



HM HOSTS DINNER ON ARMED FORCES DAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, hosted a dinner at Al Barakah Palace on Saturday on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day.

The ceremony comes as a felicitation by His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, to all military formations and units of the Armed Forces on this glorious day. It symbolises his Royal recognition for their great dedication in performing the sacred duty to defend the homeland, protect its security and ensure its stability and safety. It is a manifestation of the Armed Forces’ role in safeguarding the national achievements to retain Oman’s status as an oasis of security, harmony and peace under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan.

The ceremony was attended by the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, as well as some ministers, commanders of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), Royal Oman Police and senior military and civil officers. — ONA

HM greeted on Armed Forces Day by Shihab



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Saturday received greetings on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day (December 11) from His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, reading as follows:

“Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, peace be upon you.

Upon the advent of December 11 (the Armed Forces Day) we, as Omanis, commemorate this eternal anniversary in Oman’s history. It was the day when Your Majesty’s heroic Armed Forces gave the best examples of sacrifice so that the nation could press ahead with its ever renewed renaissance.

On this glorious occasion, I am honoured to convey the most heartfelt greetings of the Armed Forces and all personnel of the Ministry of Defence to Your

Majesty, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect Your Majesty and endow you with continuous good health and happiness.

YOUR MAJESTY, THE SUPREME COMMANDER

The loyal people, though proud of the civilisation of their nation, have never constrained themselves to the past, but they kept creating milestones on the road to progress and prosperity. The values enshrined in this national anniversary will constitute a source of inspiration for the present and future generations. It will comprise strong impetus for every genuine action aimed at building a better future for Oman.

Your Majesty, While celebrating this glorious event, the Armed Forces express pride and deep gratitude for Your Majesty’s visit to one of its facilities and making it the venue of the 51st National Day. The Armed Forces cherish

the achievements they made and the modernisation introduced to all its land, air and navy units so that they could remain the strong bastion of the nation’s gains and its blessed renaissance. The Armed Forces are steadfast in their allegiance to Your Majesty and they pledge to follow your footsteps in all that realises Oman’s progress and prosperity.

YOUR MAJESTY, THE SUPREME COMMANDER

Your gallant Armed Forces, Firqat Forces and all personnel of the Ministry of Defence promise to remain loyal to Your Majesty and sacrifice everything dear in protecting Oman. They pledge to hoist high the banners of its dignity as they march forward under the wise leadership of Your Majesty, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect Your Majesty and grant you a long life and good health.” — ONA



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Armed Forces Day celebrated



NATION CELEBRATES ARMED FORCES DAY

THE SAF HAS BEEN CELEBRATING THE EVENT SINCE 1975, TAKING PRIDE IN THE PROGRESS MADE WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS AND ITS NATIONAL ROLES THAT SET THE STAGE FOR DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Saturday marked the 11th of December Anniversary, the Armed Forces Day. This historic occasion epitomises the national accomplishments made by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF).

The SAF has been celebrating the event since 1975, taking pride in the progress made within its own ranks and its national roles that set the stage for domestic development and prosperity.

On this glorious occasion, the SAF organises activities to showcase the modernisation of its units under the Royal patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander.

The 11th of December constitutes a luminous pedestal in the Sultanate of Oman's military history. It was the lantern that lit the flame of peace and security in the country, and it saw the launch of the comprehensive nation-building process.

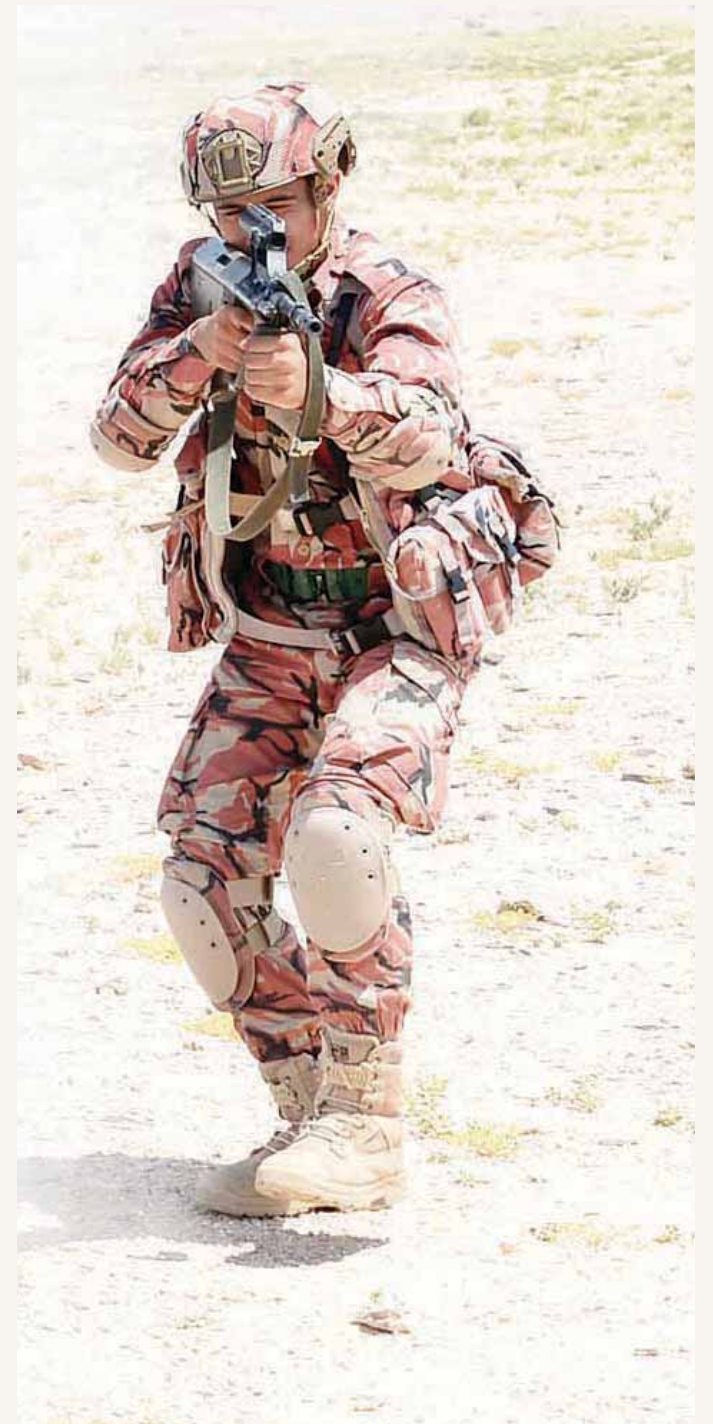
This day will remain as a source of inspiration for values of truthful patriotism that enabled Omanis to reap the fruits of good deeds and proceed with spirited, unsubdued wills and invincible determination to revive the glories of the Sultanate of Oman and shape its future.

