

P10

DHOFAR INCH CLOSER TO HM CUP FINAL



P15

PURE OMANI HONEY VIES FOR SPOTLIGHT IN CROWDED FIELD



P19

ESO RENEWS COMMITMENT TO PROTECT ARABIAN SEA HUMPBACK WHALE



MUSCAT

ASYAD PORTS-DUQM BEGINS OPERATIONS

In line with the official inauguration of Port of Duqm, Asyad Ports-Duqm is set to commence the operation and management of the general cargo terminal that includes three commercial berths in Port of Duqm, following Asyad Group's strategy to enhance the competitiveness of Omani ports and maximise their investment and economic returns, as underpinned by Oman Logistics Strategy (SOLS) 2040. Asyad Terminals — Duqm, established through a partnership between Asyad Ports and Port of Duqm, will manage and operate three berths in Port of Duqm, which can accommodate the largest ships to serve customers and trade partners. SEE P13

NEW PROJECTS IN NORTH AL BATINAH

Jusoor Foundation celebrated the launch of four projects to the tune of RO 345,000, implemented within its social investment programme in the Governorate of North Al Batinah. The projects were funded jointly by OQ and Sohar Aluminium. The ceremony was held at Al Qurum Natural Park in Shinas. The first project was the development on the 28,000 square metre Al Qurum Natural Park in the Wilayat of Shinas with a total cost of RO 200,000 funded by Sohar Aluminium and OQ, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior. DETAILS ON P15



INSIDE



OMANI ELECTRIC CAR MAYS LAUNCHED



Mays Motors, one of the investments of the Oman Technology Fund, launched its electric car on Sunday, which is one of the emerging Omani innovations, to be a new beginning for the electric car sector in Oman. Mays was launched as a competitive project. The car's acceleration starts from 0-100 km in 4 seconds. The car is capable of covering a distance of 500 km on a single charge. DETAILS ON P2

Project on alternative protein from dates

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 20

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) launched a new project to produce alternative protein from dates with an international partnership. Myco Technology, an American company, is partnering in this project. The project has been announced in the “Food Future” event, which the authority organised to introduce the promising capabilities of the technologies that this project can provide after completing the first phase of the project which is to prepare the economic feasibility studies currently under way. The OIA announced that the

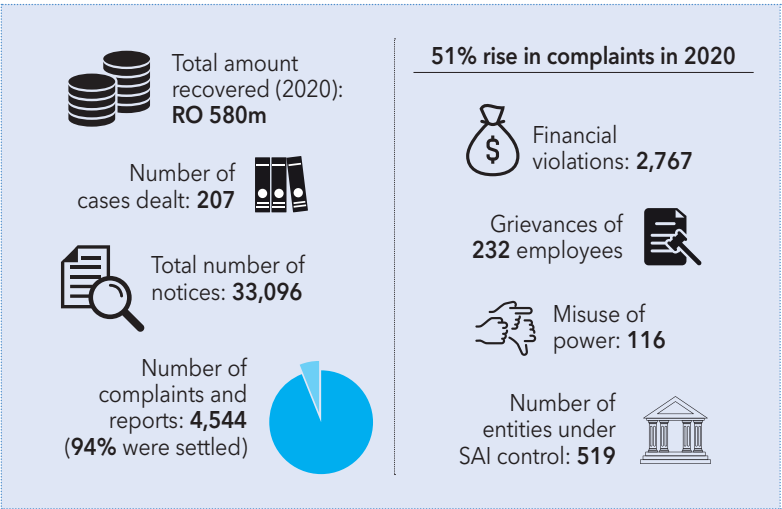
project aims to achieve some basic roles like attracting foreign investments, building strategic partnerships and interests with the countries that invest in it, and transferring globally advanced knowledge and technologies to the Sultanate of Oman for localisation and utilisation in serving strategic sectors. It has been reported that food alternatives are sectors that have recently imposed themselves on the global scene. Additionally, this partnership comes as a result of the authority's investment in the Myco Technology Company, to develop alternative protein and use it successfully in the production of alternative foods. SEE ALSO P13

RO 580 million funds recovered

SAI HANDLED 207 CASES IN COORDINATION WITH PUBLIC PROSECUTION

MUSCAT: The State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI) said that it has recovered a total of RO 580 million funds during the 9th Five-Year Plan. The Annual Community Brief 2020 report, briefed the community about the tasks taken by SAI during the fiscal year, and stated that SAI handled 207 cases in coordination with the Public Prosecution Department and that verdicts on some cases were issued, while the rest were being processed.

This was unveiled during the first issue of the State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI), termed Community Brief or community summary, which is undertaken in realisation of the 10th Five-Year Plan's requirements to consolidate transparency and disclosure in a manner that serves the development process in the Sultanate of Oman.



The brief indicates that the total number of notices during the timeframe 2011-2020 stood at 33,096. As many as 1,861 audit missions were conducted, among them 1,210 pertained to financial and administrative audit, 624 performance audit and 27 pre-monitoring. The brief indicated that a total of 4,544 complaints and reports were filed during the period

2011-2020, of which 94 per cent were settled. In 2020, the number of complaints and reports soared by 51 per cent, compared to 2019, according to the brief. The complaints and reports constituted 2,767 administrative and financial irregularities that included, 1,063 reports of delayed transactions, 232 staff grievances, 116 reports of misuse of power, 122 instances of inad-

equately awarding of bids and 244 other reports. SAI's 2020 annual inspection plan checking the performance of the State's Administrative Units covered various areas of audit. These included 96 missions giving rise to 124 reports on checking financial and administrative tasks of government departments, income-tax tiers, assessment of electronic systems, checks on projects, contracts and usufructs, as well as the study and analysis of the Sultanate of Oman's trade balance, the state's final account and impacts on export mineral ores. INSPECTION PLAN The 2020 annual inspection plan monitoring authorities and public institutions and companies covered the implementation of 24 missions, among them 21 reports on the assessment of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company...

Macron, Putin to work for east Ukraine ceasefire

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Sunday agreed to work for a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, Macron's office said. In a phone conversation lasting 105 minutes, they also agreed on “the need to favour a diplomatic solution to the ongoing crisis and to do everything to achieve one”, the Elysee said, adding that French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov would meet “in the coming days”. Putin and Macron said they would work “intensely” to allow the Trilateral Contact Group, which includes Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE. SEE ALSO P7

Arabian Prosthetics Centre rehabilitates 600 Yemenis

AMER BIN GHANIM AL RAWAS
SALALAH, FEB 20

Fifty injured Yemenis have completed a medical and rehabilitation programme at the Arabian Prosthetics Centre (APC) in the Sultanate of Oman. The tenth batch of war-injured Yemenis got artificial limbs and training at the APC in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate. The injured praised the

humanitarian role provided by the Sultanate of Oman for the victims of the war in Yemen, appreciating the efforts of the government and people of the Sultanate of Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. RECOVERED MOBILITY Rafat Yahia said she had recovered mobility with an artificial limb after receiving training at APC. She had her leg amputated above the knee in a landmine explosion

in Al Jawf Governorate in Yemen in 2016. Ashraf Yahia had both his legs amputated in a landmine explosion in Hajjah Governorate. He suffered from mobility impairment and used a wheelchair for years before getting artificial limbs at APC. APC completed rehabilitation of 600 injured, including women and children over the past period all of whom had artificial limbs fitted using advanced prosthetic design.





QATARI EMIRI NAVAL FORCES COMMANDER ON VISIT



MUSCAT: Real Admiral Abdullah Hassan al Sulaiti, Commander of the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces arrived here on Sunday on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman which lasts several days. He was received upon his arrival at Muscat International Airport by Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, Royal Navy of Oman's (RNO) Senior Staff Officer, senior RNO officers and the military attaché at the Qatari Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

MoTCIT to unveil its 2022 plans

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), will hold the ninth press conference today to review its 2022 plan and the accomplishments of the previous year.

The press conference comes within the framework of enhancing transparency embraced by the ministry and familiarising the public with its plans and executive situation and answering questions about projects of interest to citizens and investors.

Citizens will get the chance to raise questions through direct interaction with the minister of transport, communications and information technology and the under-secretaries on social networking sites. — ONA



MSC and French Navy sign pact in field of maritime security



MUSCAT: The Maritime Security Centre (MSC) on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the French Navy on exchanging information in the field of maritime security.

The MoU was signed by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Chairman of the Maritime Security Committee and Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French Navy, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of

Oman.

This came when Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the RNO, received the French Navy's Chief of Staff at the MSC. The two sides discussed several matters related to maritime fields between the two countries.

Later, Admiral Vandier toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was also briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre within its national duties,

as it coordinates with relevant authorities in search and rescue missions, as well as in the safety of the maritime environment.

Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), on Sunday received in his office Admiral Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French Navy.

The two sides exchanged views and discussed several military matters of common interest between the two countries. — ONA

First Omani electric car Mays launched



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 20

Mays Motors, a company funded by the Oman Technology Fund, launched the first model of its electric car on Sunday evening in a ceremony held at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat.

Mays Motors confirmed that the Mays car will contribute to

building an integrated system of industries related to the automotive sector and increase the added value and revenues for the Sultanate of Oman through the use of locally manufactured raw materials.

Haider bin Adnan al Zaabi, co-founder of Mays Motors, said the company is planning to launch 100 cars as a first stage.

He explained that the speed of the car reaches from 0 to 100 km in just 4.9 seconds, and the distance travelled is more than 500 km on a single charge, and with the development of the self-charging service, the distance will increase by double.

The company expects to sell the e-vehicles across both Omani and global markets.



Districts
as Export Hubs

IBEF
INDIA BRAND EQUITY FOUNDATION

Experience
India

THE GREAT INDIAN RECIPE CONTEST

3rd Jan - 27th Feb '22

Create a traditional Indian recipe
using Indian produce and win big!

Participate Now!

Email your recipe photos/videos at experienceindia@ibef.org,
post on your social media handles and tag us

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To know more, log on to:
www.ibef.org/experience-india
#ExperienceIndia

To participate
Scan QR code



MIBF: Students can register to visit book fair



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 20

To enhance the attendance and organise visits in a way that preserves the safety of everyone, the Muscat International Book Fair has started the online pre-registration process for students to visit exhibitions.

Schools and universities wishing to visit the exhibition can register at: <https://www.mctbookfair.gov.om/visitor-registration>.

The management said in a statement that precautionary measures will be followed at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center to maintain public health and safety procedures in all facilities to ensure the health and safety of all publishers and visitors to the exhibition. All visitors must wear a face mask at all times during the exhibition and in public places, present a certificate of immunisation “two doses” upon entering the venue, maintaining social distance inside the exhibition halls and avoid coming to the exhibition if they have



symptoms such as cough, runny nose and shortness of breath, even if it is from the groups immunised.

His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will inaugurate the 26th edition of Muscat Book Fair 2022 on February 24.

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said the exhibition will be by following precautionary measures as the country has decided to

coexist with the prevailing health situation by following the rules.

The exhibition will function at 70 per cent of its capacity and the number of visitors will be regulated by the people through specific systems installed at the exhibition centre.

The fair, which will continue until March 5, will host about 114 various cultural events with the participation from 27 countries, 715 publishers, and over 361,000 titles.

JABAL AKHDHAR WADIS

STORE HOUSE OF RICH BIODIVERSITY

TEXT & PHOTOS YAHYA
ALSALMANI

Climbing the mountains may be difficult yet exciting to discover nature in the Sultanate of Oman. There is so much landscape, rare rock formations, and biodiversity that one can see only by enjoying the fun of climbing mountains.

Wadi Sadah and Wadi Halfeen are located between the slopes of Al Hajar Mountain. They are examples of the exceptional natural sites distinguished by their rare rock formations and characterised by an abundance of water that descends in the form of waterfalls that give exceptional beauty.

Nature lovers can spot beautiful geological formations in the path filled with huge limestone rocks. They can practice watching and observing wild birds that take these ideal locations as their natural habitat.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar forms a unique ecosystem. In his book ‘The Birds of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar’ published in 2008, Jens Eriksen says: “The total number of bird species in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar stands at 125, of which 33 are considered breeding.”

The most popular birds are Lwsser kestrel, owls, European nightjar, bee-eater, hoopoe, barn swallow, tree pipit, grey wagtail and willow warbler.

The pleasant atmosphere



encourages many adventure lovers to explore the depths of these sites. In this mountain path, there are many water springs that descend from high altitudes. These water springs, especially after the torrential rains which the area had recently, represent a good source of drinking water for all local people, visitors, animals and birds. This water also contributes to feeding Aflajs systems and providing water for dozens of species of plants and trees.

The water also provides a fertile environment for the reproduction of many plants and trees, from which the local people benefit from beekeeping and extracting the juices of some herbs that offer many traditional medicines that treat acute infections skin allergies and reduce the level of sugar in the

blood.

The mountain terraces in these areas attract many climbing enthusiasts from different countries, contributing to the revitalisation of sports tourism in the Sultanate of Oman. While crossing this valley, hikers can see many small caves that serve as natural sites for habitation. Some sources indicate that they were used as hideouts during the conflict in the region.

The trip to explore these valleys takes approximately 8 hours, and those who wish to participate in this trip need high physical fitness. It should be noted that the mountain path has many snakes, which is why visitors to this valley must be careful, and carry with them a small first aid box, to avoid any damage that may occur during the trip.





WEATHERING THE STORM

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

Threats arising from climate change are nothing new to the Sultanate of Oman.

Recent experiences with cyclones show the potential impact of extreme climatic events in urban areas with a high loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure and economic damage.

When it comes to urban infrastructure, they are vulnerable to climate change impacts associated with sea-level rise and tropical cyclones. In addition, flash flooding magnitude and frequency could increase in the future from heavy rainfall events.

Al Batinah North is considered the most exposed of the coastal governorates to the tropical storms caused by climate change. Muscat, Sur and Salalah are also highly vulnerable.

Urban development in the country has largely focused on the coast during the past five decades, a trend that seems certain to continue through the 21st century. Coastal population growth has led to widespread conversion of natural coastal landscapes to industrial and residential uses.

There are seven governorates with coastal borders, namely: Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Muscat along the Sea of Oman; and Al Wusta and Dhofar along the Arabian Sea.

Approximately 48 per cent of the total built-up area of the seven coastal governorates has been developed within a 200 metre distance from the shoreline.

According to a feature published in *The New Arab*, a London-based news website, the Sultanate of Oman needs to enforce national standards for building and architectural design.

Quoting experts, the feature urges buildings to be equipped to withstand rising temperatures and extreme weather events like cyclones, stressing that the current infrastructure is not cyclone-resistant.

“Oman needs to enforce national standards for building and architectural design, which require buildings to be equipped to

Urban development in the country has largely focused on the coastal areas during the past five decades, a trend that seems certain to continue through the 21st century. Coastal population growth has led to widespread conversion of natural coastal landscapes to industrial and residential uses

withstand rising temperatures and extreme weather events like cyclones”, it says quoting experts.

