as a result of the continued recovery of the global economy and the gradual return to normal life before the pandemic. It is hoped that this momentum will continue in the coming year. In conclusion, we can only supplicate to Allah, the Almighty God, to lift this epidemic from the whole world, as we seize this opportunity to thank with gratitude, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, may Allah bless and protect him. And keep citizens of this country safe and secure. Best regards,		
Omar bin Ahmed Abdullah Mahfoodh Al-Shaikh Chairman		
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021		
	31 December 2021	31 December 2020
	RO	RO
Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	540,958	919,031
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	169,328	169,328
Investments at fair value through other comprehensive income	1,243,598	1,237,466
Trade and other receivables	509,005	316,691
Furniture and equipment	7,043	7,969
Intangible assets	2,481	1,111
Investment properties	1,790,000	1,800,000
Total assets	4,262,413	4,451,596
Equity and liabilities		
Equity:		
Share capital	2,000,000	2,000,000
Property revaluation reserve	862,859	862,859
Fair value reserve	432,577	426,445
Accumulated losses	(174,287)	(125,457)
Total equity	3,121,149	3,163,847
Liabilities		
Bank overdraft	493,278	519,826
Trade and other payables	641,893	739,670
Staff terminal benefits	6,093	28,253
Total liabilities	1,141,264	1,287,749
Total equity and liabilities	4,262,413	4,451,596
Net assets per share	0.156	0.158
Customer securities held in trust	236,702	260,651
STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021		
	Year ended 31 Dec 2021	Year ended 31 Dec 2020
	RO	RO
INCOME		
Brokerage	257,740	108,577
Dividend income	16,173	55,358
Premeasurement gain on investments at fair value through profit and loss	-	463
Rental income	63,492	64,069
Other income	7,811	4,049
Operating income	345,216	232,516
EXPENSES		
General and administrative expenses	(357,310)	(381,114)
Fair value loss on investment properties	(10,000)	-
Depreciation	(3,844)	(3,729)
Amortisation	(940)	(4,887)
Operating expenses	(372,094)	(389,730)
Operating loss	(26,878)	(157,214)
Finance costs	(21,952)	(14,861)
Loss for the year	(48,830)	(172,075)
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss		
Remeasurement gain on investments carried at fair value through other comprehensive income	6,132	112,970
Other comprehensive income for the year	6,132	112,970
Total comprehensive loss for the year	(42,698)	(59,105)
Loss per share	(0.002)	(0.009)

ahli islamic launches
special campaign for
credit card owners



Ahli islamic has announced the launch of a special campaign for its Credit Card customers, which gives them the opportunity to win cash prizes monthly. The campaign is scheduled to be held for 3 months from February 2022.

This campaign aims to offer monthly cash prizes to four winners from ahli islamic credit card holders (RO 100 for each winner). ahli islamic will announce the winners on its social media pages.

Commenting on the promotion, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic said, “An exclusive campaign for our credit card holders exemplifies our continued commitment towards the customer experience and confidence that we aspire to build. At ahli Islamic, we provide various ways of banking to our customers, catered through multiple channels. This, coupled with high level of security, ease and convenience, especially while using Credit Cards, is something that we consider as an important aspect to us.”

He also said that by adding more interesting offers and surprises for customers, ahli islamic is keen to keep pace with its client’s lifestyle while also ensuring that these banking offers are in accordance with Sharia.

ahli islamic’s credit cardholders

are eligible to participate in the campaign when they spend at least RO 100 monthly through their Credit Cards. There are four cash prizes every month each with a value of RO 100 which will be drawn through a random draw system.

Customers can use their ahli islamic Credit Card, locally as well as internationally, to be eligible for the draw. ahli islamic will conduct the draw on a monthly basis and will announce the winners on the bank’s official social media pages.

ahli islamic has won many prestigious awards for its excellence in banking services provided to its customers. The bank has witnessed remarkable growth over the past period, bringing added value and exceptional Islamic banking experience to the people of Oman.

Through an extensive branch network, and digital channels, ahli islamic is committed to providing the market with new banking products consistent with the sharia’h principles that meet the different banking needs of customers.

This also effectively supports the Sultanate’s economic and social development, as well as to establish benchmark customer satisfaction standards in the Sultanate’s Islamic banking landscape.

Hyundai Motor, Shell
expand collaboration

Hyundai Motor Company and Shell are embarking on a new strategic collaboration to explore ways to offer lower carbon emissions products and services and to reduce emissions across their operations.

Jaehoon Chang, President and CEO of Hyundai Motor Company, and Huibert Vigeveno, Shell’s Downstream Director, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in a ceremony held at Hyundai Motor America headquarters in Fountain Valley, California.

The MoU builds on a strong foundation of several years of collaboration and will draw on the companies’ expertise in electric vehicle (EV) charging, hydrogen, low carbon energy solutions and digital technology as potential opportunities for both companies to reduce carbon emissions.

“Through this collaboration, we see ample opportunities for the transformation of our respective businesses and have identified promising synergies that will allow Hyundai Motor and Shell to thrive during the transition to future mobility and clean energy solutions”, said Jaehoon Chang, President and CEO of Hyundai Motor Company. “Through our joint endeavours, we will pursue strategic alliance initiatives designed to achieve common goals, such as carbon neutrality.”

Huibert Vigeveno, Shell’s



Downstream Director added “Strategic collaborations like this will be fundamental in the world’s transition to cleaner energy. To succeed we will have to break into new growth markets and work at a scale we have not seen before. Today’s agreement is the latest example of how we work with our customers to help accelerate their carbon emission reduction plans”.