The Armed Forces Day is a strong reminder of the national epic masterminded by the late Sultan Qaboos and realised by the valiant soldiers of the country at the beginning of the renaissance, which has been gathering momentum every day within this well-guarded fort.

The Sultanate of Oman is still racing with time to attain the prime of modernisation and prosperity for its citizens under the astute leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, May the Almighty Allah protect him.

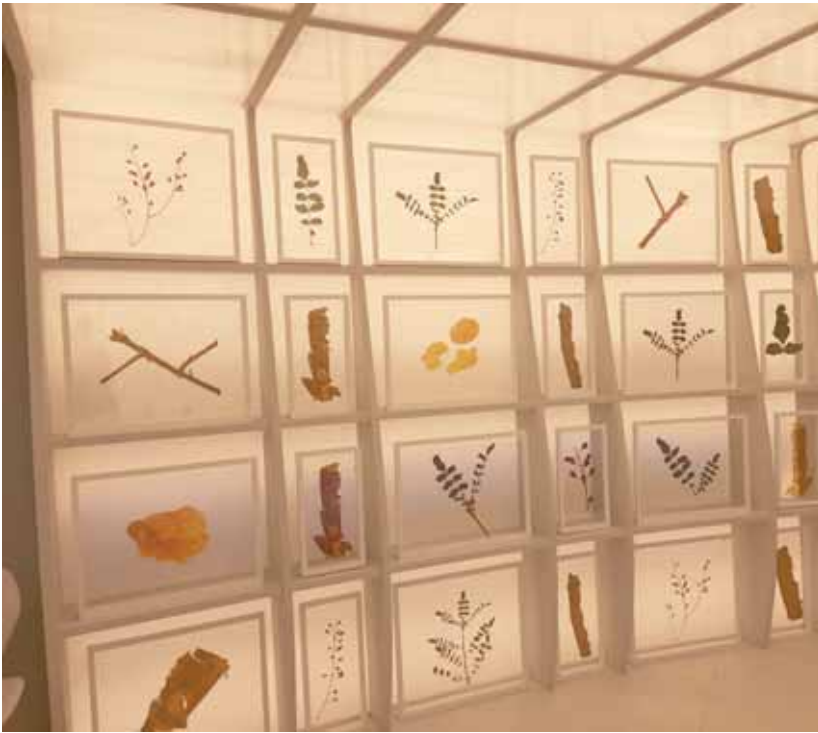
On this memorable day, every Omani revels in the accomplishments of the SAF and cherishes its sacrifices in protecting every inch of the country's territory.

The SAF, today and every day, reiterates its firm resolve to uphold its sacred duty of protecting the gains and sanctities of the nation. — ONA



Showcasing unique features of the nation

Expo 2020 has given an opportunity for the Sultanate of Oman to focus on its unique selling features – friendly and welcoming people, simple tourist visa regime, a home away from home for many nationalities and its specially gifted natural beauty



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman's strategic presence at Expo 2020 is helping the visitors to get a glimpse of what this gateway to the Arabian Peninsula has to offer to the world.

As the Expo received over four million visitors (as per ticket sales) by the end of November, it gave an opportunity for the Sultanate of Oman to focus on its unique features — friendly and welcoming people, simple tourist visa regime, a home away from home for many nationalities and its specially gifted natural beauty.

As per official estimates, 518,312 people have visited the Sultanate of Oman's Pavillion as of December 4.

Representatives from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion manning the Sultanate of Oman Pavillion, told the *Observer*, "The response has been great and people do come with curiosities and questions about the Sultanate of Oman. As the country is just next door from the Expo venue, I am sure a sizeable number of people will make a point to visit the Sultanate of Oman in these months."

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in association with Oman Air, has been offering tourism packages and promotions for visitors of all ages and nationalities.