In 2019 the government declared a strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation to be a national goal, in order to reduce the threat to water resources, tourism, infrastructure and people’s health.

According to Sultanate of Oman’s Second National Communication report, urban expansion in the cities has typically not accounted well for even historical flooding risks, much less the greater flooding risks accompanying climate change.

“Today, the impact of floods in the built-up area of Suhar Wilayat, Saham, Al Khabourah, Al Suwaiq and Muscat can wreak havoc on transportation and power systems. These risks have increased substantially over the past 50 years”, the report points out.

The report calls for steps that will focus on knowledge generation, capacity building, and improved governance and planning.

The report recommends ensuring that all hazard maps are updated to reflect designs of extreme events under climate change to manage climate change risks to urban areas, touristic facilities and infrastructure.

In addition, there should be update on coastal zone setback line to incorporate climate change risks to infrastructure, steps to ensure that existing infrastructure which are exposed to unacceptable climate change risks are evaluated to address subsequent rehabilitation or other risk-reducing options; and conducting climate change impact assessment by tourist region, focusing on the most vulnerable sectors and locations.

To strengthen capacity to assess the vulnerability of urban areas, touristic facilities, and infrastructure, the report favours improving ministry-level technical capacity for conducting climate change impact studies using state-of-the-art methods and tools, facilitating the exchange of experience and knowledge with other countries.

In 2019 the government declared a strategy for climate change adaptation and mitigation to be a national goal, in order to reduce the threat to water resources, tourism, infrastructure and people’s health



OMREN activates eduroam service in 32 locations

MUSCAT: Staying connected has become easier for students and researchers in the Sultanate of Oman with the activation of eduroam services by OMREN.

Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) has activated eduroam in 32 locations in the Sultanate of Oman distributed among universities, colleges and research centres to enable researchers, academics and students to stay connected through wireless Internet when moving between institutions in the Sultanate of Oman or abroad.

Innovative Wi-Fi Internet, Innovative Wi-Fi Internet, the access roaming service allows users to have easy and secure access to wireless Internet in research and education institutions within the Sultanate



of Oman and abroad by using the same username and password provided by the institution and without the need for any additional settings.

With the activation of eduroam in the Sultanate of Oman, statistics indicted that the service has been used 502,542 times in 2021 by students and researchers connected to the service. The service has been developed by the global research community and is available only for students, researchers and academics affiliated with official research networks such as OMREN, which is the official network in the Sultanate of Oman and the authorised organisation to provide this innovative service in the country through OMREN Federation.

OMREN aims to enable eduroam in public areas for the benefit of the research community with the support of the strategic partners and concerned authorities.

OMREN is a central part of a sustainable infrastructure that contributes to the emergence of an effective national innovation ecosystem. It provides the research and education community in the Sultanate of Oman with a common network and collaboration infrastructure adapted to their needs.

RO 580 million funds recovered

FROM PAGE 1

...as well checks on financial and administrative tasks of authorities and public establishments, cross-checking of operation and maintenance contracts of Oman Environmental Service Holding Company (Be'ah) and some financial and administrative tasks of the telecommunications sector.

SAI's annual inspection plan for investment and commercial companies saw the execution of 24 missions that produced 25 reports that included a study on the performance of some direct government investments after their conversion into holding companies and checks on the tasks of the former Oman Investment Fund. The plan also covered checks on some financial, administrative and investment activities of the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund, the Public Authority for Social Insurance, some hotel establishments and some projects delegated to Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran), the assessment of performance of Oman Air and Oman Dry Dock.

MISSIONS

SAI's annual inspection plan 2020 on the performance of oil and gas companies generated 12 missions resulting in 12

SAI's annual inspection plan 2020 on the performance of oil and gas companies generated 12 missions resulting in 12 reports

reports. The reports covered checks on some financial, administrative and operational tasks of concession areas, the assessment of oilfields, revision of the petroleum products' procurement agreement and checking procedures for the appointment of consultants and secondment of non-Omani staff.

The brief indicated that the number of departments reporting to the SAI stood at 519, of them 292 basic units and 227 subdivisions. SAI's missions produced 2,449 audit reports during the period 2011-2020.

The SAI assumed missions on controlling and combating corruptions by detecting financial and administrative violations and activating its audit role in most government units throughout the year. The SAI also opened branches in most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and implemented the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

— ONA

Over 5,600 tap merger, clearing incentives offered by MoCIIP

MUSCAT: As many as 5,672 companies benefited from a package of corporate incentives offered by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) between June 15, 2021 to the end of December 2021.

The services enabled desirous companies to clear, merge, cancel or adjust their commercial registers. Among the total, 3,703 companies cancelled their registers after, following conducting clearing tasks to facilitate the rectification of their status during the above-mentioned period. Khalid bin Khamis al Masroori, Director of Commercial Establishments Monitoring Department at the Ministry, said that the clearing or merger of commercial registers helps address the issue of multiplicity of commercial registers. The process enables firms to rectify their market conditions, improve the business climate, enhance competitiveness and support the development of small and medium enterprises, he added, noting that this empowers entrepreneurs to cancel their old, non-functional registers and merit fee cancellation benefits.

— ONA

Women seeking artificial hair on the rise

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

There is high demand for artificial hair among women and the reasons behind this trend range from medical to fashion.

While some women who go in for a wig have hereditary reasons, ageing, hormonal and dietary conditions, others want to wear different hairstyles as per trend style.

"We are getting many female customers for full-length wigs to extensions, mostly to cover their scalp while others prefer to have a change in the way they look," says Ligesh Gangadharan, country manager of Gulf Gate, which claims to be the largest producer of wigs for both sexes.

On an average, five to ten female wigs are made during a week while demand for artificial male hair is equal or more than the females. According to doctors and dieticians, genes contribute to hair thinning, while ageing, hormone changes and menopause result in balding. At menopause, some types of hair loss often get worse as estrogen is lost during this phase.

They say vitamin deficiency, dieting where weight is lost in no



time and over-processed scalp hair, known as breakage, are some reasons among women.

"There are many other reasons hair loss among women," says Huda bint Salim al Zidiyah, a dietician at the Royal Hospital.

"Predominantly, the deficiency of zinc and iron seen among most women is the underlying factor and certain precautions as well as dietary corrections can help retain hair," she adds.

The doctor said that hair texture could cause hair loss when your hair is arranged in ways that pull on your roots, like tight ponytails, braids, or cornrows. This type of hair loss is called traction alopecia. If hair follicles are damaged, the loss can be permanent.

Consumption of toxic substances such as excessive chlorine in potable water, undergoing chemotherapy, radiation therapy and some medications are critical factors behind losing hair.

"One can prevent hair loss to a great extent by eating a healthy diet which is rich with nutrients in terms of vitamins, minerals and protein and by quitting smoking," says Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician at the NMC Ghobra.

"Following a Mediterranean diet has been a tried and tested method while the use of over-the-counter hair loss medication, massaging the head can stimulate blood flow to the scalp and hair follicles. This also helps in the growth of healthy hair," she adds.

Programme on digital content creation

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information, represented by the Media Training Centre, on Sunday organised a training programme on creating digital content.

The 3-day training programme sees the participation of 24 media personnel from various government units.

The programme covers several topics, including an introduction to influences on digital media, building communication strategies and operational strategic media planning, among other topics.

— ONA

Indian school film festival begins

MUSCAT: The third edition of Indian Schools Film Festival 2021, the greatest platform to channelise students' burgeoning potential and to produce the best film makers, organised by the Board of Directors, Indian schools in the Sultanate of Oman, was inaugurated at a dignified virtual function by Indian School Al Maabela, the host School of ISFF 2021, on Thursday.

The grand inaugural ceremony commenced with the lighting of the lamp and an invocation song by the school choir. The chief guest Humaid bin Saeed bin Rashid al Ameri, a renowned writer, film director and the President of Omani Society for Cinema and theatre, enhanced the grandeur of the occasion with his august presence. Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors of Indian Schools, Sultanate of Oman, Sirajudheen

Nhelat, Academic Chair, Board of Directors and Sujithkumar S, President, School Management Committee, ISAM graced the occasion.

The ceremonial unveiling of ISFF Statuette marked the official inauguration of ISFF 2021, the confluence of cinematic virtuosity. Dr Sivakumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors of Indian Schools, Sultanate of Oman, in his introductory note, highlighted the influence of social media among the people and acknowledged that art aids learning outcome. "Films have a three-fold impact on society, particularly the young people — they are a source of learning, motivation and entertainment," Dr Manickam said. Sujithkumar S, President, School Management Committee, ISAM, welcomed the chief guest and other dignitaries present in the function.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
ANNOUNCEMENT



The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 08:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-214/2021 Recall	Modification Works of Engineering Department Building of Directorate General of Health Services Muscat Governorate	22/February/2022	09/March/2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the Second Grade	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-26/2022	Painting Works in Various Offices at the Ministry's HQs	03/March/2022	23/March/2022	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the First Grade	

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Iran MPs put forth norms for reviving N-deal

DUBAI: Iranian lawmakers have laid out six conditions for the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal with global powers in a letter to President Ebrahim Raisi published on Sunday, the country's official IRNA news agency reported.

The letter, signed by 250 out of 290 parliamentarians, stated that US and European parties should guarantee that they would not exit a restored agreement, nor trigger the "snapback mechanism" under which sanctions on Iran would be immediately reinstated if it violates nuclear compliance.

The parliament has not voted on the proposed conditions and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who enjoys the support of hardliners, has the final say on Iran's nuclear policy and all other matters of state.

"We have to learn a lesson from past experiences and put a red line on the national interest by not committing to any agreement without obtaining necessary guarantees first," lawmakers said in the letter.

The statement comes in the midst of final steps to revive a 2015 nuclear agreement in Vienna, which could lead to an agreement "very soon", according to a senior



A general view of the Iranian parliament during the opening ceremony of Iran's 11th parliament in Tehran. — Reuters File

European Union official.

Such conditions from lawmakers at a crucial time risk restricting Iranian negotiators' room for manoeuvre in Vienna and endanger a final agreement.

The letter also said a return to the deal should only go ahead if all sanctions were lifted, including those pertaining to terrorism, missile technology and human rights.

In addition, lawmakers first want to confirm that Iran receives money from its exports, before the government returns to nuclear compliance, the statement added. After 10 months of talks in

Vienna, one of the remaining differences is Iran's demand for a US guarantee of no more sanctions or other punitive steps in the future, and also how and when to restore verifiable restrictions on

The statement comes in the midst of final steps to revive a 2015 nuclear agreement in Vienna, which could lead to an agreement 'very soon'

Iran's nuclear activity. A senior Iranian official has said that Iran has shown flexibility by agreeing to "inherent guarantees" as Washington says it is impossible for President Joe Biden to provide the legal assurances Iran has demanded.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said on Saturday that a joint statement by the heads of the US Senate and House of Representatives to back the nuclear deal would suffice as a "political guarantee".

Under the 2015 deal, Iran agreed to curb its nuclear work in return for relief from US and other sanctions. The accord includes the option of a snapback of UN sanctions if Iran breaches the deal, requiring Tehran to suspend all nuclear enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research development. — Reuters

Australia re-opens after two-year Covid closure

SYDNEY: Australia opens its international borders to all vaccinated tourists on Monday, nearly two years after the island nation first imposed some of the world's strictest Covid-19 travel restrictions.

"The wait is over," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said during a press conference on Sunday ahead of the re-opening.

"Pack your bags," he told potential visitors, adding, "Don't forget to bring your money with you, because you'll find plenty of places to spend it."

The first flight into Sydney Airport will arrive from Los Angeles at 6 am, followed by arrivals from Tokyo, Vancouver and Singapore.

Only 56 international flights are expected to land in Australia in the 24 hours after the re-opening — far below pre-pandemic levels — but Morrison said he had "no doubt" the number will scale up in time.

Australia closed its borders to almost everyone except citizens and residents in March 2020 in an attempt to slow surging Covid-19 case numbers.

The travel ban — which also

barred citizens from travelling overseas without an exemption and imposed a strict cap on international arrivals — earned the country the nickname "Fortress Australia".

Every month under the policies has cost businesses an estimated Aus\$3.6 billion, according to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, with tourism particularly hard hit.

Tony Walker, managing director of Quicksilver Group, which operates cruises, diving excursions and resorts across the Great Barrier Reef, said he was "very excited about being able to re-open". International tourists "make up around 70 per cent" of business for tourism operators on the reef, Walker said, making the two-year border closure "incredibly difficult".

During the pandemic, his company had to reduce its employees from 650 to the 300 it has today. Morrison on Sunday said tourism had "really borne the brunt of this Covid pandemic" and he thanked the sector. "It's been tough, but Australia is pushing through," he added. — AFP

Ethiopia starts electricity production

GUBA: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inaugurated electricity production from the country's mega-dam on the Blue Nile on Sunday, a milestone in the controversial multi-billion dollar project.

Abiy, accompanied by high-ranking officials, toured the power generation station and pressed a series of buttons on an electronic screen, a move that officials said initiated production.

"This great dam was built by Ethiopians but not only for Ethiopians, rather for all our African brothers and sisters to benefit from," an official presiding at the launch ceremony said. "The day every Ethiopian has sacrificed for, hoped and prayed for, is finally here."

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is set to be the largest hydroelectric scheme in Africa but has been at the centre of a regional dispute ever since work first began in 2011.

Ethiopia's downstream neighbours Egypt and Sudan view it as a threat because of their dependence on Nile waters, while Addis Ababa deems it essential for its



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed during the first power generation ceremony at the site of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam in Guba, Ethiopia. — AFP

electrification and development.

The \$4.2-billion project is ultimately expected to produce more than 5,000 megawatts of electricity, more than doubling Ethiopia's electricity output.

State media reported that the dam had started generating 375 megawatts of electricity from one of its turbines on Sunday.

The 145-metre high dam lies on Blue Nile River in the Benishangul-Gumuz region of western

Ethiopia, not far from the border with Sudan.

Egypt, which depends on the Nile for about 97 per cent of its irrigation and drinking water, sees the dam as an existential threat.

Sudan hopes the project will regulate annual flooding, but fears its own dams could be harmed without agreement on the GERD's operation.

Both countries have been

pushing Ethiopia for a binding deal over the filling and operation of the massive dam, but talks under the auspices of the African Union (AU) have failed to reach a breakthrough.

The dam was initiated under former prime minister Meles Zenawi, the Tigrayan leader who ruled Ethiopia for more than two decades until his death in 2012.

Civil servants contributed one month's salary towards the project in the year of the project launch, and the government has since issued dam bonds targeting Ethiopians at home and abroad.