Areas of focus for the two companies will include:

- The selection of Shell Recharge Solutions as the Charge Point Operator (CPO) and Mobility Service Provider (MSP) for premium brand, Genesis. Genesis drivers will be able to charge on-the-go, at home and at destinations with Shell. Initially focusing on the UK, Germany and Switzerland, the

ambition is to grow the partnership throughout Europe. Through this partnership, Genesis expects to meet its EV owner’s needs seamlessly through the service, supporting its ambition for all new car models to be zero emissions by 2025 and 100% of the line up by 2030. Shell also looks forward to consolidating its position as the leading charging provider.

- Pursuing combined EV network and service offerings in key markets including the US, Europe and Asia.
- Providing integrated hydrogen solutions, where Hyundai Motor could provide fuel cell trucks and Shell offers hydrogen infrastructure for targeted fleet customers.
- Continuing Hyundai’s

participation in Shell’s project to expand California’s hydrogen infrastructure to meet increasing consumer demand for fuelling options for vehicles like the NEXO SUV.

- Exploring opportunities to supply Shell renewable energy at Hyundai’s business facilities and global plants to help Hyundai meet its RE100 targets for renewable electricity.
- Considering opportunities where Hyundai could supply fuel cell trucks for Shell’s operations, and potentially expanding to Battery EVs in Shell fleets.
- Pursue digital projects using Shell’s experience of in-car services, which may include vehicle management, and smart maintenance.

Munz Islamic Banking pioneers digital banking

Muzn, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) pioneering Islamic banking window, has added several new features to its corporate internet banking platform.

Making it more convenient than ever, business users can now pay their electricity and water bills, make PASI payments and pay fees for various educational institutions across Oman, in addition to a host of other easy-to-use functions that enable them to manage their finances at their fingertips.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief



Salima al Marzouqi

Islamic Banking Officer, said, “Muzn continues to pioneer innovation in the Islamic finance industry and our digital banking

suite allows us to serve the evolving needs of our customers, whether individual or corporate. Backed by our exceptional customer service, it’s part of an expanding list of modern Sharia-compatible solutions that provide our customers with a modern and seamless banking experience.”

Muzn’s leading corporate internet banking solution supports 24/7 service to corporate customers for all their banking needs, from the comfort of their office. The Wage Protection System (WPS)

through allows private entities to make their monthly salary payments directly to their employees’ accounts at any bank in Oman.

Meanwhile, the bulk payment feature facilitates businesses to make bulk payment transfers across Oman as well as allowing government entities to make salary payments to their employees. In addition, Muzn has upgraded its foreign telex transfer feature, allowing business to make foreign transfers in USD directly through their Muzn CIB account.

Exclusive benefits on Lincoln range ending soon

Experience distinctive luxury and enjoy the difference with a Lincoln vehicle. Now available with exclusive benefits. Enthusiasts can now look forward Service 5 years/100,000 kms, 1 year registration and 3M Window Tint. The campaign concludes tomorrow, March 9, 2022.

Luxury automotive enthusiasts can choose from an exciting range of vehicles in Oman. They include the family-size Lincoln Navigator, Lincoln Nautilus, the Lincoln Aviator and the Lincoln Corsair.

The Navigator, combines modern luxury with advanced technology — elevating family travel to first class. A twin-turbo V6 engine that can produce 450 horsepower provides smooth power whenever you need it,

delivered through a 10-speed transmission. Navigator’s lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride.

The Aviator is packed with advanced technologies that let the luxury SUV rise up to greet you, and scan the road ahead to glide through an uneven pavement. Aviator offers the kind of capability premium clients require in a three-row SUV, with available all-wheel drive. The standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine, paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission, it delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration.

The Corsair embraces elements of both the full-size



Lincoln Navigator and three-row Lincoln Aviator while building on these cues with even more flair. Painstakingly sculpted in clay, Corsair features exquisite contouring throughout the body section of the door, offering a deep landscape of curvature and relief

with a fast-falling roofline. Staying true to its Quiet Flight DNA, Corsair is engineered to deliver the effortless drive experience and sensation of gliding over the road. A standard 2.0-litre with a targeted 245 horsepower is mated to a new 8-speed automatic transmission

for agile performance.

The attractive and luxurious Lincoln Nautilus is bold, stylish and powerful. The Lincoln Nautilus is equipped with a turbocharged engine line-up. Delivering a luxurious driver environment with SUV flexibility,

the Nautilus offers a stunning exterior design. Inside, the cabin is welcoming and keeps all occupants comfortable. In terms of safety, the Nautilus is equipped with Lincoln Co-Pilot360 and advanced driver-assist features. A 2.7-litre twin-turbo V6 engine boasts an AWD drivetrain with adaptive suspension and all-wheel drive disconnect. It delivers 335 hp and 515 Nm of torque and includes standard Auto Start-stop capability, plus a new eight-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability.

Customers wishing to own their dream Lincoln are encouraged to visit their nearest Lincoln showroom. In Oman, Lincoln vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC.



Vodafone Oman celebrates official launch

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 7

After commencing its trial operations on December 30, 2021, Vodafone commemorated the official launch of its operations in the Sultanate of Oman on March 6. The event took place in a festive ceremony held at the Royal Opera House Muscat, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, alongside the presence of several guests, as well as members of the company's Board of Directors and executive management in attendance.

In his speech during the ceremony, Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone in Oman, stated: "Today, we mark the official opening of a new chapter in the history of the country's digital mobile communications. We officially inaugurate the launch of one of the biggest brands in the world right here in Oman, which will mark a revolution in the technology sector. We will do things differently and digitally from the start and, we are exactly that different and we are truly digital."

He continued, "We strive to



be a key contributor towards In-Country Value, through our philosophy of utilising and capitalising on existing infrastructure and enhancing partnerships with local entities where we cannot build."