A South Korean visitor at the venue said, "I am told that the Sultanate of Oman can be easily accessed by road with visa on arrival options. I will surely make a point to visit the country if time and the situation permits."

Located in the Mobility District, on the occasion of the 51st National Day, the Oman Pavillion paid tribute to its 'gift' to the world — frankincense.

PAVILLION STRUCTURE

The Pavillion structure resembles the tree that produces the precious resin, while the interior has five zones detailing how frankincense has benefited the country, including its uses in medicine, food, and cosmetics. The pavilion is both mystical and futuristic, taking visitors on



a journey connecting people and minds across time and place.

The Omani Pavillion design is an abstracted representation of the Frankincense Tree and according to officials for the first time, the Conceptual design was developed by young Omani architects — Alya al Battashi and Rihab al Zakwani.

Going by the mood of the visitors, the Pavillion has been successful in telling the story of the Sultanate of Oman, rooted in a respect for the richness of the past, inspired by the innovation of the present, and confidence in the future.

As part of the National Day celebrations at Al Wasl Plaza, investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman were introduced to business leaders and investors from around the world, especially in construction, industry, transport, aviation, and free zones — sectors that are experiencing continued growth.

According to organisers, visitors have been taking advantage of the weekday Pass, while the Expo School Programme has been welcoming 200,000 pupils from private and public schools across the UAE.

Several high-profile world delegates, including heads of various states, have been visiting the expo on various occasions.

Expo 2020 also joined forces with UNICEF and the UAE Ministry of Community Development to celebrate World Children's Day with a slate of youth-led festivities that culminated in a spectacular concert at Al Wasl Plaza, which included Lebanese singer Yara, UNICEF Regional Ambassador for the Middle East and North Africa.

Moving the country forward to digital transformation

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The digital economy is to contribute 10 per cent to national economy by 2040, as per the Oman Economic Vision 2040, but there should be more participation and transformation towards the Big Data and AI to move rapidly to the objective, say experts.

Since 2012, Oman Data Park has been providing services for the public and private sector organisations to preserve data while being hosted in the Sultanate of Oman complying with data confidentiality and cloud security at the same time providing cyber security with 24/7 team operating as well as ensuring the data and infrastructure hosted at Oman Data Park are secure as per local and international standards.

The year 2021 saw the move

towards Artificial Intelligence through Nebula AI.

"Nebula AI is able to provide quick infrastructure for any corporate that wishes to deploy AI solutions. For AI applications an infrastructure is needed that provides GPU — graphical processing unit and not the normal CPU — central processing unit. The GPU power is ten times higher than what is provided in our laptops and laptop machine.

We are taking the Sultanate of Oman forward to digital economy space as per Oman Vision 2040," explained Maqbool al Wahaibi, CEO, Oman Data Park.

According to him, whatever is being done at Oman Data Park is fulfilment of the strategic KPI, key performance indicator that has been set up by 2040 Economic Vision.

The path towards the vision

does have challenges and one of them is skill set.

"Getting the right skill set is a challenge especially when we are speaking about futuristic components and applications. For instance, it is not easy to acquire experts in AI in the area of technology or as data scientists. Data scientists are people who can understand data, shape it, interpret it and are able to explain what can be done with the data. So it is more on the analytical part. Finding the expertise is one of the major challenges," he noted.

FOCUSING NATIONALLY

Another element is to have the demand higher and that is being mitigated by focusing nationally and not just locally.

It is about time all sectors got onto the wagon of the future, he added.

Al Wahaibi pointed out that cloud is the starting point for any transformation as one cannot be part of the fourth industrial revolution without entering cloud.

"We need to see more seriousness and willingness from all sectors and not just the private sector. There must be more entries from the government sector towards cloud. They can focus more on the core business rather than the IT part of the equation. For instance, the focus could be on using AI for maximising their services to the consumers while outsourcing the IT infrastructure to the right parties.

If everyone understood this equation, then we would be able to move forward rapidly," he urged.

A concern amongst the corporate is the cost of being part of the cloud.

To that the chief executive

We are taking the Sultanate of Oman forward to digital economy space as per Oman Vision 2040

MAQBOOL AL WAHAIBI

CEO, Oman Data Park

officer responded by saying that everyone demands lower prices.

"We listen to them and that is why we have been evolving since the beginning by introducing different options. Today Oman Data Park has four options in cloud services. Each option has its own pricing method. Nebula Lagoon is very cost effective and that is why we are seeing such a huge demand for it. It is engineered to satisfy client expectations. We are still evolving and scrutinising our pricing method. At the end of the day we want our clients to focus on the value rather than the price. We do not just provide services but secured cloud services as well as manage the infrastructure. We can tailor the services and just in case of any problem, we are in constant engagement with the client not like an off shore service," explained Maqbool al Wahaibi.

Legitimate rights of Palestinians highlighted at OIC meet

ISTANBUL: The Council of Oman took part in the 16th session of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states (PUIC), held during December 9-10 in Istanbul, Turkey.

During his speech at the session, Said bin Hamad al Saadi, Deputy Chairman of Majlis Ashshura and head of the Council of Oman's delegation at the session, affirmed that Jerusalem will continue to be of an Arab history and identity despite the attempts to erase its identity. He pointed to the Sultanate of Oman's permanent stance towards the



legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people to establish a fully-sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Al Saadi stressed the importance of prioritising and adopting the language of dialogue as a way to achieve political solutions for the Islamic

nation, in a way that would ensure that people continue their developmental path amid security, peace and stability. He called for averting extremism and tensions, and rejecting violence and hatred while handling issues in order to reach societies where brotherhood and stability prevail.