But officials on Sunday credited Abiy with reviving the dam after what they claim was mismanagement delayed its progress.

"Our country has lost so much because the dam was delayed, especially financially," project manager Kifle Horo said in his remarks.

Those in attendance at Sunday's ceremony included First Lady Zinash Tayachew, the heads of the lower house of parliament and the Supreme Court, regional presidents and government ministers. — AFP

KINSHASA

Erdogan to raise security in DRC visit

Security and economic issues will be at the heart of the official visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who visits the Democratic Republic of Congo on Sunday, the Congolese presidency said.

President Felix Tshisekedi is due to meet with his Turkish counterpart, who will be backed by "a strong delegation" of government members and businessmen from Turkey, said a press release from the Congolese presidency. Erdogan's African tour,



from February 20 to 23, will move on to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. His two-day DRC trip is intended to help Ankara and Kinshasa to strengthen cooperation in the political, economic and security fields, the presidency added.

KATHMANDU

Nepal police fire tear gas, MPs debate US grant

Nepal police fired rubber bullets and tear gas as hundreds protested against a \$500-million grant going before parliament that has become a bone of contention between China and the US.

Nepal signed the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) pact in 2017 to fund infrastructure projects but its ratification has been in limbo because of divisions within political parties, including the ruling coalition.



Several people were injured in the latest day of angry demonstrations outside parliament as the government put the bill before lawmakers ahead of a deadline of February 28 to pass it.

ANKARA

Turkish journalist shot dead

A journalist was shot and killed outside the offices of his newspaper in northwest Turkey, police and local media reported. Gungor Arslan, the director and chief editor of the local daily *Ses Kocaeli* (The Voice of Kocaeli) was shot and seriously wounded, dying in the city hospital soon afterwards.

Local police said they had arrested a suspect but did not identify him or give any details of the attack. Erol Onderoglu, the Turkish representative of Paris-based media rights group Reporters



without Borders (RSF) said Arslan had been investigating corruption in the city.

Condemning the killing, he called for those responsible to be identified and punished to the full extent of the law.



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MONDAY | FEBRUARY 21 | 2022

7

In brief

■ LONDON



QUEEN ELIZABETH CATCHES 'MILD' COVID

Britain's 95-year-old Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for Covid-19 on Sunday, a fortnight after marking 70 years on the throne, but aides said her symptoms were "mild". The news comes at a stressful time of scandal for the royal family and after Prince Charles, the queen's eldest son and heir, tested positive on February 10, two days after meeting his mother at Windsor Castle. No information was given then on whether Queen Elizabeth had taken any Covid tests herself. She resumed in-person audiences at the castle last week, but complained to one attendee of suffering from stiffness and was photographed holding a walking stick.

■ RIO DE JANEIRO



BRAZIL STORM DEATH TOLL RISES TO 152

The death toll from torrential rains that triggered flash floods and landslides in the scenic Brazilian city of Petropolis has risen to 152, authorities said on Sunday, as the pope sent his condolences. Rescue workers and residents searching for their missing relatives continued digging through mountains of mud and rubble in the southeastern city, which President Jair Bolsonaro said looked like "scenes of war." Police said 165 people remain missing after Tuesday's storm. It is unlikely any more will be found alive beneath the wreckage, authorities say. It is unclear how high the steadily rising death toll will go.

■ LONDON



STORM FRANKLIN DUE TO HIT BRITAIN

Storm Franklin is set to strike Britain just days after Storm Eunice destroyed buildings and left 1.4 million homes without power. The Met Office has issued an amber warning for wind which could cause 'travel delays, road and rail closures, power cuts and the potential risk to life and property' in Northern Ireland from midnight until 7 am on Monday. Milder yellow warnings for wind cover England, Wales and the south-western edge of Scotland for midday until 3 pm on Sunday, and for the same period on Monday. Environment agencies have also issued hundreds of alerts for flooding across the UK, and the North West is expected to be worst hit by up to 80mm of rain.

Biden to meet Putin to defuse Ukraine crisis

Russia, Belarus extend large military drills near Ukraine while UK's Johnson says sanctions threat may not deter Putin

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is willing to meet Russia's Vladimir Putin "at any time" to defuse Ukraine war tensions, his top diplomat said on Sunday, warning Russia appeared on the verge of invading its neighbor.

In a rapid-fire round of US talk shows, Secretary of State Antony Blinken told CNN "everything we're seeing suggests that this is dead serious, that we are on the brink of an invasion."

"But until the tanks are actually rolling and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute we have to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President Putin from carrying this forward."

Blinken told ABC's "This Week" Biden has made "very clear that he's prepared to meet President Putin at any time, in any format, if that can help prevent a war."

Meanwhile, Russia and Belarus are extending military drills that were due to end on Sunday, the Belarus defence minister said, in a step that further intensifies pressure on Ukraine as Western leaders warn of an imminent

Russian invasion.

The decision to extend the drills was taken because of military activity near the borders of Russia and Belarus and an escalation of the situation in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, the Belarusian defence ministry said in a statement.

Nato says Russia has up to 30,000 troops in Belarus and could use them as part of an invasion force to attack Ukraine, which lies to the south of Belarus. Moscow denies any such intention.

The Kremlin did not comment on the Belarus drills.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the repeated warnings by the West that Russia was about to invade Ukraine were provocative and could have adverse consequences, without giving details.

Russia and its allies say Ukraine and the West are whipping up tensions by sending Nato reinforcements to eastern Europe.

Belarus Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin said the focus of the extended exercises was "to ensure an adequate response and de-escalation of military



A protester holds a giant Ukrainian flag during a demonstration for peace in Ukraine, in Warsaw, Poland. — AFP

preparations of ill-wishers near our common borders."

Western countries are preparing sanctions they say would be wide-reaching against Russian companies and individuals in case of an invasion.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a BBC interview broadcast on Sunday that such

sanctions would "hit very very hard", and could include restrictions on Russian businesses' access to the dollar and the pound. However, he acknowledged such threats may not deter Moscow.

"We have to accept at the moment that (Russian President) Vladimir Putin is possibly thinking illogically about this and

doesn't see the disaster ahead", Johnson said.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the West should impose some of the sanctions now, rather than waiting for an invasion.

"Russia has to be stopped right now. We see how events are unfolding", Kuleba said. — AFP

India is largest exporter of cucumber, gherkins

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

With the export of cucumber and gherkins to the tune of 1,23,846 metric tonnes, India has emerged as the world's largest exporter of these two vegetable items, a statement from the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry said. The exports were made during April-October 2020-21, with an exposure of \$114 million.

The country crossed the \$200 million mark of export of agricultural processed product during the last financial year. The processed item is in the form of pickling cucumber.

A total of 2,23,515 metric tonnes of cucumber and gherkins valued at \$ 223 million were shipped from India in 2020-21. Covid-19 had impacted the movement of vegetable items like any other export items.

North America, European and Oceanic countries such as USA, France, Germany, Australia, Spain, South Korea, Canada, Japan, Belgium, Russia, China, Sri Lanka and Israel are among 20 countries where India exports gherkins.

According to the statement, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) took several measures to boost the production of vegetable items in the country.

The producers have been told to strictly adhere to the food safety management system in processing units, which led to product promotion in the global market and adherence to food safety management system in processing units. Quality control is a major part of product promotion adopted by the APEDA.

The agriculture authorities claim that all the gherkin

The country crossed the \$200m mark of export of agricultural processed product during the last financial year

producing and exporting companies follow international technical, industrial and commercial standards.

They are certified by any one of the international setting bodies like ISO, BRC, IFS, FSSC 22000 and HACCP. Some big companies have approval from all the above agencies.

The concept of social auditing helps some companies engage directly with the employees involved in the production process that ensures the transfer of all statutory benefits to the employees.

How Gherkins are exported: It has two broad categories, is preserved in vinegar or acetic acid; and provisionally preserved.

Cultivation of gherkin is widespread in India, but southern states of Karnataka, of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have taken the lead in organised farming, having access to export channels.

The commercial cultivation, processing and exports of gherkin and cucumbers started in India during the early 1990s, initially at a moderate level in Karnataka. Later it was extended to Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Today nearly 15 per cent production of the world's gherkin requirement is grown in India.

Reports suggest gherkin assuming the cash crop status for farmers who take two crops annually with 90 days of cropping period.

Passenger found alive on ferry ablaze off Greece

CORFU: A passenger was on Sunday found alive aboard a ferry that has been ablaze off Greece for three days, reviving hopes that several more missing people may have survived.

Eleven truck drivers — seven Bulgarians, three Greeks and one Turk — remained unaccounted for on Sunday before Skai television reported that an operation was under way "to rescue 4-5 more passengers who are alive".

Rescuers had first spotted a 21-year-old man on the stern of the stricken vessel as it was being towed to port 50 hours after the fire broke out.

The ferry was about two kilometres off the northern part of Corfu, the coastguard said. The smiling Belarussian was taken to Corfu on a coastguard boat wearing flip flops and put in an ambulance, television footage showed.

"I'm fine", he told journalists before being transported to hospital where he is expected to stay at least until tomorrow.

"Tell me I'm alive," the truck driver, had told rescuers, according to the Proto Thema news website.

"I was in my cabin. I went to the lower deck. I heard voices. I did not see others", the survivor told rescuers and doctors in the hospital where he was treated.

The news of the man's "miraculous" survival, according to Greek media, had raised hopes further lives might be saved.

"The ship may still have safe parts for the passengers", Andreas Korikis, who helped with the rescue on Friday told Athens News Agency (ANA).

"As we saw, one of them came out and the hope lives on.

The search continues but in some places the access is impossible."

According to the fire brigade, at least 40 firemen were deployed in the area on Sunday morning to help with rescue efforts.

"The thermal load and the toxicity on the vessel remain high. In some areas, fire is still burning. The operation is really delicate",

shipping deputy minister, Costas Katsafados told Skai.

The blaze broke out on the Italian-flagged Euroferry Olympia late on Thursday as it sailed from Igoumenitsa in Greece to Brindisi in Italy, with nearly 300 people aboard.

Rescuers had managed to save 280 passengers on Friday, evacuating them to Corfu, but 12 lorry drivers remained missing.

The man rescued on Sunday was one of those drivers, the coastguard said.

The vessel was officially carrying 239 passengers and 51 crew, as well as 153 trucks and trailers and 32 passenger vehicles, the Grimaldi company has said.

But the coastguard has said two of the 281 people rescued were Afghans not on the manifest, sparking fears that more undocumented passengers could also be missing. Ilias Gerontidakis, the son of a missing Greek trucker, told the *Proto Thema* online newspaper the Olympia was "miserable from every point of view". —AFP



Smoke rises from the Italian-flagged 'Euroferry Olympia', on the Greek Ionian island of Corfu, caught fire at dawn after leaving the Greek port of Igoumenitsa with 290 people, including 51 crew members registered on board. — AFP

Let us do our bit to lessen the burden



DR NISMA HARIS

The writer is a general physician, content creator, health and wellness advisor based in Salalah

When we talk of chronic ailments, it's not just the disease but the disruption it creates with leading a normal life that is the issue.

Let us begin with brief comprehension of chronic ailments. Typically, they are diseases that last for more than a year or are life-long and are non-communicable.

Diabetes, Hypertension, Arthritis, Cancer, Obesity and some respiratory diseases are common examples of chronic ailments.

How do they affect the life of one who is going through them?

Struggling with daily life activities is quite inevitable for those who are battling chronic ailments that become enormously challenging at times. A diabetic has to follow recommended food portions for meals timely along

with a daily dose of oral anti-diabetic pills or insulin injections or maybe both for some.

Moreover, they cannot indulge in their favourite food delicacies freely even at parties or vacations.

Correspondingly, for an arthritis patient lifting the lightweight objects, gripping and holding items and even getting dressed is like an everyday ordeal.

Furthermore, extreme fatigue and weakness, fear of death, financial constraints of treatments are the unsaid misery of cancer patients.

Over time, they withdraw themselves from society as the disease becomes a hindrance in gelling up with people and they find it difficult to fit in, eventually losing a sense of belonging.

Depression, generalised

AVOID CONSTANTLY THINKING OF THE DISEASE INSTEAD BEGIN WORKING AROUND THE LIFE ALTERATIONS THAT CAN BE MADE TO ALLEVIATE THE PAIN OR DISCOMFORT

anxiety disorders, as well as other mental health issues, are the obvious outcomes to gush forth when someone lives a heavily compromised life to a chronic ailment.

How does it affect others around?

It's a tough grind for the spouses, the rest of the family members and friends. At times, they are unable to apprehend the plight

of their chronically ill member while sometimes they have to bear with their angst, irritability and emotional turmoil.

How can we lessen the burden?

If you are someone going through a chronic ailment, we can begin by putting acceptance into practice. We need not be overwhelmed by the disease.

Avoid constantly thinking of the disease instead begin working around the life alterations that can be made to alleviate the pain or discomfort. Speak to your family and friends when you require their assistance and not just try to do it all on your own.

Split your work into batches as per your energy status and don't be reluctant to speak of your limitations to people when needed; be it personal or professional.

Stay in touch with people through group counselling sessions who have the same issues so that you can navigate ways on your own to make things even out of the odds.

When we have a family member or spouse going through a chronic ailment, we need to listen to their agony. Sometimes they need not a solution to their issues but someone to address and acknowledge.

They need regular encouragement to participate in the life activities they used to do prior ailment keeping in mind the guidelines to be followed as per their condition.

We cannot take away their pain but all we can do is lessen the burden and can definitely build an environment where they don't feel being overlooked or pitied.

Luxury sector undaunted by Covid, soaring inflation

BY KATELL PRIGENT

The pandemic and soaring inflation have done nothing to take the shine off luxury brands, from Louis Vuitton to Gucci and Cartier, as the sector hiked prices to notch up stellar profits.

The world economy began to recover from the pandemic last year but the rebound has been accompanied by rising inflation, with prices for raw materials and energy soaring.

But luxury good makers can respond by hiking their prices and actually look more desirable to their customers.

“Our advantage over many other companies and groups is a certain price flexibility, i.e. we have the means to react to inflation,” LVMH chief executive Bernard Arnault told reporters.

UBS analysts estimate that top brands such as Louis Vuitton, which is owned by industry leader LVMH, have raised their prices two-and-a-half times higher than the inflation rate over the past 20 years.

Indeed, “pricing power remains one of the key characteristics of the luxury goods industry,” UBS analysts wrote in a research note.

LVMH bagged a record \$72 billion in sales and €12 billion in net profit last year, both exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

The French company also owns a broad range of spirits, perfume, jewellery and cosmetics products.

Kering — which owns Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent — also beat its pre-Covid levels to book a net profit of €3.2 billion on sales of 17.6 billion euros, the group reported on Thursday. Kering CEO Francois-Henri Pinault acknowledged that “for every new season, we create a new collection and we review all the price matrices.”