Vodafone launched its operations with the opening of its Experience Hub in the Mall of Oman, late last year, alongside an exclusive launch offer for its subscribers. Customers looking to join the Vodafone network can

simply register and receive the service, quickly and easily.

Highlighting the results of the past few weeks, Jan Holzberg, Commercial Director of Vodafone in Oman, said: "We were expecting a huge response from subscribers who were looking for an operator with global experience when it comes to telecommunications within the local market. However, we were still pleasantly surprised by the large inflow of customers, since our application received tens



of thousands of download requests during the first initial days of the offer. This is a positive indicator for the future of Vodafone and we look forward to providing a state-of-the-art and digitalised experience for telecommunication subscribers here in Oman, in the upcoming period."

Vodafone is one of the largest international companies in the world of communications and technology and profoundly believes that the partnership between

technology and society can build a better future. Under its slogan, "Together We Can", Vodafone showcases its approach towards extending the most innovative and best possible products and services to its customers.

In this context, Al Zidi remarks: "Enhancing connectivity and utilising innovative technology to create a brighter future is one of Vodafone's primary objectives. With this in mind, we seek to be pioneers in digital innovation and

sustainable growth within the local society and promote digital progress, through the introduction of the latest 5G networks and services. Vodafone has established itself as a leading technology provider which reinforces its integral role in achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Vodafone is available across the Sultanate through the My Vodafone Application on Google Play Store and the App Store and in more than 3,500 outlets across Oman.

OPAZ approves revised registration fees for SMEs



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held its first meeting for the year 2022, chaired by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Board Chairman, at the Authority's headquarters in Muscat.

As a gesture to SMEs operating in the zones affiliated with the Authority, the Board approved the new commercial registration

fees for SMEs after obtaining the necessary approvals from the competent authorities. Accordingly, the registration fees and the registration renewal of SMEs in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) have been amended to be the same as the approved fees of the activities of InvestEasy. The new fees came into effect from March 6, 2022.

During the meeting, the Board reviewed the efforts and contributions made by OPAZ

towards social responsibility in all the zones affiliated with the Authority, and the Authority's plans to enhance the lifestyle in SEZAD in particular, the Board was also briefed on the efforts made by the departments and the operating companies to localise investments in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, Sohar Free Zone, Salalah Free Zone and Al Mazayouna Free Zone.

Within the environmental efforts, the Board also discussed the afforestation and greening

of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm within the beautification projects of the Zone which includes several beautification initiatives including the establishment of natural parks in some areas. Moreover, The Board reviewed the efforts of the Authority in completing some road projects of the schemes, the construction of the main and secondary roads of Saay commercial neighborhood, and the light and medium industries zones.

Salalah Mills to set up food hub at Khazaen

FROM PAGE 13

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman, said in the Directors' report that the new investment is in line with Salalah Mills' strategy to grow its flour-based food processing industrial base. Envisaged in the first phase of its implementation are an industrial bakery and multiple production lines for frozen and semi-baked pastries.

Located at Raysut Industrial City, Salalah Mills has a flour milling capacity of 1,500 metric tonnes (MT) per day, effectively making it the largest miller in the Sultanate of Oman. Complementing this capacity is a complex of silos that can hold up to 161,500 MT of wheat, which is also the largest of its kind in the country. In addition, the company owns three unloading machines at Port of Salalah with a discharge capacity of 1500 MT per hour.

In 2021, group revenues totalled RO 60.1 million, representing a growth of 12.4 per cent from the previous year's total of RO 53.5 million. Around 52.7 per cent of

these revenues came from exports of its flour and wheat-based products to markets in Africa and Asia. Net profit climbed around 9 per cent to RO 4.1 million last year.

In line with its growth strategy, Salalah Mills — which is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) — is also expanding the capacity of its packaging plant to 100 million bags per annum, up from 75 million bags presently, at a cost of RO 3 million. The new capacity will come online before the end of the year. An animal feed line enhancement project became operational in January this year.

With regard to its plans to relocate one of its spaghetti production lines from its wholly owned subsidiary Salalah Macaroni to Ethiopia, the company noted that the move has been postponed due to pandemic-related challenges. The transfer of the plant equipment, as part of a JV arrangement with a leading Ethiopian industrial and trading group, has been delayed to sometime later this year, it stated.

Pact to establish 'green buffer zone' in Sur Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has signed a cooperation agreement with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to establish a 'green buffer zone' at Sur Industrial City.

The initiative will help increase green areas in its industrial cities, and enhance public-private partnership in areas that serve the industrial and environmental sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. It will contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions at Sur Industrial City and its

surroundings. Phase one of the project will be implemented on an estimated area of 10 hectares and will incorporate planting trees of different sizes and types, in addition to construction of walking paths, seating areas, irrigation network and lighting.

The agreement was signed by Eng Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, Director General of Sur Industrial City, and Qasim bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director of Strategic Planning for Sustainability at OMIFCO.

It is worth mentioning that the total investment volume in Sur Industrial City by the end of 2021 stood at RO 2.2 billion



with 127 projects in operation. Madayn is currently implementing infrastructure development project in Sur Industrial City, which include the construction of 17 km length of water network, 14 km of sewage network, 10.6 km of road network, and 6.8 km of rainwater drainage channel. The project is expected to be completed during the third quarter of 2022.

A workforce township project in Sur Industrial City is in the preparation stage for implementation and will take from two to three years to be completed. The project will be divided into three categories, each with its distinctive standards

and specifications that meet the requirements of the operating companies and factories in Sur Industrial City.