A tale of Sultanate of Oman-Saudi friendship etched on mountains



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Nadhirah al Harthy, whose name is a synonym for conquering the world's peaks, has a tale of friendship to tell, a story where humanity and compassion are highlighted and can be etched in the annals of the Sultanate of Oman-Saudi friendship history.

Nadhirah made the national flag of the Sultanate of Oman fly high atop the world's 8th peak at 8,163 metres ASL, Manaslu, in Nepal in September, 2021.

But when she became the first Arab woman and the second Omani to reach the summit of Mount Ama Dablam (6,812 metres), which is one of the highest Himalayan peaks in the hilly country of Nepal in May 2019, it was the company of Saudi mountaineer Mona Shahab who stood by her and kept the team going till the zenith of the freezing point and leave a mark there.

"Mona Shahab is nothing short of the expression 'human

embodiment of angel' because we all were so impressed by her kindness, love, care and above all, very ambitious," said Nadhirah.

The "Dream of Everest" team also had Joyce Azzam and Nelly Attar of Lebanon as part of all Arab women's team to conquer the wilderness of the world's tallest mountain.

"Mona had been a perfect companion and she extended all mutual support and was an epitome of true Saudi hospitality," said Nadhirah.

Mona Shahab, the second Saudi woman to successfully summit the Mount Everest, hails from the Eastern Province in Saudi and was born and brought up in the kingdom. She started a GoFundMe page for her Everest climb that raised heavily for charity across the world, besides Marwa Fayed's Toy Run (MFTR) which seeks to empower underprivileged children in Egypt.

"What I have noticed about Mona is that she always climbed

for a cause. Be it raising funds for orphans or to support the victims of any disaster or for people suffering from a war, she would be in the forefront of the support."

After their joint venturing atop the Everest, she has been branded as an inspiration for thousands of women in the Kingdom and always wanted to climb the Sultanate of Oman's Jabal Shams," said Nadhirah.

She had climbed four of the "Seven Summits" and raised more than \$350,000 for charities before she set out for the mission to scale the tallest mountain in the world.

"This friendship that me an Omani and Mona a Saudi will get stronger and stronger as we are planning many such international records between the two countries. She always tells the youth to follow one's dream whatever it may be and at whatever the age he or she is because only your attitude can limit your altitude," Al Harthy adds.

Job tests held in North Al Sharqiyah

IBRA: In response to the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to pay attention to national job-seekers, the Ministry of Labour conducted tests and interviews for a number of job vacancies in the public sector at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate on Saturday.

Salim bin Khalfan al Wuhaibi, head of the team tasked with managing tests and interviews at the Ministry of Labour, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that 307 holders of bachelor's degree and post-GED diploma are vying for 41 job vacancies at a number of government units. The candidates included 286 applicants from North Al Sharqiyah Governorate contending for 29 jobs vacancies at the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences. This is in addition to another 21 applicants vying for 12 job vacancies at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. — ONA



SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment, in 'as is where is' condition. The items identified are presently located at their Al Khoud yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 13/12/2021, 14/12/2021 and 15/12/2021 between 8.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 15/12/2021 at 5pm. at our Al Khoud office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 24525345 / 24525314 / 24525303, Mobile: 91354151

TWO RESCUED BY ROP AVIATION



The Royal Oman Police (ROP) aviation wing has rescued two citizens who were stranded in a mountain in the Wilayat of Nakhl and transferred them to a safe place, and are reportedly in good health.



North Al Batna Governorate Suhar Municipality

Advertisement

Companies specialized in the field of this Tender may obtain tender documents for the following tenders, on any working day between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 Noon, from **Quantity Surveying & Contracts Office, Suhar Municipality Building** on payment of non-refundable tender fee as noted below:

Tender No.	Description of Work	Tender Fee (non refundable)	Start Date for Selling Tender	Last Date for Selling Tender	Site Visit Date	Return Date
PRS/21/026	Supply of Cartridges, Toners & Maintenance of Computer's, Printer's, Scanning Machines	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/027	Supply of Toners & Maintenance of Fax & Copy Machines	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/028	Supply of Tyres	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/029	Propose of Lathe Works	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/030	Supply of Oil & Lubricants	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/031	Supply of Vehicle Batteries	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/032	Supply & Installation of GPS Automated Vehicle locations	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/033	Hire of Mechanic	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/034	Cleaning & washing of Vehicles	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/035	Supply of Cloths	R.O. 25	Sunday 19/12/2021	Monday 03/01/2022	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/036	Cleaning of Buildings	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/037	Supply of Chemical Items and Equipments	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/038	Supply of Electrical Material	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/039	Maintenance of Air Conditioning Unites (Package, Split & Window Units)	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/040	Maintenance of Buildings	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/041	Maintenance of Traffic Lights	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/042	Maintenance of Street Lights	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/043	Hiring of Technical Staff (Land Survey & Draughtsman)	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/044	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone A	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/045	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone B	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/046	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone C	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/047	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone D	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/048	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone E	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/049	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone F	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/050	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone G	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/051	Maintenance Works of Soft and Hard Landscaping in Suhar - 2022, Zone H	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/052	Supply of Sign Boards	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/053	Insurance of Vehicles & Equipments, Accident Insurance for Staff, Buildings & Properties	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 23/12/2021	-	Sunday 26/12/2021
PRS/21/054	Hire of Labour to Suhar Municipality - Zone 1	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/055	Hire of Labour to Suhar Municipality - Zone 2	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/056	Hire of Labour to Suhar Municipality - Zone 3	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	-	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/057	The Bidding for Operation, Maintenance & Cleaning of Central Slaughterhouse - 2022	R.O. 25	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022
PRS/21/058	Maintenance of Internal Roads	R.O. 50	Sunday 12/12/2021	Thursday 30/12/2021	Sunday 02/01/2022	Thursday 06/01/2022