Hermes chalked up profits of €2.4 billion on sales of €9 billion. Hermes chief Axel Dumas said that his brand, which is enjoying “very strong demand”, raises its prices once a year.

“All of our products have the same margins. We don't play with our prices. They're linked to manufacturing costs and not to desirability.”

“In certain cases demand exceeds supply and that means consumers will both trade up and likely accept paying higher prices, which again will cushion the margin,” said analysts at HSBC.

Rolex, for example, had largely refrained from increasing prices during the last two years. But at the start of 2022, it raised prices by more than 3.0 per cent on average “and for some models they soared as high as 12 per cent.” — AFP

Timing your booster after a Covid-19 infection



KNVUL SHEIKH

The writer is a freelance science journalist

Millions of people who have recently developed Covid-19 may have some new questions about their immunity. If they have not yet received a booster shot, do they still need to get one? And when is the optimal time to get it?

Federal health officials continue to recommend that everyone get vaccinated and boosted, regardless of whether they have had Covid-19. But more than half of fully vaccinated Americans who are eligible for booster shots have not yet received them. And the guidance on when to schedule a booster appointment after recovering from Covid-19 is less than clear. Here is what we know.

What is the point of getting a booster after you have had Covid-19?

Most experts agree that vaccines can offer a more reliable and effective immune boost than a natural infection can.

When you get infected with the coronavirus, your immune system mounts a series of responses that bulk up the body's defences against future infections. One of the best ways scientists know how to measure that response is to look at how many antibodies you have produced.

In general, people who have been infected with the coronavirus tend to have lower levels of antibodies than those who have been vaccinated, said Aubree Gordon, a public health researcher at the University of Michigan.

One of the reasons for this difference is that infections trigger many parts of the immune system and the size of the antibody response will depend on factors like how much virus you inhaled, whether you have underlying medical conditions and the severity of your symptoms. “You may have a high level if you were sicker or sick for longer,” Gordon said. “But it's still going to be lower than what we see with the vaccine.”

Vaccines provide a tailored set of instructions for the immune system to use in the absence of any distractions, such as an active infection, said Paul Thomas, an immunologist at St Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. And most people who get vaccinated develop

A BOOSTER SHOT REMINDS THE BODY TO BUMP UP ITS DEFENCES — EVEN FASTER THAN THE FIRST OR SECOND SHOT — IN A MATTER OF DAYS

a strong and predictable antibody response. A booster shot reminds the body to bump up its defences — even faster than the first or second shot — in a matter of days.

Studies also suggest that the antibodies produced after vaccination tend to remain at protective levels for longer.

“I think that's the biggest argument to get boosted, frankly, even if you've had a recent infection,” said Dr Amy Sherman, an infectious disease physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. “It's a surefire way to give further protection and make sure your immune system produces peak responses.”

When is the best time to get a booster?

There is no hard and fast rule for when to schedule a booster shot after having Covid-19. The optimal timing will depend on your individual circumstances, including how severe your illness was, how long it has been

since your symptoms resolved and what your risk for re-exposure is.

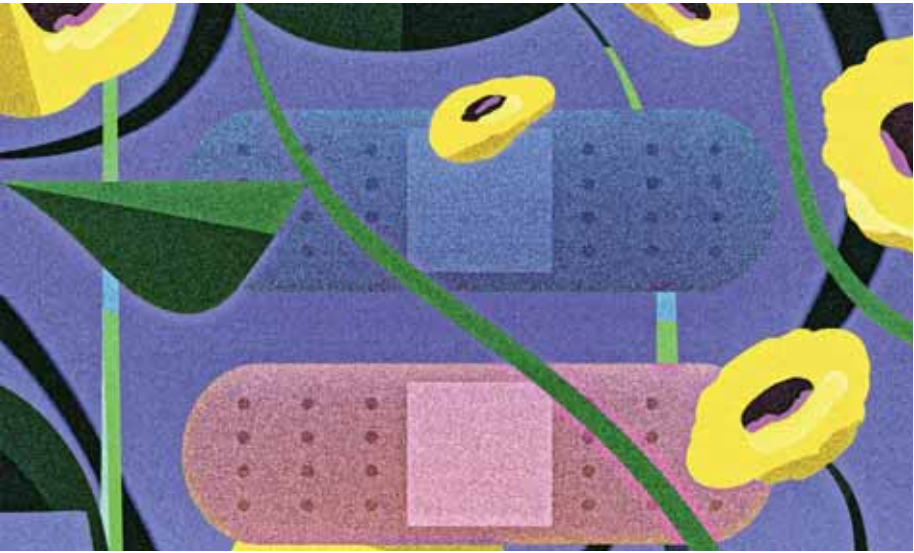
But if you are dealing with an active infection, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention recommends waiting at least until you no longer have symptoms and have met their criteria for ending isolation.

Some scientists recommend deferring your booster longer. Ali Ellebedy, an immunologist at the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, said it might make sense to wait until you have fully recovered or can get a negative PCR test, although this isn't a CDC requirement to end isolation and may not occur until a few weeks — or even months — later.

“You just don't want to overwhelm your system,” Ellebedy said. Let your immune system rest after fighting off the coronavirus and before asking it to ramp up again with the vaccine. This will also allow for a more refined and durable response, he said.

Of course, deferring a booster isn't the right option for everyone. If you have a high risk of reinfection or serious illness — whether because of your age, medical conditions or a weakened immune system, or because you live or work in a setting that increases your likelihood of exposure — then you may want to boost your immunity with an extra vaccine dose sooner rather than later, Ellebedy added.

—The New York Times



The immunity gained after a Covid-19 infection might not be enough to fend off the virus again without a booster shot, US health officials say.

Be positive, stay patient



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

There is no doubt that everyday of our life brings new challenges some of which are a one-off while others last for days. However, those challenges do not always tend to be serious ones as some are just concerns that require part of our attention, time and effort. This is life; every dawn comes with a different surprise that might be pleasing or frustrating. What really matters is the way we face the music of each challenge we experience every single day.

On a day, we perhaps come across more than a challenge, regardless how big or small it is! Sometimes, it is our job, attitudes, people or minds being the reasons behind us getting challenged. Our work place, the day-to-day attitudes, feelings and characters as well as those whom we work or live with are putting obstacles on our way. Hence, all those causes might be provoking us to get challenges or displeasing experiences possibly.

What actually happens is that whenever we get a sort of a shock or an unexpected displeasing incident, we immediately frustrate our nerves and our minds get focused on the negative side of that certain experience. Strange how it happens even though we have not given ourselves the chance or time to investigate or think of what happened, or what was the motive behind it. Such scenario

happens like anything else in life, as days are not always the same.

In fact, this is not a general assumption of our reaction to every incident, but it is a common observation. Perhaps some are in agreement that this is what first happens with some of us in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, everyone has a different way of perceiving things and experiences

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Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence

HELEN KELLER
American author

around them, but we all get affected either emotionally or behaviourly by what happens, though it is normal. However, our responses differ depending on the slap we get, time, condition and environment we are in.

However, it is us who hold the control button of the show of every single day, regardless of what happens around us. Being positive and looking at the brighter side of each experience we come through is the best way of overcoming the disappointing or unpleasant moments. Although it is not easy to manage our reaction, attitudes and feelings, but we should try our best to enjoy every moment of life. All what we probably need is just to have some patience, which could cure our tension, frustration and irrelevant disappointments.

Feasibly, we all should take the needed dose of patience whenever we get any kind of challenge in life. Likewise, we should be fair with ourselves by having enough time to fully understand what happens and what are the possible reasons behind it? Then things will undoubtedly get clear for us, so we can think of potential solutions. Seeking the support from others could be another way of getting things out of our chest. Thus, we might need to get a proper consultation and advice from trusted ones.

More importantly is that whenever we face a challenge of any kind or size, we shall have some hope and faith as always problems start big and then vanish. Believing in hope is another relief that makes us calm and relaxed.

As Helen Keller, an American lecturer and creative author, said: “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

As life is very short, it should not be wasted in moments of sadness, misery and disappointments. We should live the moment and try to enjoy life as much as possible! Challenges should be turned into learning lessons and disabilities should be turned into abilities that bring new opportunities. Just focus on the positive side, be patient and believe that there is something inside you that is greater than any obstacle.



VOTING TOGETHER!

Conjoined twins show inked finger after casting their ballot at a polling station in a village on the outskirts of Amritsar on Sunday during the assembly elections in the Indian state of Punjab. – AFP

Tapping global healthcare’s greatest resource to fight pandemics



Mary Beth Powers

The author is CEO of the Catholic Medical Mission Board

In every phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, community health workers have been indispensable. They have made diagnoses, carried out contact tracing, cared for the sick, and administered vaccinations. And they have performed all these tasks with minimal funding, supervision, and assistance.

The use of community health workers in rural healthcare has a long track record of success. In the 1960s, China’s “barefoot doctors” helped the country eradicate smallpox and double life expectancy. A decade later, Bangladesh partly emulated the Chinese initiative when it launched its community health worker programme, which helped the country achieve a majority of the health-related Millennium Development Goals, such as bringing the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccination rate for rural children from near-zero in the 1980s to more than 90 per cent today.

Community health workers are not doctors or nurses. They are local residents with basic medical training who help bridge the gap between healthcare facilities and underserved populations. Usually, they are trained by NGOs and receive little or no compensation from their governments. In fact, few governments around the world keep records of community health workers or have a way to communicate with them.

These committed people can be the backbone of the resilient health systems needed to manage the next pandemic. But for that to happen, they need more support. The challenges faced

by community health workers around the world are significant. Many, like Nepal’s 50,000 female community health volunteers, are unpaid, even though the value of the free treatment and labour such workers provide worldwide is estimated at \$1.5 trillion. But money is only one problem. In Brazil, some community health workers receive only one or two weeks of training before they begin unsupervised work. Community health workers in Ethiopia spend more time travelling than treating patients because of the rural and remote nature of the communities they serve. A survey in Liberia in 2018 and 2019 found that fewer than half of community health workers had stocks of lifesaving zinc or amoxicillin. And just over half had oral rehydration solution and malaria drugs — crucial tools in a country where thousands of people die of diarrhoea and malaria each year.

It is little wonder that many community health worker programmes experience high levels of attrition and vacancies. In Bangladesh, 15 per cent of positions are vacant at any given time. Staff turnover increases costs, because replacements have to be recruited, trained, and deployed. It also reduces the quality of care, as new workers generally have less hands-on experience providing health services. The pandemic exposed the need for strong, adaptable health systems, particularly in underserved communities. To build these systems, we must find a way to recruit, train, equip, supervise, and remunerate frontline

workers properly.

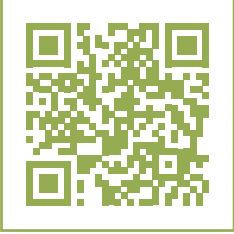
For starters, groups that operate community health worker programmes should review and strive to follow the World Health Organization’s recommendations on support for community health workers. Moreover, governments should develop and maintain up-to-date, geo-referenced national registries of community health workers, which can be used to communicate public-health messages, improve links between rural communities and health clinics, and manage crises. Keeping track of community health workers also can help ensure that they are trained and equipped properly.

Lastly, governments and funding partners should look for other ways to assist community health workers. One under-recognised and cost-effective tool is a sturdy bicycle. World Bicycle Relief, working with civil-society organisations like the Catholic Medical Mission Board and health ministries in seven countries, has distributed nearly 175,000 of its specially designed Buffalo Bicycles, allowing community health workers to spend less time in transit and more time with patients. When the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic comes to an end, it largely will be thanks to the tireless work of community health workers. The best thing the world can do to maximise their effectiveness in future crises is to ensure they are properly trained, equipped, empowered, and even compensated.

@Project Syndicate, 2021



A resident undergoes a nucleic acid test for the Covid-19 coronavirus in Lianyungang, in China’s eastern Jiangsu province on Friday. – AFP



Dhofar inch closer to HM Cup final

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 20

Salalah giants Dhofar moved closer to the final of the His Majesty's Football Cup championship after they defeated Al Rustaq 2-1 on Sunday in the semifinal first leg. The second leg match will take place at Al Rustaq Sports Complex on March 2 and it is expected to be a tough clash despite Dhofar's triumph.

At Al Saada Stadium, the ten

times winners made a positive step ahead of the second leg match and towards their presence in the concluding game of the coveted cup to defend the title.

Omar al Malki was the star of the match as he broke the goalless draw of the first half with a strong headed goal in the beginning of the second half.

The same player added another goal for the hosts in the 52nd minute and after five minutes from

The second leg match will take place at Al Rustaq Sports Complex on March 2 and it is expected to be a tough clash despite Dhofar's triumph

the opening goal. The consolation goal for Al Rustaq was struck by Abdulrahman al Ghassani.

Both teams began the encounter seeking an opening goal. Many movements were made in the half but all the attempts were not succeeding in goals as the first half

ended with a goalless draw.

Coach Rasheed Jaber's men entered the second half with different tactics and focus. It was a strong start from the hosts as Omar al Malki managed to open the account through stroking the opening goal with a header after a

good assist from Abdullah Fawaz in the 46th minute.

Four minutes later, the referee Omar al Yaqoobi decided a penalty for the hosts as Qasim Said fell down in the box area after a tough interface from Ammar al Rushaidi.

Al Malki converted the penalty into a goal at Ammar al Rushaidi's net in the 51st minute. Also, the referee showed a yellow card for the Al Rustaq custodian.

After the goal, the opponent

pressed hard to reduce the gap and after many chances, Abdulrahman al Ghassani registered the first goal for Al Rustaq with a header in the 82nd minute.

Later, the Al Rustaq players tried to equalise but the referee ended the game with Dhofar leading 2-1.

Seeb will face Al Nasr in the other semifinal match of the His Majesty's Cup championship on Monday. The match will start at 5:45 pm at Al Saada Stadium.

REAL MADRID BOUNCE BACK BY BEATING ALAVES



Alaves' Florian Lejeune (R) vies with Real Madrid's Eder Militao (L) and Casemiro (C) during the Spanish league match. — AFP

PAMPLONA, Spain: Real Madrid put their defeat by Paris Saint-Germain behind them on Saturday by beating Alaves 3-0 in La Liga as Marco Asensio's stunning goal helped send Carlo Ancelotti's side seven points clear at the top of the table.

But the result flattered Madrid, who struggled to break down Alaves until Asensio unleashed from distance at the Santiago Bernabeu, where the disgruntled fans had whistled with the score goalless at half-time.

Asensio's goal opened the floodgates as Vinicius Junior finished off Karim Benzema's cut-back before Benzema converted a late penalty after Rodrygo was brought down in the area.