More projects are in the pipeline and will be announced in the coming period, which will contribute to enhancing the investment climate at Sur Industrial City. The shipyard complex project is currently in the negotiation stage with the developer, and a usufruct contract will be signed with the developer by the end of this stage. The project is expected to present investment opportunities in fishing industry and contribute to enhancing the fisheries sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Germany
mulls energy
mix without
Russian gas

ROBIN POWELL AND ULRICH STEINKOHL

BERLIN: Concerns that Germany will not be able to supply enough energy for its businesses and homes due to sanctions prompted by the conflict in Ukraine have one influential leader to suggest that Germany rely for longer than planned on nuclear power.

Markus Söder, the conservative premier of the southern state of Bavaria, called for a multi-year extension of the lifetimes of nuclear power plants, in an interview with broadcaster ZDF on Monday.

The proposal is controversial, as both the previous and current German administrations - the current one includes the Green Party - have signed up to plans to phase out nuclear power generation by the end of this year. “Of course, an extension would be possible from a purely technical point of view. The question is whether one wants it politically,” he said.

“But I think three to five years would be a good transition in this emergency situation to produce cheap electricity that at the same time also does not damage the climate.” This would be the “right approach” now, he said.

Berlin shelved a project to bring a Russian natural gas pipeline to Germany in the same week that Russia invaded Ukraine. Amid wider international calls for countries to wean themselves off Russian fossil fuels, the energy debate Germany has been particularly fraught.

The secretary of state for economic affairs, Michael Kellner, told ZDF that the government was looking at “all options” to prepare for next winter.

“However, I don’t see how nuclear power plants can help for next winter, because they need fuel too, you can’t get that easily either.”

Economy Minister Robert Habeck said earlier this month that an extension to the lifetime of nuclear power plants does “not make sense.”

Coal-fired power plants would be kept in reserve for all eventualities, Kellner said. At the same time, the Green politician pointed out that Germany wants to phase out coal by 2030 if possible. Therefore, “we should massively accelerate the expansion of renewable energies and get out of coal earlier.”

When it came to fast-rising heating and petrol costs, Soeder demanded an “absolute energy price brake” as soon as possible.

“That’s why VAT should be reduced as much as possible, and perhaps even reduced to zero with the approval of the European Union.” This could save up to 20 per cent on the price of petrol, he said. — **dpa**



LUXURY
GIANTS CLOSE
SHOP

German Miele advertisement in Moscow's Evroreisky (European) shopping mall. French luxury giants LVMH, Hermes and Chanel as well as some other western brands have decided to temporarily close their shops in Russia, which invaded Ukraine on February 24. — **AFP**

A whole new ballgame in virtual space



SEEMA SANGRA

There’s so much happening in the virtual world. Businesses and creative industries across the globe are gravitating to the virtual space like never before. Just a few years back, going online or launching an online presence was considered a smart and positive thing. Today, the quality of our online presence risks being judged from the standpoint of the momentous trends and developments transforming the virtual space.

Our digital journey has witnessed many new milestones in the last decade. When Ethereum blockchain was introduced eight years back in 2014 and its platform went live a year later in 2015, it started the era of NFTs (non-fungible tokens). There are already reports that sales of NFTs reached around \$25 billion in 2021 and the global metaverse revenue could reach \$800 billion by 2025. The concept of the metaverse is not new, but it started to gain momentum when Facebook changed its name to Meta.

There are roughly two types of art NFTs. The first type is like a real-world art sales kind of an exclusive art piece, where an artist creates a one-of-its-kind piece of digital art and then sells it. The other type is NFT collections, like Cryptopunks. These entail artists and developers creating many (usually 10,000) NFTs that have the same template with different characteristics. One famous NFT of the latter category is the Bored Ape Yacht Club collection with

apes in different traits and outfits. Different people own all pieces of this collection.

American television host James Thomas Fallon, who owns one of the Apes is known to flaunt it during his show with Paris Hilton, who is also one of the 50 most influential people in the NFT space. @Jimmyfallon also tweeted and asked his followers to suggest a name for his APE. The second type of NFT starts with a reasonable amount for purchase but as more and more celebrities buy it, the value changes and adds prestige to digital art. The Bored Ape series has also created a community that organises meetups in New York, California, Hong Kong, and the UK. These events bring in exclusive class phenomena to NFT ownership.

Moving away from the pure creative art world, a variety of brands have started capitalising on the exploding NFT market. NFTs are being used by brands to give a unique experience to their customers. With the growing popularity of the Bored Ape NFT series, Adidas was quick to use the Ape NFTs as profile pictures. The company has plans to rule the metaverse with Bored Ape Yacht Club and NFTs. Metaverse is buzzing with new ventures and forward-thinking brands have already started to move their activities on Metaverse.

Brands like McDonald’s, Panera, Adidas, Nike, Walmart, PricewaterhouseCooper, and Sketchers are already headed to the

metaverse. Luxury brands are equally venturing into NFTs and Metaverse. Louis Vuitton partnered with digital art pioneer Beeple last year to create its first-ever NFT game - Louis. Givenchy’s creative director Matthew M Williams collaborated with artist Chito and has designed 15 unique digital fashion NFTs. Burberrys has a “Sharky B” that can be collected and sold among the players in the game.

McDonald’s, present in 100 countries and territories, is now taking burgers to the virtual space in the Metaverse. The company has recently filed 10 trademark applications including one for a virtual restaurant headset. The customer will be able to walk into the virtual restaurant via an immersive experience to place an order. The order will arrive at the customer’s doorstep, as in real-life online orders.

The immersive experiences, NFTs, Crypto, and other metaverse projects definitely come with many concerns about the bandwidth, as well as ethical practices, and their social implications, but for sure, it will not be possible for business and the art world to ignore the shift. It is indeed a whole new ballgame.