The **Form of Tender** (in small envelope) under wax sealed cover shall be placed in the tender box location in our **Quantity Surveying & Contracts Office, by 10.00 a.m.** All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Governor of Al-Batinah North and no other marks.

The Tenderers shall submit with Form of the Tender (**Financial Offer**) a **Certified Cheque or Tender Bond** in the sum of 1% of the tender value valid for **90 days**, issued by a locally registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman. Tenders without such bond shall be rejected.

Comments:

- has the right to distribution items or works or quantities there of between more than one contractor without giving reasons to the bidder.
- The Tender Committee is not obliged to accept the lowest or any tender that may.

LIFE IN SHREDS



A woman looks through a window shattered by a blast inside the Burj al Shemali refugee camp for Palestinians outside the southern Lebanese port city of Tyre, on Saturday. — AFP

Libya delays candidate list as likely election postponement looms

TRIPOLI: Libya's election commission said on Saturday it would not publish a list of presidential candidates until after it settles some legal issues, leaving almost no time to hold the vote as planned on December 24.

While most Libyan and foreign figures involved in the process have continued to publicly call for the election to go ahead on schedule, politicians, analysts and diplomats all say in private that this would be very hard to achieve.

Significant delays could increase the risk of derailing the wider peace process in Libya, though a disputed election conducted without clear agreement on rules or eligible candidates also poses immediate dangers to stability.

"Given the sensitivities of this stage and the political and security circumstances surrounding it, the commission is keen to exhaust all means of litigation to ensure its decisions comply with issued judgements," the commission said in a statement.

Less than two weeks before the vote, there would

be almost no time remaining for the final list of candidates from the 98 who registered to campaign across Libya, giving a huge advantage to those who are already well-known.

Disputes over fundamental rules governing the election have continued throughout the process, including over the voting timetable, the eligibility of major candidates and the eventual powers of the next president and parliament.

Without any commonly accepted legal framework, it was not clear how far rules would be based on the UN-backed roadmap that originally demanded the election or on a law issued by the parliament speaker in September but rejected by other factions.

The process of ruling on the eligibility of candidates has laid bare major vulnerabilities in the process. The commission initially ruled out 25 candidates and set a period of about two weeks for judicial appeals.

Rival factions have accused each other of intimidating or bribing judicial and administrative officials to sway the final list of candidates. — Reuters

Tunisia told to return to democratic institutions

TUNIS: The envoys of seven Western states plus the European Union urged Tunisia on Friday to respect "fundamental freedoms" and set a timeline for a return to democratic institutions.

Tunisia's President Kais Saied on July 25 sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers, following months of economic and political turmoil worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

Four and a half months later, he has yet to declare a clear timeline for his next steps, deepening the uncertainty hanging over the country's battered economy and sparking fears for political freedoms in the birthplace of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

In a statement on Friday, diplomatic mission heads of the G7 nations plus the EU said they "strongly support the people of Tunisia in their pursuit of effective, democratic, and transparent governance". — AFP

Palestinians vote in local elections

RAMALLAH: Palestinians held municipal elections in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Saturday in a rare democratic exercise and amid rising anger with President Mahmoud Abbas after he cancelled planned legislative and presidential votes earlier this year.

More than 400,000 Palestinians were eligible to cast ballots for representatives in 154 village councils in the West Bank, where Abbas' Palestinian Authority has limited self-rule. Municipal votes are typically held every four or five years.

Municipal elections are not being held in Gaza, whose rulers Hamas are boycotting the vote amid a rift with Abbas' Fatah party. The 86-year-old president postponed municipal votes in major West Bank cities, such as Ramallah, that could have been seen as a referendum on Abbas' rule.

"These elections cannot be an alternative to legislative elections," said Ahmad Issa, 23, outside a polling station in the West Bank village of Bir Nabala, adding that a legislative vote could offer "a horizon for the youth" and lead to reforms.

In the village of Beit Kahlil,



A woman casts her vote at a polling station during municipal elections in the village of Baitain, East of the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, on Saturday. — AFP

women and men lined up outside a polling station, some in facemasks to protect against Covid-19. Once inside, they placed voting papers in envelopes and dropped them into ballot boxes, dipping their fingers in ink as they left in a move to prevent

people voting twice.

Abbas, whose support has sagged in opinion polls, drew widespread anger in April when he cancelled legislative and presidential elections scheduled for the summer, citing Israeli curbs on Palestinian voting in

East Jerusalem.

Abbas' rivals, including Hamas, accused him of using the Jerusalem voting dispute as an excuse to cancel elections that polls showed he and his party would lose to the Islamist group. Abbas, who has ruled by decree

for over a decade, denies this.