Sevilla can reduce the gap to

four points again by winning away at Espanyol on Sunday but Madrid remain the clear favourites to regain the Spanish title, despite their dip in form.

Luis Suarez had earlier lifted the mood at Atletico Madrid after his phenomenal long-range strike helped Atleti to a 3-0 win over Osasuna, ahead of Wednesday's crunch Champions League game against Manchester United.

Real Madrid had managed only one goal in their previous four games — another Asensio stunner against Granada — and there was particular criticism after the passive performance against PSG last week brought a 1-0 defeat in Paris.

There was frustration again against Alaves and Ancelotti will hope Vincius' first goal in seven

Asensio's goal opened the floodgates as Vinicius Junior finished off Karim Benzema's cut-back before Benzema converted a late penalty after Rodrygo was brought down in the area

matches and Benzema's first since returning from injury can now reignite the spark.

SPECTACULAR SUAREZ

Atletico did not have to wait so long against Osasuna.

Joao Felix smashed his team into a third-minute lead in Pamplona before driving a superb pass downfield for Suarez to chase af-

ter, with the Uruguayan firing in a second before Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera could scramble back. Angel Correa tucked in a third late on to round off a convincing win for Atletico, who climb back into the top four and head into the last-16 tie against United with a spring in their step.

The only blot on a satisfying afternoon for Diego Simeone was an injury to central defender Jose Gimenez.

Barcelona are only three points behind Atletico with two games in hand while Villarreal look increasingly like serious contenders for Champions League qualification after they secured an impressive 4-1 win away at Granada, Arnaut Danjuma scoring a hat-trick. — AFP

Victories for Ideal, Global, Capital Star, Landmark

MUSCAT: Ideal International rode on excellent all-round performance by Ruban Durai to beat Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting in a C Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Al Jadidi posted a robust 176 for 9 on the board thanks to top scores of 51 by Dhanesh Krishnan and 38 by Vaseem Pyarejan. Ruban was the pick of Ideal bowlers, taking 3 for 21 in his four-over spell.

Ruban led the way with the bat too, scoring a superb 51 as Ideal chased the total down in 18.4 overs, collecting 177 for 3. Vaseem Pyarejan contributed 38.

WASEEM BOWLS GLOBAL CORP TO VICTORY

Waseem Abbas claimed 3 for 5 to help Global Corp Logistics to a 37-run victory against Pitspot in a D Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 3 on Friday. In a game reduced to 18 overs a side, Global Corp was restricted to 125 for 8 due largely to brilliant bowling by Monty Navani who claimed 4 for 31.

Pitspot failed to mount a challenge, folding up for a paltry 88 in 15.2 overs due to outstanding bowling by Waseem, Muhammed Siddique (3 for 16) and Marshal Barmeda (2 for 21).

RAFEEL SHINES IN CAPITAL STAR'S WIN

Muhammed Rafeeq's magnificent 5 for 13 and Maheswaran Annadurai's unbeaten 68 off 37 were the highlights of Capital Star's emphatic 8-wicket win over Y Horizon in an E Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Y H was dismissed for 140 in the 20th over as Mohamed Rafeeq ran through the side with his fifer, getting excellent support from Nahas Theparambil who picked up 3 for 32.

Capital Star surpassed the

total in only 14.2 overs, scoring 142 for 2 thanks to Maheswaran's top knock of 68 and Kamesh Maharaja's 48.

KUGAN POWERS LANDMARK TO WIN

In another E Division clash, Kugan Kuganeswaran powered Landmark Group to a comfortable 7-wicket win over Sam Royals at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Sam Royals could score only 133 for 9 with Nandakumar Nair scoring 42. Kugan and Naresh Kumar took three wickets each.

It took Landmark Group only 15.1 overs to overhaul the target, scoring 134 for 3 thanks to Kugan's superb 45.

BRIEF SCORES

C Division

Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting 176-9 in 20 overs (Dhanesh Krishnan 51 – 5x4, Vaseem Pyarejan 38 – 5x4, Ruban Durai 3-21) lost to Ideal International 177-3 in 18.4 overs (Ruban Durai 51 – 5x4, 3x6, Wasim Jamadar 44 – 7x4) by 7 wickets.

D Division

Global Corp Logistics 125-8 in 18 overs (Giridharan Vyrawamoorthy 22 – 1x4, Ummer Mahmood 21 – 2x4; Monty Navani 4-31) beat Pitspot 88 all out in 15.2 overs (Vinod Shankar 17 – 2x4; Waseem Abbas 3-5, Muhammed Siddique 3-16, Marshal Barmeda 2-21) by 37 runs.

E Division

Y Horizon 140 all out in 19.5 overs (Amar Pal 30 – 1x4, Naresh Sudhakar 27 – 3x4; Muhamad Rafeeq 5-13, Nahas Theparambil 3-32) lost to Capital Star 142-2 in 14.2 overs (Maheswaran Annadurai 68 – 11x4, Kamesh Maharaja 48 – 5x4, 2x6) by 8 wickets.

Sam Royals 133-9 in 20 overs (Nandakumar Nair 42 – 4x4, 1x6, Kugan Kuganeswaran 3-20, Naresh Kumar 3-21) lost to Landmark Group 134-3 in 15.1 overs (Kugan Kuganeswaran 45 – 8x4, 1x6) by 7 wickets.

47 young riders take part in 100 km race in Barka

WALEED AL JAHWARI

MUSCAT, FEB 20

The Oman Equestrian Federation (OEF) organised a 100 km endurance horse race for 2021-22 season in Barka. It was a one-off race for girls and boys, young and adults, under the sponsorship and support of the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Development Corporation.

The concluding ceremony was sponsored by Mohammed bin Hamed al Marhoon, member of the OEF Board of Directors in the presence of Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, OEF Secretary-General.

Salsabil bint Mohammed al Mudhaffar on the 'Conquistador' won the title of the 'local girls competition' for 100 km competed by 16 horses.

Mohammed bin Khamis al Balushi on 'Dondervale' won the boys title for a distance of 100 km with the participation of 31 horses.

The qualifying races of 40 km and 80 km with the participation of 14 and 7 horses were held in run-up to the final race.



AWARDS

Prizes were allocated to each girls and boys races for 100 km. First place rider received RO 3,500, second place rider took home RO 2,500 and third place rider got RO 1,500.

The rider at fourth place got RO 1,000, rider at fifth place got RO 800, rider in sixth place got RO 700, rider at seventh got RO 600 and place from eighth to tenth received RO 500 each.

100 KM RACE FOR YOUTH

The race included three stages — 40 km, 35 km and 25 km. The minimum age of the horse is 6 years and the minimum speed is 14 km/hr where five horses were able to successfully complete the race.

Salsabil bint Mohammed al Mudhaffar won the first place on the 'Conquistador', Tharaa bint Mohammed al Zadjalayah on the 'Bahghah of Muscat' was second and

Alaa bint Ahmed al Balushiyyah on 'Ajda', came third. Sarah bint Abdullah al Balushiyyah on 'Najm Sohail' came fourth and Sheikha bint Mohammed al Rawahiyah on 'Lormarkopinhagen' finished fifth.

100 KM RACE FOR BOYS

The competition included three stages — 40 km, 35 km and 25 km. The minimum age of the horse is 6 years, and the minimum speed is 14 km/hr where 10 horses were



able to successfully complete the race.

Mohammed bin Khamis al Balushi on 'Dondervale' claimed the top spot, Faris bin Abdulaziz al Abri on 'Team Tam' came second and Moayed bin Suleiman al Balushi on 'Sam Lord' finished third. Muhanned bin Suleiman al Balushi on 'Ostotah' was fourth and Saeed bin Jaber al Busaidy on 'GS Lavan' finished fifth.

QUALIFYING RACES

Seven horses participated in the 40 km qualifying competition and five horses were able to qualify. The qualifying competition included two stages and, the minimum speed was 12 km/hr and the maximum was 16 km/hr. The minimum age of the horse was 5 years.

At one stage, 26 horses were able to qualify out of 33 horses in the 40 km qualification.



Oman Racing match season best in Abu Dhabi

STRONG CHALLENGE FROM AHMAD AL HARTHY AND OMAN RACING AT YAS MARINA

FIFTH PLACE IN THIRD ROUND OF ASIAN LE MANS SERIES MATCHES SEASON BEST

MID-RACE RED FLAG STOPPAGE IN ABU DHABI IMPACTS GT PODIUM CHALLENGE

AL HARTHY, EASTWOOD AND DE HAAN AIMING TO END ALMS ON A HIGH TODAY

ABU DHABI: Aston Martin Vantage GT3 racer Ahmad al Harthy produced a typically fast, committed and determined performance during round three of the Asian Le Mans Series at Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Saturday, on the way to matching a season-best top five finish.

Oman Racing's Al Harthy, plus team-mates Charlie Eastwood and Sam De Haan, challenged hard for a deserved GT class podium finish but a red flag stoppage 90 minutes into the four-hour encounter, plus a series of Full Course Yellow cautionary periods, worked contrary to the team's strategy.

Fifth place though, added to sixth and fifth place results in rounds one and two last weekend at Dubai Autodrome, continues the Oman entry's consistent 2022 campaign in ALMS unabated — and Al Harthy is determined to sign-off the championship on a high today with a challenge for silverware in the fourth and final round.

"We had really good pace, the car was amazing", said the Omantel, OQ and MHS-ITICS backed Omani. "Unfortunately



the Safety Car, Red Flag and Full Course Yellows limited us from reaching the podium, but there are so many positives to take into race two. I'm absolutely happy with my pace in the car, Sam's initial start was really strong and Charlie's ending was really strong

as well.

"We're really happy to be in Abu Dhabi and really happy to show our true pace. If everything goes to plan, which obviously isn't always that easy with so much out of your control, we should have a good result in the final round and

that's what we're hoping for."

He added: "P5 is very respectable, especially out of a big and very strong grid, and being the fastest Aston Martin again as well. We're working extremely hard and the team is doing an amazing job to make sure we're as competitive

as we can be."

Aston Martin 'factory' driver Eastwood qualified the No 69 car a strong fourth fastest for the round three GT class grid, but De Haan took the opening stint of the first Abu Dhabi race and put together a superb opening lap.

Storming through into second in GT, the Briton was shuffled back to eighth during a very tight battle around 15 minutes into the race but then mounted a great fightback. Prior to a Full Course Yellow cautionary period at the half-hour mark, De Haan had moved back into the top four and he then pitted to hand over the Oman Racing car to Al Harthy after another FCY late in the first hour.

Al Harthy climbed behind the wheel for hour two and the multiple GT endurance racing champion had plenty of work to do from 15th position in class. Lapping quickly and consistently, the Omani began to slice his way through the order before the action was then halted midway through his stint due to a car fire for a rival entry and oil on the track.

When racing resumed, Al Harthy held seventh in GT and with 90 minutes of the race to go he had moved back through into the top four as another round of pit-stops began to unfold. He then pitted to hand over the Aston Martin to Eastwood with around one hour to run.

Initially holding eighth place, Eastwood was seventh with 50 minutes to go and then sixth with just 40 minutes left on the clock. Working his way into fourth, with the sun setting over Abu Dhabi, one final stop had to be served and so he slipped back to seventh place. Climbing into fifth during the last 10 minutes, Eastwood ensured the Oman Racing entry was the highest placed Aston at the flag.

The fourth and final round of the Asian Le Mans Series will take place at 16.30 local time today, at Yas Marina Circuit, with live streaming online here: <https://live.asianlemansseries.com/en/>

Provisional 2022 Asian Le Mans Series GT Class Standings (after Rd3) 6th Ahmad al Harthy/ Charlie Eastwood/Sam De Haan, 28pts

Gunners edge Brentford, aim top-four finish

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, FEB 20

Having lost to Brentford on the opening day of the season, Arsenal hit back with a 2-1 win. The margin would have been considerably greater but for myriad missed chances in a match which saw the Gunners in dominating form. Victory puts them level on points with fifth-placed West Ham but the Gunners have three games in hand to them as well as to fourth-placed Manchester United.

Arsenal's manager, Mikel Arteta said: "The scar was there from that defeat at Brentford and I certainly felt the hurt. I tried to transmit that to the players and told them not to forget how we felt after that game.

"That was an invaluable time for me to understand all the people we have at the club. The more difficult the situation was, the closer we became as a group and that was a game changer because it really united everyone."

He added: "Nobody was blaming each other, nobody was hiding and everyone wanted to contribute. Now we want to win every game and we are a little bit closer to our goals because we won this game and are very happy with the way we're playing."

Arsenal's 24 shots at goal — 16 in the first half — and 14 corners were proof of their superiority and two appeals for penalties were turned down with the Bees fortunate not to concede goals in the first half. Arsenal did have the ball in the net in the 13th

minute but Alex Lacazette was marginally ruled off-side.

The Bees resistance was broken within three minutes of the start of the second half. On receiving a pass from Lacazette, Emile Smith Rowe moved in from the left, cut inside, passing Kristoffer Ajer and from the edge of the box he curled a right-footed shot just inside the far post for his 10th goal of the season.

Halfway through the half, the Bees did have a spell when they managed more of the possession without causing much worry to the Gunners defence. In fact, at the other end, a goalline tackle by Christian Norgaard denied Nicolas Pepe a chance for a second goal.

With just eleven minutes remaining Arsenal broke through



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka celebrates scoring their second goal. – Reuters

for their second goal with Thomas Partey providing a pass to Bukayo Saka whose firm left-footed shot found the net off the far post. Brentford managed a consolation goal in stoppage time after VAR had checked Norgaard's effort.

Brentford Manager, Thomas

Frank said: "I still think the teams below us would prefer to be in out position. One victory would do a lot definitely and I don't think it's very far away. It's about keeping believing." Brentford have had just one point from their last seven matches.

Thomas added: "Four of our

last six games have been against Liverpool, Manchester United, Manchester City and Arsenal and I think they are relatively big clubs. It's about staying positive and consistent in our approach. Right now, I'd love a scrappy 1-0 win but I'm convinced we'll do well going forward."



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MoCIIP launches
Tejarah Talks

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 20

Tejarah Talks, a new initiative launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will hold its first event on Wednesday, February 23 at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North.

Supported by SOHAR Port & Freezone, HSBC and Oman Business Forum, over the coming year Tejarah Talks will bring together panels of experts, business and thought leaders in a series of seven interactive and informal discussion-led evening sessions to examine key issues shaping the Sultanate of Oman's business landscape, influencing the country's socio-economic environment, impacting investment and driving non-oil exports.



Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP Director and Tejarah Talks organiser said: "Through this inspiring initiative, we look forward to showcasing the dynamism of business and industry in Oman and highlighting how under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman Vision 2040 is creating the conditions where more than ever investors in our country can grow, succeed and thrive."