[The author, a former resident of Muscat, is the Program Leader for the Media Studies Department of Amity University, Dubai Campus. She is also pursuing her PhD studies in New Media and Non-Profits. Email: ssangra@amityuniversity.ae]

War and sanctions upend global commodity markets



OLE S HANSEN

Commodities, with a few exceptions, have rallied strongly since President Putin ordered the attack on Ukraine, thereby triggering a change in the market from worrying about tight supply to actually seeing supply disappear. With Russia, and to a certain extent Ukraine, being major suppliers of raw materials to the global economy, we are currently witnessing some historic moves with Russia’s growing isolation and self-sanctioning by the international community cutting a major supply line of energy, metals and crops.

While the focus has been on crude oil given its global importance as an input cost to the wider economy, other markets such as gas in Europe as well as coal have seen incredible strength with the market attempting to price a potential shortfall in supply. From a global food security perspective, record wheat prices in Europe and US prices at their highest since 2008 are causing a great deal of concerns as well.

The strong and unprecedented response to Russia’s attack on Ukraine is rapidly being felt, not only in Russia where the economy is in free fall with the country’s major stocks collapsing by more than 90 per cent before trading was halted while the Russian Ruble has reached its lowest level during twenty years of President Putin’s leadership. Across the world, a combination of outrage and self-sanctioning have seen flows of oil, coal and many other commodities originating in Russia slow with buyers increasingly viewing Russian-produced and mined products as toxic.

These developments highlight the risks to the global economy, especially from a long drawn-out conflict. In such a situation, prices of commodities in short supply would likely have to rise to levels where demand starts to become negatively impacted, thereby supporting the return to a more balanced market. At this point, having seen these historic moves, it is also incredibly important to stress

that we are dealing with a situation that could have a binary outcome. Any sudden solution that warrants the removal of sanctions could trigger a significant correction across many key commodities, potentially reversing the strong gains seen in the table above.

Global commodity markets are tightening and as a result the Bloomberg Commodity Spot Index continues to reach fresh record highs. The stunning 9.4 per cent surge this past week is the biggest since 1974 when the OPEC oil embargo triggered the 1973-74 oil shock. Looking at the futures curves we find that most of the major commodity futures are seeing a rising backwardation, a gauge which helps measure the market’s concern about shortfalls and the higher price buyers are willing to pay for immediate delivery compared with delivery at a later date.

Crude oil reached a 14-year high on Thursday after Brent almost touched \$120/b before suffering a ten-dollar correction

on speculation that a nuclear deal with Iran could be reached this weekend. Global oil majors including BP Plc, Shell Plc and Exxon Mobil Corp are exiting Russia while buyers are shunning the nation’s crude as they navigate financial penalties and soaring shipping costs. As a result, the global market is currently in a flux with Russian unwanted crude varieties trading at a deep discount to Brent.

Following a record short meeting on Wednesday, OPEC+ decided to rubber stamp another unobtainable 400k b/d production increase for April. As it turned out, this meeting was more about keeping OPEC+ stable than the oil market with the elephant in the room of the Ukraine war and Russian sanctions not being addressed. It highlights the tightrope the group has to walk, perhaps also considering the fact the toolbox, i.e. spare capacity, is running close to empty. In the short-term, with no solution in sight, the price may need to

rally to levels that kill demand. A peace deal on the other hand may remove a large chunk of the gains seen during the past ten days.

Wheat prices spiked to a fresh 14-year high in Chicago while the Paris high-protein milling wheat contract has been setting daily records culminating on Friday when it jumped to €385/tons, some 30 per cent above the previous record from 2008. Ukraine and Russia export 29 per cent of the world’s wheat, mostly via the Black Sea, a route that is now offline following attacks on cargo ships near Odessa. From a global food security perspective, this is a very serious development as wheat together with rice are two of the most important food staples. Among the world’s top ten importers of wheat we find several developing nations from Egypt and Turkey to Indonesia and Algeria, all countries where surging food costs will have an outsized negative impact.

(The writer is Head – Commodity Strategy, Saxo Bank)

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features

A road trip along the rugged nature

By Samuel Kutty

Despite its rough topography and rugged nature, the Sultanate of Oman boasts world-class road networks spanning its length and breadth. For a visitor to this country of mesmerising natural beauty, according to a report Lonely Planet, "there is no better way to explore its pristine, wildly beautiful and surprisingly diverse landscapes than on a road trip". A network of excellent coastal highways and interior routes offers access to fishing villages, white-sand beaches, stunning gorges, mountain towns and lush nature reserves, says the Australian travel guide book publisher in the latest report published in its website. "Whether you're spending one week or two in the Sultanate of Oman, renting a car gives you maximum flexibility – something you'll appreciate when faced with the prospect of spending an extra hour or two soaking in a turquoise spring instead of having to rush to the next spot while on a guided tour", the travel advisory notes.