A spokesman for Hamas, which boycotted previous municipal elections in 2012 and 2017, said the group "refuses to participate in partial elections that are tailored to Fatah, and conducted by the Palestinian Authority," calling on Abbas to reschedule the cancelled summer votes.

Hamas has enjoyed a surge in popularity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since fighting an 11-day war with Israel in May. The group won student council elections this year at several top West Bank universities, an important barometer of support.

The Palestinians seek statehood in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, territory Israel captured in a 1967 war. Israel annexed East Jerusalem in a move not recognised internationally, and peace talks between the two sides broke down in 2014.

Hamas won the Palestinians' last legislative election in 2006. That victory laid the ground for a political rupture. Hamas seized Gaza after fighting a short civil war there with Fatah in 2007 and has ruled the coastal enclave ever since. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Iran is serious in nuclear talks

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday that Tehran was serious in its nuclear talks with world powers in Vienna, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Indirect US-Iranian talks to revive a 2015 Iran nuclear deal resumed on Thursday in the Austrian capital.

Diplomats from France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China shuttle between the two sides because Tehran refuses direct contact with Washington.



A European source, speaking on condition of anonymity, suggested on Friday that Iran had agreed to continue talks from where they left off in June. Iranian officials denied this.

ABUJA

Emirates runs into new restrictions in Nigeria

Nigeria has imposed new restrictions on Emirates airline flights, just over a week after it removed a nine-month suspension of all the carrier's flights into and out of its territory, the aviation authority said on Friday.

Musa Nuhu, director general of Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority said in a statement that Nigeria had approved Emirates' request to have 21 flights a week into Nigeria.

But United Arab Emirates



declined an application by local carrier Air Peace to fly to Sharjah International Airport three times a week. Instead, UAE gave the airline one weekly slot, citing non-availability of arrival slots at the airport.

BEIRUT

Authorities seize captagon shipments

Security forces in Lebanon and Syria said on Saturday that they had seized two separate shipments of the banned stimulant captagon, the latest in a string of similar busts.

Lebanon's Internal Security Forces said it "thwarted an attempt to smuggle four million captagon pills" hidden in a coffee shipment destined for Saudi Arabia via Jordan.

The pills were confiscated following raids this week on a storage facility in Bir Hassan,



a neighbourhood near Beirut's southern suburbs, the ISF said on Twitter.

It said it arrested two men behind the operation, including one who was trying to flee the country through Beirut's airport.

In brief

■ NEW YORK

**MYANMAR CITIZEN
PLEADS GUILTY IN PLOT
TO ATTACK ENVOY**

A citizen of Myanmar on Friday pleaded guilty in a plot to attack or kill the country's pro-democracy UN ambassador, who has refused junta orders to quit, US officials said.

In August, Ye Hein Zaw, a resident of New York in his early twenties, conspired with two others to force Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun to resign or, if he refused, to kill him, according to prosecutors. Zaw agreed to pay \$5,000 for the attack, which was foiled by US investigators.

Zaw admitted in court that he "participated in a plot to injure or kill Myanmar's ambassador to the UN in a planned attack that was to take place on American soil," US Attorney Damian Williams said.

■ BEIJING

**CHINA ORDERS COVID-19
TESTS FOR TRAVEL WITH
SOME BORDER CITIES**

China has ordered some border cities to beef up vigilance against Covid-19 with measures such as mandatory testing for travellers, in its effort to prevent clusters caused by viruses arriving from abroad.

Since mid-October, locally-transmitted symptomatic cases have risen to more than 2,000, with several small northern towns on the borders with Russia or Mongolia, among the hardest-hit, as health resources there are sparser than in major cities.

"There have been multiple local outbreaks in China recently, all caused by viruses imported from overseas via cities with ports of entry," the government said in a notice.

■ FRANKFURT

**AFGHANS OFFERED
COURSES AT DIGITAL
UNIVERSITY IN EXILE**

A digital university in exile is to offer Afghan students worldwide a chance to continue their education. This concept was the focus of a two-day conference attended by representatives of the Afghan education system in the German financial hub Frankfurt on Friday and Saturday.

Participant Sajiya Behgam Amin was an adviser to the Afghan prime minister on women's and youth issues until August. Like many of her compatriots, she is now in exile, having fled Taliban rule, but she keeps in touch with her former female students at Kabul University by e-mail.

Donors back \$280m transfer for Afghan food, health

WASHINGTON: Donors agreed on Friday to transfer \$280 million from a frozen, trust fund to the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF to support nutrition and health in Afghanistan, the World Bank said, as it seeks to help a country facing famine and economic freefall.

The World Bank-administered Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund will this year give \$180 million to WFP to scale up food security and nutrition operations and \$100 million to UNICEF to provide essential health services, the bank said in a statement.

The money would aim to support food security and health programmes in Afghanistan as it sinks into a severe economic and humanitarian crisis that accelerated in August when the Taliban overran the country as the Western-backed government collapsed and the last US troops withdrew.

The United States and other donors cut off financial aid on which Afghanistan became dependent during 20 years of war and more than \$9 billion of the country's hard currency assets were frozen.