Tackling topics directly relevant to business, industry and investment in the Sultanate of Oman, economic diversification and job creation as well as pressing global issues, Tejarah Talks will explore post-Covid company culture, the evolving world of manufacturing, cracking export markets, the green transition, creative industries and Gen Z and marketing in the new data-led world.

The first Tejarah Talks session will examine the role of sustainability in enhancing competitiveness, attracting investment and unlocking new opportunities.

Starting at 7:30pm, the February 23 Tejarah Talks will be moderated by His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm. The evening's panelists are: Mazin al Saadi, HSSE Manager, Mazoon Dairy; Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO, SOHAR Port & Freezone; Dr Firas al Abduwani, VP, Clean Energy OQ Alternative Energy; Simon Adcock, Head, Commercial Banking, HSBC; and Dr Michael Tsang, Founder, Three Pillars Consulting. (To reserve a seat please e-mail your name and contacts details to TT@tejarah.gov.om)

Plan for large-scale alternative foods
project in the Sultanate of Oman

NEW FOODS: OIA partners
with MycoTechnology and
others to establish Vital Foods
Technologies

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 20

In line with its mandate to attract foreign investment, build strategic partnerships and support technology inflows, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — the integrated sovereign wealth fund — launched a new project to produce mushroom-based protein using dates as a main element, in collaboration with international partners, most predominantly, the US company MycoTechnology.

The partnership comes on the heels of OIA's investment in MycoTechnology, a US company founded in 2013. MycoTechnology is a leading US food biotechnology firm focused on the production of alternative protein and sugar reduction ingredients. The company has successfully established its fermentation technology platform producing a variety of ingredients which address some of the food industry's most pressing challenges.

OIA and MycoTechnology announced the establishment of 'Vital Foods Technologies' for the purpose of completing the feasibility of setting up a large scale production facility in the Sultanate of Oman.

The partnership was announced at a 'Future of Food' event organised by OIA and MycoTechnology to introduce the promising capabilities of this project, which already underwent several successful techno-economic studies.



FROM THIS PARTNERSHIP,
OIA SEEKS TO ENHANCE
FOOD SECURITY,
ACHIEVE NATIONAL
SUFFICIENCY AND
ATTRACT
INTERNATIONAL
EXPERTISE TO BE
UTILISED IN LOCAL
PROJECTS

The event witnessed the formal signing between OIA and MycoTechnology to establish Vital Foods Technologies, and was attended by a number of senior government officials, senior corporate executives, representatives of companies and funds investing in the food sector, and MycoTechnology representatives. Attendees were served a Southeast Asian menu with dishes composed of alternative

protein.

From this partnership, OIA seeks to enhance food security, achieve national sufficiency and attract international expertise to be utilised in local projects. The outcome to this partnership is hoped to achieve economic diversity, create direct and indirect job opportunities and create opportunities for Omani SMEs.

"This innovative project represents the benefits OIA can reap from international investments, whereafter it attracts its international partners to establish their projects in Oman and to transfer and bring advanced modern technologies to the country," stated Ibrahim al Eisri, Director of Private Equity at Oman Investment Authority.

"Through its investment in the food production sector, OIA is exploring promising investment opportunities that can succeed in the back drop of Oman's climate and benefit the national economy. Such investment is set to deliver

return on investments, improve the trade balance, substitute food imports in light of international price discrepancies, provide job opportunities in the food production sector both directly or indirectly, and provide a high quality product that meets the consumers' needs," he added.

"Oman produces about 400m MT per year, and over 50 per cent is not suitable for table dates and can be made available to produce Mushroom Protein," said Alan Hahn, CEO and Founder of MycoTechnology.

"Regional markets for alternative products are promising with the MENA current market for alternative dairy at \$1.2b with a 12 per cent CAGR and is expected to reach at least \$3bn MENA current market of alternative meat is \$180m with a 10 per cent CAGR. Export opportunities are huge with India representing the largest opportunity with their 1.3 billion population.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Asyad Terminals–Duqm starts operations at Port of Duqm

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 20

Asyad Terminals–Duqm, a partnership of Asyad Ports and Port of Duqm, announced on Sunday that it has started operating and management the general cargo terminal, comprising three commercial berths, at the Port of Duqm. The first is a multipurpose general cargo berth with a capacity of about 1 million metric tonnes per year.

The second is a dry bulk cargo berth with a capacity of about 5 million MT per year and the third is a roll-on/roll-off berth capable of handling 100,000 vehicles per annum.

With the start of commercial operations, Port of Duqm is



anticipated to witness a strong uptick in vessel calls and freight volumes.

Nasser bin Suleiman al Harthy, Chairman of Asyad Group, said the award of operatorship of the

terminal to a national company is in line with the goals of Vision 2040.

In a statement to ONA, he added that Asyad Group has adopted a strategy to enhance logistics investments in the country's maritime gateways, raise efficiency and productivity and enhance the ports' appeal to international shipping.

Dr Ahmed al Abri, CEO of Asyad Ports, said Asyad Terminals–Duqm will develop the superstructure of the terminal to enable its handling of general, bulk and ro-ro cargo.

Asyad Ports already oversees the management of Port Sultan Qaboos, Suwaiq Port, Shinas Port and Khasab Port, which are playing an increasingly important

role in facilitating trade flows and keeping the supply chain moving.

Asyad Ports will also work with SMEs to provide support services in the operation of warehousing and logistics, customs clearance, transportation, storage and maintenance activities Port of Duqm, which officially opened earlier this month, is one of the largest maritime gateways in the Middle East and one of the largest infrastructure projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Covering an area of 187.9 square km, with 2.25 km of commercial quay, the port is 18 metres deep. Also under the port's management are 2,000 hectares of industrial land and 1,000 hectares of logistical land.

(With inputs from ONA)

Alizz Islamic Bank continues exciting finance offer



MUSCAT: As part of Alizz Islamic Bank's constant efforts to make customer's dreams come true the bank continues its competitive finance offering that helps customers fulfil their aspirations. The bank's offer provides the opportunity to purchase and build a perfect home as per their monthly income through simple and easy procedures. In addition, it extends attractive offers to purchase a vehicle or fund electronic products or furniture which is subject to flexible terms with respect to the funding period or repayment.

As per the offer customers can purchase or build a house, with home financing at a competitive profit rate starting from 4.85%. In addition, special offers are being extended to those wanting to transfer their existing financing to Alizz Islamic Bank from other Islamic and commercial banks at a reduced financing rate starting from 4.75% per cent for customers who transfer their financing to Alizz Islamic Bank.

Likewise, the option of car and commodity financing has become flexible and accessible as the customer can choose the car model and complete his transactions in no time, with a financing ratio rate starting from 4.95 %.

Mohammed bin Juma al Ghassani, AGM and Chief Consumer Banking Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said: "Your home and your car are waiting for you at Alizz Islamic Bank. In fact, these offers make it easier for customers, whether new or existing, to purchase or build a small house, a car or finance commodities through easy and flexible procedures. Such diversity of options meets various expectations and requirements of different customers."

Realise your organisation's potential with Bank Muscat corporate banking solutions

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to launch new innovative financial services and solutions that simplify corporate banking.

As one of the enduring successes of the Sultanate of Oman's Renaissance, the bank has been playing a key role in transforming the Omani banking sector with a number of innovative products and services over the past four decades. Bank Muscat enjoys the enduring trust of government institutions, corporates and SMEs who have been partners in the bank's journey since the very beginning, and its constant development over the years.

Today, Bank Muscat is the largest financial services provider for corporates in the Sultanate of

Oman. Bank Muscat is proud to have contributed significantly to the emergence and establishment of many institutions that are leading institutions in the private sector today.

The bank is contributing steadily to the implementation of their production plans in addition to contributing to the support of government institutions as a part of the vital role the bank is playing in supporting Omani Renaissance. Bank Muscat is proud to collaborate with corporates across various sectors such as oil and gas, power, water, mining, transport and telecommunications, airports, free zone development and industry.

Today, Bank Muscat offers a wide range of corporate banking products and services including term loans, working capital



facilities, overdraft, asset finance, agency and custody services, import and export services, bonds and guarantees among others.

The bank maintains a leadership position enabled by its deep sectoral expertise, innovative structuring capabilities and sound due diligence techniques thus catering to the long-term financing requirements of various projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking on the occasion,

Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi (pictured), Chief Banking Officer, said: "Bank Muscat has strengthened the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector as an Omani institution, which provides a full suite of banking products, services and solutions. One of the great success stories of the Sultanate of Oman's Renaissance, Bank Muscat has become a trusted corporate banking partner to government institutions and corporates, both big and small, over the past four decades.

We are delighted to further build on this success and continue launching new world-class banking services and solutions that fulfil the complex requirements of our valued customers so as to realise the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040."

Speaking about the digital

transformation of the banking sector, Ahmed bin Faqir al Balushi said: "During the past few years, the world has witnessed many challenges that helped accelerate digital transformation due to the growing need to provide unlimited access for all regardless of their circumstances.

Digital solutions are playing an ever bigger role in economic growth and development with more and more corporates around the globe boosting their internal efficiencies through digitalisation.

We are excited to see more and more of our corporate banking customers using digital solutions to enhance business efficiencies and scalability. Going ahead, Bank Muscat will continue to support the business sector by launching new and innovative digital solutions that further enhance the ease of banking."

NBO opens new branch in Bukha

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently celebrated the opening of its new branch in Bukha in the Governorate of Musandam.

Having relocated its existing branch to a bigger premises, the new facility is fully modernised and equipped with a Full Function Machine (FFM), enabling customers to access a comprehensive range of services including account management, card issuance, and inquiries.

Opened under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Musandam, the branch marks the latest in NBO's efforts to make the banking experience as convenient and as enjoyable as possible for its growing customer base.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO said, "In our quest to make banking accessible to people across the Sultanate of



Oman, we continue to place our branches in strategic and convenient locations. Our new branch in Bukha is an extension of our efforts to meet the needs of our customers in Musandam, while offering them excellence through a tailored range of innovative products and services."

As Oman's local bank, NBO provides a full suite of innovative and high-quality

banking solutions through 60 branches across the country, including two in the Governorate of Musandam, as well as a wide network more than 189 ATM and deposit machines.

Having built a rich history of innovative banking services that keep pace with the needs of its customers, it continues to modernise and evolve, in readiness for the future.

Make all roads fun with the powerful Kia Pegas

MUSCAT: Kia's compact yet powerful and fuel-efficient Pegas is exciting to drive and fun to own too. The Pegas is equipped with impressive range of features and technology along with comfort and space that makes it an ideal car for first time buyers.

The Kia Pegas is powered by Kia's efficient 1.4-litre MPI (multi-point injection) gasoline engine which produces maximum output of 94PS at 6,000 rpm and maximum torque output of 13.5 @ 4,000 rpm. It offers an impressive fuel-efficiency of 17.8 Kms/L. For added convenience and safety the Pegas is also equipped with rear parking system and steering audio control.

The Pegas offers buyers in this class a uniquely stylish design, with

sculpted body panels and bold character lines complemented by a striking colour palette and a carefully-balanced sedan silhouette.



Reliable International Automotive, the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way. No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia 'Distributor of Distinction' award.

Lulu Group empowers Omani youth, promotes local talents

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to encourage and nurture local talents in the retail sector, Lulu Group Oman had embarked on an ambitious drive and today boasts of a work force in excess of 3,200 Omani employees from different educational qualifications for its operations in the Sultanate of Oman. The Group has remained steadfast in its policy of encouraging Omani employees to shoulder key responsibilities in the operations across its 31 facilities, including 28 stores and 3 Logistic hubs and the regional headquarters operations.

Nasr bin Mubarak bin Salim al Maawali, General Manager — HR at Lulu Group, stated, "Lulu Group has always been committed to the empowerment of national cadres in all its departments. We believe in the importance of career progression of local workforce



through specialised training under the supervision of expert trainers in order to enhance their skills, experiences, and practical knowledge. In the recent drive, we have recruited employees who are post-graduates, degree holders, high school freshers and others.

The Group has also demonstrated its commitment towards Omanisation by hiring large batches of Omanis in various fields in all its branches in the Sultanate of Oman".

Nasr also informed that, in the recent intake, Omanis were hired to senior positions such as General Managers, Managers, Assistant Managers, Trainers, Marketing Executives, Accountant, IT professionals, Happiness Center In-charges and Department Heads across the spectrum of operations.

He explained that a training centre with a state-of-the-art

infrastructure has been set up to train Omani citizens on a regular basis in their areas of work. As part of its HR development strategy, the company has also trained the incumbents for improved language skills in English as well as sharpened inter and intra interaction skills.

The Group has focused on the importance of training Omani youth according to the employment plans adopted by the Ministry of Labour by raising their efficiency in dealing with customers and understanding the areas of work related to hypermarkets.

As a matter of career progression, Lulu has also introduced a motivational scheme to employees by rewarding them through promotions and upgradations based on individual's efficiency and proficiency.

The training imparted through

specific modules would make it easier for the new recruits to interact with customers of different nationalities, meet their demands, and provide them a world-class shopping experience. The Group has also hired employees who have not completed their high schooling as food supply salesmen, cashiers and merchandisers, giving them the opportunity to come to the main stream, be productive and contribute to the growth story of the country, he added.

Nasr dwelt on the part-time job opportunities available for Omanis in the Governorate of Muscat. This he said, "is an extension of the policy to encourage Omanis in different walks of life, whether job seekers, public or private sector workers, male or female students in higher education institutions, housewives and retirees to a stable and brighter future."



Pure Omani honey vies for spotlight in crowded field

BALQEES AL ARAIMI

MUSCAT, FEB 20

The Sultanate of Oman is rich in various types of high-quality honey, scattered apiaries and various honey stores. While there are many commercial outlets showcasing a wide array of Omani honey, various government agencies, notably the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, as well as Riyada, organise 'festivals' that celebrate this rich heritage.

One such festival is under way at Oman Avenues Mall in Al Ghubra, where a large number of Omani honey merchants are displaying their delicious products. The event began on February 18 and will continue until Tuesday, February 22, 2022. Some of the finest Omani honey can be bought from 10 am to 10 pm during the festival. Many of the participants were happy to be part of this marketing initiative.

Waleed bin Salim al Rubaee of Safaa Al Raheeq, said the festival was an opportunity to introduce wide range of honey-based merchandise to customers. "Besides attracting customers to my brand, it's also an opportunity



for me to supplement my income through sales to a wider audience build new commercial

relationships. I also welcome the chance to interact and network with other fellow honey producers

and learn from their experience", she told the *Observer*.

Adil bin Humaid bin Abdullah al Jamaee, who markets the Buthain and Alkhatieb honey brands, has more than 15 different types of unique Omani honey on display. They include honey types sourced from Omani beekeepers with long experience in this field. Several cosmetic products made from natural honey are on sale as well.