Road tripping also offers the opportunity to be spontaneous and wild camp around the country, and to experience the warmth and kindness of the Omani people, who are quick to invite you for a meal or tow your vehicle out of the sand should you get stuck. The coastal drive along Highway 17 from Muscat to Sur and farther to Ras Al Hadd, where the Sea of Oman meets the Arabian Sea, is one of the most popular road trips in Oman for good reason. "Not only do the stops along this route create a good three-day Oman road trip itinerary, but also the drive is rewarding for its spectacular scenery, especially if you don't mind taking a few detours to the wadis (valleys) in the interior", the travel guide urges. On the left are azure sea hugs white-sand beaches and windswept cliffs along a coast dotted with quaint fishing towns. On the right, the eastern Hajar Mountains beckon with the promise of valley trails, mountain villages and jaw-dropping canyon views. "When stops for a coffee", the Lonely Planet adviser urges, "you can wander around

Ourayat, a fishing village with a busy souq and a 19th-century fort and round watchtower". Also swim in the turquoise brackish water at Bimmah Sinkhole (locally known as Hawiyat Najm Sinkhole), a natural 20m (65ft) deep limestone sinkhole that attracts visitors for the bright colour of the water. Fins Beach, with its white sand, pebbles and interesting rock formations, is one of the most beautiful beaches along this coast and a good spot to camp overnight. At Wadi Shab, hike along canyon walls to swim in turquoise pools and see a waterfall inside a cave. Visit agricultural villages at nearby Wadi Tiwi and hike past traditional falaj irrigation channels to take a dip in pristine pools surrounded by palms. In Sur, two castles, an open-air museum and a boat-building yard where dhows (wooden boats) are still built using traditional methods tell of the town's rich maritime heritage. Don't leave the area without visiting Ras Al Hadd and the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve, where you can witness nesting green turtles or hatchlings making their way to the sea.



READ

THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD MOTHERS

BY JESSAMINE CHAN

In this taut and explosive debut novel, one lapse in judgement lands a young mother in a government reform programme where custody of her child hangs in the balance. Frida Liu is struggling. She doesn't have a career worthy of her Chinese immigrant parents' sacrifices.

FASHION

Dior rebuilds historic Paris address into sprawling flagship, museum

DIOR IS REOPENING its sprawling flagship store and a museum at the label's historic Avenue Montaigne site this week after a two-year revamp, the latest in a series of hefty real estate investments from luxury conglomerate LVMH in the French capital. The official opening of the complex, scheduled for March 6, follows on the heels of a flurry of inaugurations of new sites from the group in recent months,

including a department store and two luxury hotels – the Cheval Blanc overlooking the Seine River and the Bulgari hotel on the tony Avenue George V. LVMH has benefitted from a post-pandemic boom in demand in high-end consumption, even without the return of wealthy visitors from abroad – a key source of revenue for the industry in recent years, particularly in Europe.



"Of course we are optimistic the tourists will one day come back," Pietro Beccari, the chairman and chief executive of Christian Dior Couture, said.

The newly expanded complex stretches over 10,000 square metres (107,640 square feet), with cafes, gardens, a restaurant and a private apartment for over-

night visits from VIP clients, in addition to floors of retail space stocked with clothing, accessories, tableware and make-up. Next to the store is a museum, "La Galerie Dior" that traces the label's history from the 1940s, including dresses from that era, as well as the late Christian Dior's desk and an original fitting room packed with hats, gloves and jewellery. The project was thought up by Beccari and LVMH head Bernard Arnault in 2018, before the label had the economic firepower for such an undertaking, Beccari said in an interview. The executive declined to provide financial details for the project, which entailed moving historic workshops and 400 employees out of the space, and digging a second basement beneath the building. "The building was kept standing on micro-poles for weeks – I didn't sleep very well," said Beccari. — Reuters



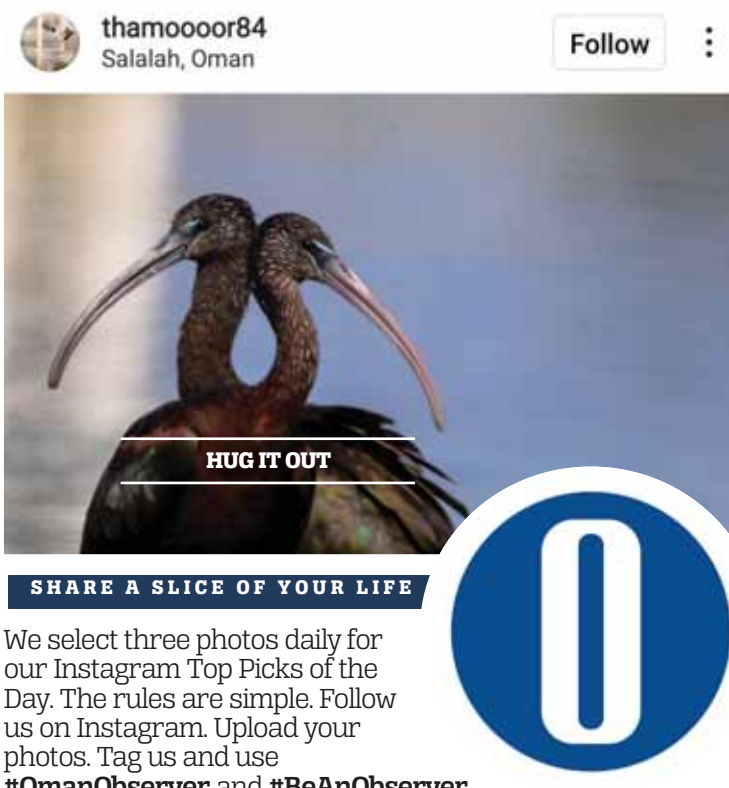
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

“Bridgerton” producer Rhimes, make-up artist McGrath heralded with Barbie dolls



US TV PRODUCER and writer Shonda Rhimes, British make-up artist Pat McGrath and French blogger Lena Mahfouf are being honoured with Barbie dolls in their likeness as part of a celebration of female business founders.

In its latest Barbie role models line-up, toy maker Mattel is paying tribute to women from around the world, including Sonia Peronaci, founder of Italian cooking website “GialloZafferano” and German digital entrepreneur Tijen Onaran.

Rhimes, whose Shondaland Media company is behind hit Netflix series “Bridgerton” and “Inventing Anna”, took to Instagram to share a picture of her doll from the collection ahead of International Women’s Day.