The United Nations is warning that nearly 23 million people — about 55 per cent of the population — are facing extreme levels of hunger, with nearly 9 million at



An Afghan hawker selling balloons walks along a path in a ground in Chaman-e-Hozori area in Kabul. — AFP

risk of famine as winter takes hold in the impoverished, landlocked country.

Using reconstruction trust fund money and channelling it through the WFP and UNICEF, both part of the UN family, appears to be a way to get funding into the country for basic needs in a manner that does not necessarily implicate US sanctions against the Taliban.

"This decision is the first step to repurpose funds in the ARTF portfolio to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan at this critical time," the bank said, saying the agencies had presence on the ground to deliver services directly to Afghans in line "with their own policies and procedures."

"These ARTF funds will enable UNICEF to provide 12.5 million

people with basic and essential health services and vaccinate 1 million people, while WFP will be able to provide 2.7 million people with food assistance and nearly 840,000 mothers and children with nutrition assistance," it added.

Earlier on Friday, Reuters reported exclusively that the donors were expected to approve the \$280 million transfer. — **Reuters**

Pakistani Taliban kill policeman after calling off truce

PESHAWAR: A Pakistani policeman was shot dead and another officer was hurt while guarding a polio vaccination team on Saturday, police said, in an attack claimed by the local Taliban a day after they called off a ceasefire with the government.

The militants on Friday ended a truce mediated with the help of the Afghan Taliban, accusing the government of violating the terms of the agreement.

Two men riding a motorcycle opened fire on police officers guarding a two-woman polio inoculation team who were administering vaccines to children in Tank district in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"The gunmen opened fire indiscriminately, killing one policeman on the spot and wounding another," district police officer Sajjad Khan said.

Another local police official, Kamal Shah, confirmed the incident and said the assailants had escaped.

Police guards protecting vaccination teams in Pakistan have come under attack before, mostly from homegrown militants. — **AFP**

US hits Chinese, Myanmar and N Korean companies with curbs

WASHINGTON: The United States has imposed extensive human rights-related sanctions on dozens of people and entities tied to China, Myanmar, North Korea and Bangladesh, and added Chinese artificial intelligence company SenseTime Group to an investment blacklist.

Canada and the United Kingdom joined the United States in imposing sanctions related to human rights abuses in Myanmar, while Washington also imposed the first new sanctions on North Korea under President Joe Biden's administration and targeted Myanmar military entities, among others, in action marking Human Rights Day.

"Our actions today, particularly those in partnership with the United Kingdom and Canada, send a message that democracies around the world will act against those who abuse the power of the state to inflict suffering and repression," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement.

China's embassy in Washington denounced the US move as "serious interference in China's internal affairs" and a "severe violation of basic norms governing international relations."

Embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu said it would do "grave harm to China-US relations" and urged Washington to rescind the decision.

The measures are the latest in a raft of sanctions timed to coincide with Biden's two-day virtual Summit for Democracy, where he announced initiatives to bolster democracy around the world and support for pro-democracy legislation in the United States.



A pro-democracy activist holds an image of Myanmar's ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi as they take part in the "Show Respect for Human Rights in Asia Peace March" in Tokyo on Saturday. — **AFP**

Biden said on Friday that commitments made by some of the more than 100 world leaders at the summit would push back against rising autocracy around the world, fight corruption and promote human rights.

"This is going to help seed fertile ground for democracy to bloom around the world," he said in a speech closing the summit.

The Treasury on Friday added Chinese artificial intelligence company SenseTime to a list of "Chinese military-industrial complex companies," accusing it of having developed facial recognition programmes that can determine a target's ethnicity, with a particular focus on identifying ethnic Uyghurs.

As a result, the company will fall under an investment ban for US investors. SenseTime said in a statement on Saturday that it "strongly opposed the designation and accusations that have been made in connection with

it," calling the accusations "unfounded".

"We have complied with the applicable laws and regulations in relation to our business in all material respects in the jurisdictions where we conduct business," the company said.

MYANMAR, NORTH KOREA

The Treasury said it was imposing sanctions on two Myanmar military entities and an organisation that provides reserves for the military. The Directorate of Defence Industries, one of the entities targeted, makes weapons for the military and police that have been used in a brutal crackdown on opponents of the military's February 1 coup.

The Treasury also targeted four regional chief ministers, including Myo Swe Win, who heads the junta's administration in the Bago region where the Treasury said at least 82 people were killed in a single day in April. — **Reuters**



Farmers cheer as they prepare to leave the protest site at the Delhi-Haryana state border in Singhu on Saturday. — **AFP**

■ SPREADING CHRISTMAS CHEER



Runners dressed as Santa Claus take part in the annual Christmas run in Middelfart, Denmark, on Saturday. The race is 2.5 km long. — AFP

Researchers use ostrich cells to make glowing Covid-19 detection masks

TOKYO: Japanese researchers have developed masks that use ostrich antibodies to detect Covid-19 by glowing under ultraviolet light.

The discovery by Yasuhiro Tsukamoto and his team at Kyoto Prefectural University in western Japan could provide for low-cost testing of the virus at home, they said.

The scientists started by creating a mask filter coated with ostrich antibodies targeting the novel coronavirus, based on previous research showing the

birds have strong resistance to disease.

In a small study, test subjects wore the masks, and after eight hours, the filters were removed and sprayed with a chemical that glows under ultraviolet light if the virus is present.

The filters worn by people infected with Covid-19 glowed around the nose and mouth areas.