Among the bigger players is Ali bin Said bin Hassan al Awaidi, who runs Al Thiqa Honey, well-known for its vast range of Omani honeys, including sidr honey, frankincense honey and others.

A specialist in the apiary business, Ali says he makes the careful distinction between ordinary honey products where the nectar comes from garden-variety flowers and pure organic honey. The former — also known as 'flower honey' — is more sugary blended with honey that comes from the nectar of natural flowers. This blending, he warns, can harm the reputation of Omani honey, including springtime honey in Dhofar Governorate. The latter is one of the best honeys and the most expensive as well, he notes.

"That is why we have a big problem in marketing this honey, especially outside the governorates, due to the problem I mentioned earlier. Take, for example, frankincense honey, which a large segment of the residents outside Dhofar Governorate is not aware that the frankincense tree is a flowering tree from which frankincense honey originates. They think that it is honey mixed with frankincense — this is a great fallacy", he lamented.

While welcoming the support received from the Ministry, many of the participants urged the authorities to help secure new marketing outlets for their products with a view to bolstering their revenue. Increased sales would benefit the traditional apiary sector, one producer stressed, adding that it would also help spur demand for Omani honey in various parts of Oman.

They also requested the authorities to make it free for Omani honey producers to take part in these public promotions, enable wider coverage of these events through mainstream media and social media platforms. Some also indicated that participating in such marketing

outlets helps spread awareness among expatriates and tourists about the value and significance associated with pure Omani honey as opposed to other types of dubious quality honey sold in the market.

A key highlight of the festival was the presence of the Oman Honey Platform — an electronic platform that brings together beekeepers and Omani honey dealers from various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman. Founded by Younis bin Nasser bin Salim al Shaithani in September 2020, the platform showcases various types of Omani honey and enables customers to buy products of their choice for delivery anywhere in the country and the Gulf region. Backed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the platform also has a secure payment feature.

Additionally, the platform also has an Android and iPhone app that can be downloaded to make it easier for customers to access it at any time and at any place. The platform can also be accessed through the platform's website and various communication sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, he added.

Jusoor launches 4 social projects in North Al Batinah



MUSCAT: Jusoor Foundation celebrated the launch of four projects implemented as part of its social investment programme in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The projects, worth about RO 345,000, were funded jointly by OQ and Sohar Aluminium. The launch ceremony was held in Al Qurum Natural Park in Shinas, under the auspices of Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Mardas al Busaidy, Secretary-General for Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior. This event was attended by Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar Al Malik al Shehi, Governor of North Al Batinah and Chairman of Jusoor Board of Directors.

The first project was the development of the 28,000 square metre Al Qurum Natural Park in the Wilayat of Shinas with a social investment worth RO 200,000. It includes a 3 kilometre walkway, arena theatre, migratory bird viewing platform, 11 family rest areas and barbecue sites, crossing bridge over the waterway, children's games, green fields and a café.

The second project was the construction of a park in the mountainous area of Al Hayleen in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq on an area of 2,000 square metres, which is surrounded by a 320 metre walkway.

The third project was to provide equipment to clean beaches in the wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate. The equipment filters, purifies and removes all the waste stuck on the beaches.

It's not all roses on social media



SEEMA SANGRA

Social media platforms gave us a community and an extended family feeling. When social media network platforms emerged and we were introduced to a new version of friends.

We had a lot more friends on our friend list. It helped us get in touch with many lost friends, we managed to track our old classmates and people we had interacted with many years back. Facebook was the pioneer.

Then came Instagram, Snapchat, before TikTok finally arrived and added well-packaged content and interaction to our experience.

It provided scope for creative expression and made us laugh, learn new recipes, and enjoy dance and music. No doubt, the platform reached new heights of popularity.

I will not dwell on how this virtual interaction between friends and connections changed personal lives, but rather focus on other dimensions where we interacted on these platforms as communities.

Instagram and TikTok, among other platforms, commercialised the community size and helped coin the term 'social media currency'. Collective action by large communities started the social media challenges trend. Making a difference via social media challenges became another way of 'contributing-towards-a-cause' staple.

People, in general, want to contribute, but only if the process is easy — something that can make them feel good, yet is not too



difficult to accomplish.

So we saw the emergence of challenges like #IceBucketChallenge to raise awareness for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease), #BlindingLightsChallenge, based on the Weekend's 80's inspired energetic dance tune that connected family members and friends together, and #SafeHands challenge during the first wave of Covid-19, initiated by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Through such initiatives, people contribute to a bigger cause, albeit with minimal effort. Thus while platforms have the potential to connect and motivate social media users around the world, they can also have a darker side.

Particularly when the minimum age for membership is as low as 13 years. Many of us haven't forgotten about the awful Blue Whale online community-based challenge targeting teenagers. And now there are again some recent challenges involving teenagers.

The #deviouslicks challenge encourages students to steal stuff from schools. Students in the US have stolen things like facemasks, soap dispensers, bathroom mirrors, fire alarms, paper towel holders and even items from the teacher's desk.

They display their handiwork in a TikTok video, with the hashtag deviouslicks. One TikTok video featuring stolen hand sanitizer got 7.2 million views!

The situation reached a point where schools in the US had to come up with a special monitoring plan. TikTok also grabbed headlines for its extreme diet known as the Corpse Bride diet trend, which encourages teenagers to gamble with their health.

Seeking to highlight the dangers associated with this challenge, an investigative journalist from *Wall Street Journal* created multiple profiles as 13-year-old users.

Within two months of setting up the fake profiles, TikTok's algorithm sent 32,000 videos associated with weight loss to the fake profiles.

The videos gave tips on how to eat less than 300 calories a day, consume only water, and take laxatives for over-eating.

There were extreme videos of festive-themed competitions. The 'corpse-bride diet' for maximum weight reduction was suggested with pictures of teen girls with bones sticking out.

There was also constant shaming of those people who gave up on getting thin. The most recent and worrisome challenge, popular amongst

teens, is the 'blackout challenge', also known as the 'Choking Challenge' or 'Pass-out Challenge'. It encourages users to hold their breath until they pass out due to a lack of oxygen.

Some children aged 12 and under have already died after attempting the challenge. Some say that this challenge existed even in 2008, but gained popularity on TikTok a few months back. Besides these challenges, there are multiple instances of teen girls being repeatedly targeted by child predators.

The growing popularity of social media platforms amongst teenagers, notably TikTok, is being increasingly linked with rising mental health issues, injuries and even deaths among vulnerable target groups. It is high time we think about where it is leading our younger generation.

With apps capable of tracking our every move, we have already reached a point where parental and policies level interventions are not a choice but an imperative.

[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]

Plan for large-scale alternative foods project in the Sultanate of Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Imported products are approximately 200 per cent the cost of similar products in the US/EU and having the protein and finished product produce in Oman will allow for the lowest cost in the region. This cost advantage allows for new local brands to emerge and leverage the domestic production and the use of such a well-known and respected crop of dates as the source of protein", he added.

The alternative food industry has strongly imposed itself in the international playing field recently. According to Bloomberg Intelligence the plant-based food market is set to reach \$162 billion in value by the year 2030, as opposed to \$29.4 billion in 2020. On the regional front, it is estimated that 15-20 per cent of animal-based protein will be replaced by plant-based protein by 2025.

This company is set to be the new investment in a line of OIA's local investments in the food industry.

In Oman, this vital industry is overseen by state-owned company Oman Food Investment Holding Co (OFIC). OIA also owns Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) which was established to develop the fisheries sector in the country through investing in profitable commercial projects that enhance the value of the fisheries sector in the country. (With inputs from ONA)

Allianz’s US fund misery is only half over

Allianz may have unwittingly drawn a bigger target on its back. The \$103 billion German insurer set aside \$4.2 billion to compensate US savers for derivative bets that went sour. The sum, less than the amount sought by disgruntled investors, may invite a higher fine from the Department of Justice (DOJ) to level things up.

Chief Executive Oliver Bäte is wisely keeping his chequebook to hand. Allianz has settled the “vast majority” of claims made by investors who say the insurer failed to safeguard pension fund investments due to inadequate hedging during the pandemic-fuelled market rout in early 2020.

However, Bäte cautioned that the total bill “cannot be reliably estimated” and may be higher. P a s t experience supports his caution. US regulators have spent the past decade pursuing foreign companies like HSBC, Standard Chartered and Deutsche Bank and imposing tough fines for money laundering and mis-selling mortgage securities.

DOJ investigators may take a dim view of the mismatch between the claims lodged by US teachers, subway workers and truck drivers and the amount Allianz is actually coughing up. That could be an invitation to extract a higher penalty. Splurging on shareholder rewards doesn't help Bäte's case. On Thursday, he announced he would buy back 1 billion euros of stock and raised the dividend 12.5 per cent to 10.80 euros a share. The risk is the DOJ interpreting that as a sign that Europe's largest insurer can absorb a heavier hit. After all, its 209 per cent Solvency ratio, a measure of financial health, implies that Bäte has a cushion of around \$25 billion before he has to switch off dividends.

The uncertainty and reputational damage are hurting Allianz's valuation. A host of pension funds are unable to hold Allianz's stock until the company is no longer the subject of a DOJ investigation. That explains why the insurer trades at just 1 times the value of its assets. Rival Zurich Insurance is on 1.8 times. With the possibility of US regulators dropping a potentially hefty hammer, the gap is unlikely to narrow any time soon. — Reuters

US regulators have spent the past decade pursuing foreign companies and imposing tough fines for money laundering and mis-selling mortgage securities



SPARKLING NICKEL

A worker uses the tapping process to separate nickel ore from other elements at a nickel processing plant in Sorowako, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. Nickel prices climbed to three-week highs on Friday as worries about low inventories and potential sanctions against major producer Russia fuelled supply fears. Benchmark nickel on the London Metal Exchange (LME) was up 0.6 per cent at \$24,035 a tonne, having earlier touched its highest since January 24 at \$24,140. — Reuters

Bury the US-China trade agreement



CHANG-TAI HSIEH

The writer is Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT CHINA PREFERS AN AGREEMENT THAT STRENGTHENS STATE CONTROL AND, FOR THE TIME BEING, REMOVES US PRESSURE TO UNDERTAKE STRUCTURAL REFORMS.

Two years ago, in an attempt to end their deepening trade war, the United States and China signed an agreement in which China promised to purchase an additional \$200 billion worth of US goods and services in 2020 and 2021, relative to 2017 levels.

That implied a total purchase commitment of \$502.4 billion over the two-year period. In the end, China bought only 57 per cent of the US exports that it had promised to buy, or \$288.8 billion and thus purchased none of the extra \$200 billion.

But this shortfall, far from being a failure, should be a cause for celebration. That is because the only way the so-called “phase one” agreement could have been fully implemented was for China to use the same non-market tools that have long bedeviled American firms trying to do business there.

Former US President Donald Trump started the trade war in 2018 with the aim of forcing China to end its theft of US companies’ intellectual property, its subsidies for “strategic” sectors, and, more broadly, its use of non-transparent regulatory measures that harm US firms.

In January 2020, after multiple rounds

of reciprocal tariff hikes had battered US-China trade, the two countries reached a settlement containing the Chinese purchase commitments.

Although the deal specified the amounts of different US products that China should buy, it did not stipulate any reduction in Chinese import tariffs or require China to make any legal and regulatory changes regarding the issues that had prompted Trump to initiate the trade war.

These matters were instead to be addressed in later rounds of negotiations, presumably after China had shown its commitment to regulatory reform by meeting the purchase obligations.

But, absent any commitment to reduce tariffs or address structural issues, China could fulfil its commitments under the phase one deal only by resorting once again to opaque regulatory measures — except this time to favour US exporters and handicap their competitors.

For example, the Chinese authorities could have ordered state-owned firms to purchase American goods, or made it clear to private importers that they would benefit from doing the same in order to support “national policy.” Officials also could have ordered customs and health inspectors to

favour US goods over products from other countries.

In the short run, these measures would have increased US exports to China and benefited American firms, but their long-run cost would have been enormous.

By increasing China's reliance on non-market mechanisms to support its political and economic goals, they would have made levelling the playing field in the Chinese market an even more distant prospect.

More importantly, economic coercion — even if it benefits America — is still coercion, and recalls a dark period of Chinese history when the British used similar strong-arm tactics to sell more opium to China.

Lastly, even if doubling down on state control was merely an expedient short-term tactic as part of a long-term strategy, this would hardly imply that Chinese policymakers were somehow more committed to removing state control in the future. That is like telling an alcoholic that the first step on the path to sobriety is to drink more. It is no surprise that China prefers an agreement that strengthens state control and, for the time being, removes US pressure to undertake structural reforms.

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Amid Ukraine tension, oil traders are betting on an Iran deal



STANLEY REED

The author, a London-based journalist, has been writing for *The New York Times* on energy, the environment and the Middle East since 2012.

Oil prices slumped ON Friday, falling more than 3 per cent before recovering lost ground later in the day, as Western leaders sounded the alarm about an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Markets are worried about the potential of a supply disruption from conflict in Ukraine since Russia produces about 10 million barrels of oil a day. But they are also reacting to reports that talks to revive a nuclear deal with Iran are making progress, a development that could bring tens of millions of barrels of oil to the market.

On Wednesday, an Iranian negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, tweeted: “After weeks of intensive talks, we are closer than ever to an agreement; nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, though.”

Brent crude, the international bench mark, was trading at \$92.92 a barrel, down 0.2 per cent. West

Texas Intermediate slipped 0.3 per cent to \$91.37.

While obstacles to a new Iran deal remain, some analysts say that it appears both sides want to overcome them.

“The signs to me, both from Tehran and from Washington, are very clear,” said Scott Modell, managing director of Rapidan Energy Group, an advisory firm.

Richard Bronze, head of geopolitics at Energy Aspects, a research firm, said that the markets were being “torn between the risks of escalation” of the standoff at the Ukrainian-Russian border and what seems a growing potential for a deal in the indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States.

At present, the prospect of a deal with Iran seems to be outweighing worries over a disruption to oil supplies stemming from conflict between Russia and Ukraine. “Geopolitics has been driving a lot of the moves up and down,” Bronze said.

Iran has as much as 80 million barrels of oil in storage, he said, some of it on tankers near Asian markets, ready to sell at short notice. Tehran could then ramp up domestic production by 1.2 million barrels a day within eight months, bringing substantial new supplies to the market.

Should a deal happen and if the oil that is now stored is dumped on the market quickly, that could pull prices down, Bronze said. But over time, he added, the world would need the Iranian oil. Other analysts, though, say that global markets may wind up being oversupplied later in the year.

Traders’ calculations could of course change quickly in the event of war breaking out over Ukraine or if the talks with Iran collapse.