“I have my own Barbie! Proud to be among the 12 amazing women, all of which are breaking barriers in their respective careers”, Rhimes, also known for medical drama “Grey’s Anatomy” and political series “Scandal”, wrote on Instagram on Thursday.

Other honorees include McGrath, a fixture backstage at fashion week shows and founder of Pat McGrath Labs, as well as 24-year-old Mahfouf, a social media influencer of Algerian heritage.

“It’s a huge honour and it’s something quite unbelievable because when I was younger we used to only have... a few models of Barbie and they all looked kind of the same – blonde, tall with straight hair – and I didn’t feel represented by that”, Mahfouf said. “So now to have my own Barbie with some curly hair and a bit darker skin, I’m happy to see that.”

Mattel said its global Barbie Dream Gap project was teaming up with charitable organisation Inspiring Girls International to work with local schools in various countries delivering workshops and advice.

“It is crucial for girls to have role models, because you cannot really dream of becoming something if you haven’t seen it”, Inspiring Girls International founder Miriam Gonzalez Durantez said. “So having that visibility is crucial for girls.” – Reuters

ART

This time, Beeple is trying his hand at artwork for walls



A CAVALRY OF crypto enthusiasts funnelled into Manhattan’s Tribeca neighbourhood on Thursday evening, waiting outside Jack Hanley Gallery for a chance to meet their online art messiah in the flesh. In the mix were celebrities such as Jimmy Fallon. It was a rock-star welcome for Mike Winkelmann, a digital artist known as Beeple, who was putting the final touches on his images of decapitated tech executives and haywire science experiments.

Last year, Winkelmann, 40, introduced the world to NFTs (or nonfungible tokens), starting with the \$69 million sale of his “Everydays – The First 5000 Days” at a Christie’s auction, which set cryptocurrency on a crash course with culture. Now, he is seeking approval from the art establishment with his first gallery exhibition, called “Uncertain Future”, which intends to convince critics that his work has more substance than what they see on screen.

“I’m kind of in a weird position”, Winkelmann said at the gallery that night. “I’m an outsider in the traditional art world. I didn’t really feel like that until recently because I have been making this work in the digital art community for a very long time.”

So, Winkelmann has produced an exhibition on walls instead of screens, with 13 paintings and prints that imagine an apocalyptic future where companies such as Amazon and Facebook are reduced to rubble, their founders’ vessels of vanity and greed. Prices range from \$75,000 to \$300,000. Not that any of the hundreds who attended had a chance of buying a Beeple on Thursday night; the artworks were all on reserve, purchased, by the time the doors opened.

Still, Winkelmann remains bullish on NFTs, pairing each physical work with a blockchain-based collectible for authentication purposes. He said that much of his fortune made off the metaverse has gone back into his art.

Winkelmann recently moved into a new 50,000-square-foot industrial studio space in Charleston, South Carolina. His younger brother, Scott Winkelmann, quit his job at airplane company Boeing to oversee the 16 full-time employees responsible for turning the artist’s dreams into realities. (The staff includes several aerospace engineers from Boeing.) Other family members have joined the team, including the sons’ mother, who has an office in the studio complex.

Several advisers from the

worlds of crypto and culture have also joined team Beeple, including Jehan Chu, a blockchain venture capitalist and NFT collector who attended the opening.

“Right now, there are two art worlds”, said Chu, adding that he hoped more museums and galleries would soften to digital art. “The traditional art world is still learning about the fundamental values of the NFT space.”

Development for the exhibition started nine months ago with Winkelmann calling gallerist Jack Hanley. “I was initially suspicious of all the hype”, the dealer said. “But Mike has a really clear-eyed critique of Big Tech. He’s also very funny.”

Hanley has spent the last 35 years championing outsider artists such as Raymond Pettibon and Peter Saul, who slowly gained institutional acceptance after being dismissed for lacking a formal arts education. Winkelmann could be the next generation, the dealer said, although not everyone at the gallery agrees; Hanley confirmed that some artists he represents quit in protest of the Beeple exhibition, as ArtNet News had reported.

Fans say that Winkelmann’s ability to shock the establishment is part of his appeal. – NYT

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

A word on the importance and translation of “A soldier from Oman: Memory’s nectar”

IN THIS AND the following columns, I will present my English translations of some parts of “A Soldier from Oman: Memory’s Nectar” (2016). Written originally in Arabic, this book gives a detailed biographical account of Rashid bin Said al Kalbani, the first Omani Inspector General of the Royal Police.

A WORD ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK

I understand that “A Soldier from Oman” assumes importance for two main reasons. Firstly, whatever our political orientations, we perhaps all agree that the year 1970 was a turning point in Oman’s contemporary history. The modern developed Oman of today is, to a large extent, a cumulative effect of the building process initiated in that year. Lest we limit our view to the prosperity and stability we see before our eyes today, this book reminds us that transforming Oman into a viable modern state was a process fraught with all manner of difficulties. It reminds us that there were Omanis who struggled to overcome those difficulties. One such Omanis are the author of the book, retired Inspector General Said bin Rashid al Kalbani. Presenting his journey from the army to the police and his account of what can be characterised as his pioneering role in establishing the Omani police force, Al Kalbani is an eye witness to the challenging building process.

Secondly, though the time span from 1970 to 2016 is by no means long, the sheer rapidity of the changes that Oman has been experiencing resulted in rendering many cultural phenomena of the pre-1970s a thing of the past. This book is an interesting account of some forms of Omani heritage that are growing less perceptible day by day. From this perspective, I would say that it has direct pertinence to Middle Eastern cultural and political studies.