When it comes to Ukraine, the worries about disruption are more focused on natural gas than oil. Reflecting a tight market and fraught geopolitics, European gas prices are more than four times

higher than they were a year ago, a situation that is putting pressure on households and businesses, like fertiliser makers and metal producers, that use a lot of energy.

About one-third of Europe's natural gas supplies come from Russia, mostly through a network of pipelines. Some analysts doubt that President Vladimir Putin of Russia would want to cut off gas supplies to his most important customers, like Germany and Italy, but pipelines through Ukraine could become collateral damage of fighting and some analysts worry that Putin might further squeeze energy supplies to retaliate for sanctions imposed by the West.

Analysts believe that Europe could deal with a short disruption of gas deliveries from Gazprom, the Russian gas monopoly. A warm winter during the time of heaviest gas consumption has helped.

This week, Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, told reporters, “Our

models now show that for partial disruption or further decrease of gas deliveries by Gazprom, we are now rather on the safe side.”

But to prepare for a longer cutoff, Europe might need to take strong measures. Such changes are already occurring in the current tight market.

Flows of liquefied natural gas, largely from the United States, have outpaced imports of Russian gas to Europe in recent weeks. If Moscow further squeezed supplies, Europe is likely to ask other suppliers, like Algeria, Azerbaijan and Norway, to rev up flows, analysts say.

Europe could also take further measures, including restarting mothballed coal plants and delaying scheduled shutdowns of nuclear plants in Germany. Henning Gloystein, a director at Eurasia Group, said that businesses could ultimately be shut down and, as a last resort, households could see their energy supplies rationed.

— New York Times

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Ali al Maashari: 99639264
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features



Walk your way to fitness, health advocate says

Walking is one of the most underrated forms of exercises that when made a routine has tremendous benefits not only environmentally but especially health-wise. This health advocate shares some important details why you should make walking a habit...**P20**

ART

READ

CITY OF THE DEAD

BY JONATHAN KELLERMAN

The 37th book in the Alex Delaware series. Delaware and Sturgis investigate a double homicide.

Solo exhibition for German-born photographer Tillmans at MoMA

NEW YORK'S MUSEUM of Modern Art (MoMA) is preparing a solo exhibition featuring German-born photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, the museum said Thursday.

The show titled "Wolfgang Tillmans: To look without

fear" will open in mid-September and will feature some 350 works from the past 40 years, including photos, videos and multimedia installations.

"From ecstatic images of nightlife to abstract images made without a camera,



sensitive portraits to architectural slide projections, documents of social movements to windowsill still lifes, astronomical phenomena to intimate nudes, Tillmans has explored seemingly every imagina-

ble genre of photography, continually experimenting with how to make new pictures," MoMA said in a statement.

"I see my installations as a reflection of the way I see, the way I perceive or want

to perceive my environment," the 51-year has said. "They're also always a world that I want to live in."

The artist, who is also heavily involved in social causes, became known in the early 1990s with photographs centred on youth and pop culture.

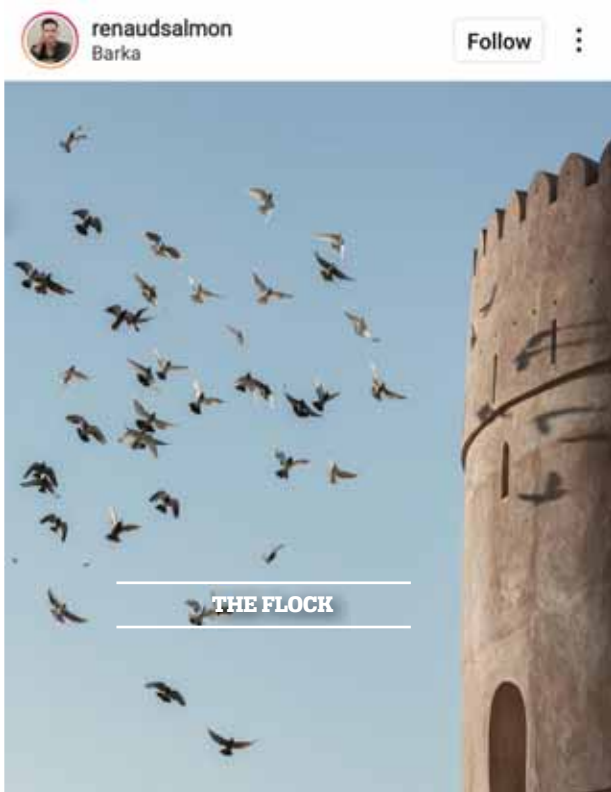
He is considered one of the most important contemporary artists today, and is the recipient of numerous awards including as the Goslar Kaiserring award for modern art in Germany and Britain's Turner Prize.

The exhibition will run through the end of the year and will continue on to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. — **dpa**



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENVIRONMENT

ESO renews commitment to protecting Arabian Sea Humpback Whale



IN RECOGNITION of World Whale Day on February 20, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is raising awareness about one of Oman's most famous cetaceans, the Arabian Sea humpback whale.

ESO will be initiating two projects in 2022, both designed to support the conservation of the Arabian Sea humpback whale.

The first project aims to implement a Conservation Management Plan, working with local authorities to implement alternative solutions to harmful marine practices that threaten the whales' survival. Complementing the conservation plan, ESO will also be launching a 2-year capacity building programme designed to develop the next generation of cetacean researchers and activists.

The Arabian Sea humpback whale is one of 20 species of marine mammals found in Oman's waters. Classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List of threatened species in 2008, it is estimated to be the smallest and potentially most vulnerable whale population in the world, numbering fewer than 100 individuals. Research supported by ESO has also proven Oman's humpback whales to be the only known population in the world not to migrate between high and low latitudes, staying instead to breed and feed in the waters surrounding Oman.

Since its inception in 2004, ESO has focused on developing a better understanding of the distribution and ecology of the different whales found in Oman's waters. Among its achievements last year, the country's only non-profit organisation focusing on environmental preservation launched the *Marine Mammal Atlas of Oman*, a publication that is the culmination of 20 years of scientific research and serves as an important reference for studies on environmental diversity, while also raising awareness on the species.

Whilst research and monitoring for the Arabian Sea humpback whale will continue, ESO's long history of research means that there is now sufficient scientific information to inform meaningful conservation actions. As a result, the focus of ESO's work going forward will shift to deliver more advocacy and mitigation options to help protect these endangered whales. As a non-profit organisation, ESO continues to rely on the generous support of sponsors and members to deliver this work. For more information on how to support, make a donation, or to find out other ways to get involved, visit eso.org.om.

FASHION

Street styles, neon kick off London Fashion Week



FASHIONISTAS BRAVED gale-force winds in London on Friday to attend the first Fashion Week shows, with a schedule dominated by up-and-coming young designers. Gusts ripped through the streets of the British capital as crowds, wrapped up in coats and hats, flocked to the week's first live shows with attendees, which make up about half of the five-day event's timetable.

It kicked off with sustainable label SOHUMAN, created by Spaniard Javier Aparici, who promises "radical transparency" on the factories used to make his garments.

He showed an ultra-feminine collection of cocktail dresses in red and black featuring applique flowers, sheer panels and giant bows.

Young British designers then came under the spotlight, with Saul Nash showcasing a relaxed but luxurious streetwear collection of merino wool tracksuits, hoodies, puffer coats and scarves, many emblazoned with his Saul logo.

With a background in dance and performance, Nash graduated from the Royal College of Art in menswear in 2018.

Another British brand, Poster Girl, known for ultra-revealing cutaway shapewear-style dresses worn by celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and Dua Lipa, held its first catwalk show with an apres-ski theme.

Poster Girl designers Francesca Capper and

Natasha Somerville, who studied at the prestigious Central Saint Martins fashion college, showed their neon-hued creations in a freezing building due for demolition.

Models in tube dresses and leggings wrapped up in fake fur coats and puffer jackets. There was even a ski suit, accessorised with bright pink high heeled sandals. Fans took pictures on their phones and whistled in approval.

BRANDS MISSING SS Daley, a brand based in Liverpool in northwest England recently founded by Steven Stokey Daley, went for classic unisex tailoring, featuring wide baggy trousers and Sherlock Holmes-style checked overcoats.

Meanwhile Matty Bovan, another northern designer from the city of York, showed an Americana-themed collection with models wearing eccentric assemblages melding baseball jackets, gingham, denim and colourful crochet.

Missing from this week's events are several of the best-known brands in British fashion, including Burberry, Mulberry and Victoria Beckham.

Burberry has announced that it will hold a separate live show in London in March, while Beckham has not participated in London Fashion Week, even digitally, for a year.

She has complained of the high cost of catwalk shows.

Another major name in British fashion, Oswald Boateng, announced at the last minute that he will hold a comeback show on Monday.

The former creative director for Givenchy menswear, who was the first black head designer at a luxury fashion house, has not shown a collection in London for 12 years.

As sustainability and upcycling become industry buzzwords, Britain's Bethany Williams and Ireland's Richard Malone will present shows on Tuesday focusing on reused materials.

Williams' materials include abandoned festival tents for garments and book waste for bags while Malone's creations feature fragments of materials including scrap leather.

Following in the footsteps of designer brands such as Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana, meanwhile, Serbian designer Roksanda Ilincic has announced she will sell non-fungible tokens (NFTs), offering digital ownership of a 3D image of a dress from her label. — AFP

THE OPERA

Omar Khairat to showcase how he masterfully bridges contemporary Egyptian, Western music at ROHM



COMPOSER AND PIANIST

Omar Khairat has long held the Arab music world in thrall with his unique and compelling sound exploring ways in which to combine the age-old, much-loved classics of such artists as Umm Kulthum and Mohammed Abdel Wahab with his own voice so that it continues to resonate with audiences from all around the world. The resulting style has garnered Omar Khairat widespread acclaim. His music bridges contemporary Egyptian and Western music.

Khairat will be performing at the Royal Opera House Muscat on Thursday and Friday, February 24 and 25 with the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, in an even lauded as a great opportunity to see this master in action.

Audiences are invited to embrace a beautiful blend of cultures with a master of art. Winner of awards both locally and regionally, most notably the Middle East Music Award and the 1993 Oman Award, Omar Khairat will perform arrangements of works

by Mohamed Abdel Wahab such as Men Gheir Leh and songs of Umm Kulthum such as Enta Omri.

Performing with the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) would definitely enhance the whole experience as ROSO have established itself as a mature orchestra, demonstrating a versatility that is widely acknowledged.

Ticket holders are invited to attend Coffee and Dates at the opera house on Tuesday, February 22 at 7 pm, in the opera house. This event offers fans the opportunity to gather with Omar Khairat and hear him talk about his life and musical influences.

All visits to the opera house are conducted under the guidelines of the Supreme Committee responsible for measures to tackle the development of Covid-19. Social distancing is maintained throughout the building and the wearing of face-masks is mandatory.

For more details, please download the app or check the ROHM website.



Walk your way to fitness, health advocate says

By Kabeer Yousuf

Taking a stroll along the beach or parking lot in the mornings or evenings is not a leisure activity alone anymore. It is a subtle exercise that gives one immense benefit to the mind as well as the body.

If your target is to get rid of the ailments or to protect oneself from various conditions, to control high blood pressure and heart diseases, or to safeguard from stroke, cancer and type 2 diabetes, the quickest remedy is walking.

Some of the benefits of walking at a good pace help you maintain a healthy weight and lose body fat, improve cardiovascular fitness, enhance the bones and muscles and improve muscle endurance depending upon the pace, duration, steps and the like in your walk, according to experts.

"Walking is one of the most underrated forms of exercise and it is one of the best and most economical forms of exercise. Regular walking is not only a good, pleasant, and productive exercise but also spawns ideas and creative thinking that can be pinned down", shared Ishwar S Deshmukh, Head of Physical Education Department Indian School Salalah.

He explained, one part at a time, one day at a time, we can accomplish any goal we set for ourselves. Walking is low impact and with minimal equipment can be done at any time of the day at your own pace. You can be out and walk without worrying about the risks that are analogous with some more robust forms of exercise. Walking is also a great form of physical activity for people who are overweight, elderly or who

haven't exercised for a long time. This fun and healthy activity can be made an entertaining and societal part of your lifestyle.

"Make walking a daily routine with the same amount of energy at your convenient time. When walking becomes a societal part of your lifestyle, it boosts the urge to walk daily in an individual. People sometimes find keep-

The pedometer on the phone helped him a lot to achieve the target in the stipulated time.

The doctor said that the feeling of satisfaction upon completion dominates the feeling of exhaustion. The daily walk of 10 km boosted him and became a source of motivation to test his physical and mental strength. This will lead to him eventually participat-



ing an activity diary or log makes it easier in pursuing this workout. Undoubtedly, walking is an activity that one loves to do at his/ her own pace," said the doctor who is also a passionate peripatetic.

"The pandemic lockdown was a Blessing in disguise for me as I got into the habit of regularly walking in the morning. Initially, I enjoyed the walk at my own pace by listening to the music in nature", he said.

After making this a routine, he started exerting himself by going at a greater pace with the increase in distance, setting a daily target of 10 km in less than 80 minutes.

ing in the 'Virtual Mini Marathon' on September 19, 2020. Although it was a run, he walked to complete the stretch in less than 3 hours.

"While the physical benefits are notable, the mental boost that can be gleaned from adding a walk to your daily routine may be more immediate. Walking improves fitness, prevents weight gain, depression and fatigue, improves mood and endurance, helps in blood circulation, lowers your disease risk, increases your heart health, reduces stress on joints and above all makes you happy as compared to running," the doctor added.

In honour of one of his favourite activities, he lists some five reasons to lace on some comfortable shoes and hit the pavement/path/track everyday.

1) Your Health — Moderate daily exercise is essential for good health, and walking is a great exercise. Of course, most people know exercise is great for the heart. It may surprise you that the walkers are two-and-a-half times less likely to die of cancer than their sedentary peers.

2) The Environment — Walking is even easier on the earth than cycling. No one has to mine molybdenum, titanium, aluminium, or smelt steel for you to hit the pavement. All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes (which you probably own anyway). The more trips we make on foot, the cleaner our air, water and planet will be.

3) Fresh Air — I believe one develops behavioural problems due to lack of outdoors activities. Spending time in nature is undoubtedly good for children and adults alike. A daily walk allows you to note the gradual shifts in the seasons, watch the sunrise or set, keep track of the moon's cycles, breathe in the fresh air, explore the vast variety of plants and animals, and just be a part of the natural world.

4) Family and Neighbourhood Connections — A daily after-dinner stroll is not only good for digestion but also a great time to catch up with your spouse or kids and get to know your neighbours.

5) Last but not certainly the least, it's easy — My favourite thing about walking is how easy it is to incorporate into one's daily life. Just lace on some shoes set a comfortable pace, and enjoy the scenery.

Dr Deshmukh concluded with a quote: "As you start to walk out on the way, the way appears".