A WORD ON THE TRANSLATION

A book orally narrated and then transformed into writing by a person with a literary background could be quite a challenging read. The challenge is perhaps bigger for the translator who has to accommodate the voices of both the narrator/author and the writer on the one hand and the cultural background of the English reader on the other. In the midst of all these voices, the individual translator can hardly sit on the fence. Being aware of this, whilst taking faithfulness to the original text as my guiding principle, I tried to accommodate the reader by adhering to the 3Cs: cohesion, coherence and conciseness. This led me at times to disentangle what I took to be entangled and to untie the knots.

There is an unmistakable Omani flavour in the book. Perhaps the clearest manifestation of this is the author’s constant references to local customs and traditions, especially in the first chapter. Acutely aware of the differences between his generation and the current one, Al Kalbani provides us himself with brief explanatory notes essential to the understanding of those traditions. From my part, in an attempt to preserve this local flavour in the English translation, I have often used the original names of the customs with explanatory footnotes I deemed necessary for the English reader.

Writing Arabic names in English is a perennial problem, as there are no clear rules to go by. The whole process is at the mercy of the individual writer. The resultant situation may be one of confusion and chaos. I am afraid I have played my own part in this sorry tale. In the absence of standards, I have gone by my own way and spelt the names as I deemed fit. Having admitted this, I should say I have tried to be consistent throughout.

*The title of the source text is “A Soldier from Miskin, Memory’s Nectar”. I suggested to the author that “Miskan”, a small village, far from the capital Muscat, would probably be unfamiliar to the English reader; as such, it could be replaced by “Oman”. He gracefully accepted the suggestion (the translator).

**This book was narrated by Al Kalbani to Mohammed al Rahbi, an Omani novelist and writer (the translator).



Experiencing Vietnamese culture in the heart of Muscat

By Yeru Ebuen
Photos by Khalid al Busaidy

Something amazing is happening at the Royal Opera House Muscat this month. While a lot of us are already aware of the amazing shows they prepare monthly, the month of March is particularly noteworthy primarily because they are bringing the world's culture to our little corner here in the Sultanate.

A case in point is the event that took place this weekend at the ROH Musical Arts. From southeast Asia, show director Tuan Le and musical director Nguyen Nhat Ly in coordination with artistic director Nguyen Lan Maurice and choreographer Ngo Thanh Phuong brought Teh Dar — The Bamboo Circus of Vietnam to the shores of Oman.

There is no better way to summarise the whole performance except that it has everything that you can ask for in a show — a little bit of drama, a little bit of comedy, a little bit of horror and a whole lot of action.

And action-packed it was indeed, from beginning to end. Unlike the regular ROHMA programming, it was a 60-minute performance that kept on revealing layer upon layer of insight into the lives of Vietnamese.

The show opened up with a procession, the performers walking through a dimmed hall with only the stage bleeding with red light revealing on it different traditional Vietnamese instruments.

The procession took at least five minutes combining the tantric melody of instruments I can't even name and the humming and groans of the men and women who would become the soul of the performance. They all lined up in front of the stage broken and led into the darkness by the authoritative shout of the elder before everything faded into darkness.

The first bamboo setup was then led into the stage — a giant half-circle weaved basket with three protruding bamboos that served as its base. This contraption is rolled on the floor like a wrecking ball forced to swing in the direction of the performers. Demonstrating their agility, the performers would dance with it, evading it, toying with it with so much ease they looked like nothing more but doing child's play.

The full show was divided into nearly half a dozen different segments all showcasing the preciseness of the movement of both performers and contraption that any wrong move would have led to fatal injury. More than anything, one key takeaway is that this show was made to impress and was a true reflection of Vietnamese discipline.

There was numerous stand out performances throughout the whole

show. My personal favourite was the fishing segment where performers gracefully moved from moving baskets resembling rocks on a river and ultimately, the one that stole everyone's heart was the monster scenes when the performers contorted while hanging on a bamboo contraption nearly 15 metres high. The swinging bamboo pendulum also needed a mention because, for the life of me, I can't figure out how they made it work that it was nothing short of impressive.

Having been performed over 500 times in 17 countries all over the world, the Bamboo Circus is the Vietnamese art form that a lot of people and production companies wanted to see. At its core, the use of "bamboo" and "circus" is a representation of the ordinary rhythms of the simple country life of this Southeast Asian nation.

Watching the performers on stage, it was breathtaking to see them play with bamboo poles nearly three times their size. It was awe-inspiring how they move from pole to pole with ease and how, with very minimal setup, they were able to create a whole new world beautifully crafted out of bamboo. It's genius how through wild imagination and creativeness, they were able to communicate peaceful river, majestic mountain and cityscape of high-rise buildings on a stage where the light takes you to the next venue with ease.

Deferring to ROHM's description, "the instruments used are unique to Vietnam: the Central Highlands gongs; the traditional lute in the northern folk tradition (ca trù); the two-chord fiddle of southern folk music. These are all recognised by UNESCO as cultural treasures. Each scene of the show brings the audience closer to the essence of Vietnamese culture and tradition."

Without a doubt, the Bamboo Circus of Vietnam in fact "was a harmonious play on juxtapositions: the toughness of the bamboo pole versus the flexibility of the body and the stillness of a rural village versus the excitement of the circus combined with the flare of Vietnamese genius."

I would have to thank Lune Production for its commitment to producing world-class entertainment. To have the opportunity to experience the culture of Vietnam right at the heart of Muscat was a true gift in a time when the world has suffered a lot. It was a welcome distraction but more than that, it was a beaming invitation to see the countryside of Vietnam and experience its culture first-hand.

And that I think is the reason why you should watch out for the next performances coming this month at ROHM — it's that gift of experiencing the world without living the comfort of life in Muscat.