The team hopes to further develop the masks so that they will glow automatically, without special lighting, if the virus is

detected.

Tsukamoto, a veterinary professor and the president of the university, has studied ostriches for years, looking for ways to adapt their immunity power to fight bird flu, allergies, and other diseases.

Tsukamoto told the Kyodo news agency he discovered his own positivity for Covid-19 after he wore one of the special masks and found that it glowed when checked.

The diagnosis was confirmed after a standard test. — Reuters

Global shortage of nurses set to grow

GENEVA: The numbers of nurses around the world are falling further just as the Omicron coronavirus spreads, and there is also an imbalance as Western countries step up recruitment of healthcare workers from African and other poorer countries, the International Council of Nurses said on Friday.

Many nurses are burned out from the Covid-19 pandemic and rates of “intention to leave” within a year have doubled to 20-30 per cent, said Howard Catton, CEO of the Geneva-based group that represent 27 million nurses in 130 national associations.

“I think that we are at a tipping point ... if those numbers continue the trend that we are seeing, it could be an exodus of people,” Catton told a news briefing.

“I almost think that governments need to be thinking about the life support package of measures they need to be putting together to invest in their nurses and their healthcare workers next year,” he said.

At least 115,000 nurses have died from Covid-19, but Catton said this World Health Organization figure from the start of the pandemic through May was conservative and the true figure is probably twice that.

There was already a global shortage of 6 million nurses pre-pandemic and some 4.75 million nurses are due to retire over the next few years, he added.

On average, wealthy countries



Many nurses are burned out from the Covid-19 pandemic and rates of “intention to leave” within a year have doubled to 20-30 per cent

have nearly 10 times the rate of nurses in terms of their populations compared with poor nations, but many are recruiting overseas to staff their hospitals, he said, noting that the Philippines and India were traditional exporters.

“We have absolutely seen increased recruitment activity by

the UK and Germany as examples in Europe, the US and Canada in North America as well,” he said. He added that African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria were seeing their nurses recruited.

The emergence of the Omicron coronavirus variant, first detected last month in southern Africa and Hong Kong and now reported in nearly 60 countries, has caused fresh anxiety.

“My sense is that nurses around the world, I think like all of us were perhaps starting to feel that we were starting to see light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, but now there is a palpable anxiety that we could be going back close to square one,” Catton said.

— Reuters

Daughter of pioneering astronaut Shepard soars to space

VAN HORN: The eldest daughter of pioneering US astronaut Alan Shepard blasted off aboard Jeff Bezos’ Blue Origin commercial space tourism rocket on Saturday, 60 years after her late father’s famed suborbital Nasa flight at the dawn of the Space Age.

Laura Shepard Churchley, 74, who was a schoolgirl when her father first streaked into space, was one of six passengers buckled into the cabin of Blue Origin’s New Shepard spacecraft as it lifted off from a launch site outside the west Texas town of Van Horn.

The crew capsule at the top of the fully autonomous, six-story-tall spaceship is designed to soar to an altitude of about 350,000 feet

(106 km) before falling back to Earth, descending under a canopy of parachutes to the desert floor for a gentle landing.

The entire flight, from liftoff to touchdown, was expected to last a little over 10 minutes, with the crew experiencing a few minutes of weightlessness at the very apex of the suborbital flight.

The spacecraft itself is named for Alan Shepard, who in 1961 made history as the second person, and the first American, to travel into space — a 15-minute suborbital flight as one of Nasa’s original “Mercury Seven” astronauts. A decade later, Shepard walked on the moon as commander of the Apollo 14 mission, famously



A Blue Origin New Shepard rocket launches on December 11, 2021, in West Texas near Van Horn. The NS-19 mission will take Laura Shepard Churchley (inset), Television talk show host Michael Strahan, Dylan Taylor, Evan Dick, Lane Bess and Cameron Bess into space. — AFP

hitting two golf balls on the lunar surface.

Churchley was one of two honorary, non-paying guest passengers chosen by Blue Origin for Saturday’s flight. The other is Michael Strahan, 50, a retired National Football League star and co-anchor of ABC television’s “Good Morning America” show.

They were joined by four lesser-known, wealthy customers who paid undisclosed but presumably hefty sums for their New Shepard seats — space industry executive Dylan Taylor, engineer-investor Evan Dick, venture capitalist Lane Bess and his 23-year-old son, Cameron Bess. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

Aggression comes with a price tag, warns EU

The European Union warned Russia on Friday that it would face consequences if it invaded Ukraine, as Germany’s new chancellor called for talks to resolve tensions after Moscow amassed troops on the border with its southwestern neighbour.

“Aggression needs to come with a price tag, which is why we will communicate these points ahead of time to Russia,” European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told a joint news conference



with Olaf Scholz. Ukraine accuses Russia of preparing for a possible large-scale military offensive.

The Kremlin denies planning any attack.

WASHINGTON

Dozens killed as tornadoes rip through Kentucky

A devastating swarm of tornadoes ripped through Kentucky and five other US states, killing dozens of people and leaving a trail of destroyed homes, factories and warehouses along a path that stretched more than 200 miles, officials said on Saturday.

At least four tornadoes touched down overnight in parts of Kentucky, causing significant damage in more than a dozen counties. The primary tornado travelled more than



227 miles (365 km) across the state, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said.

The death toll could exceed 50 people and could reach up to 100, he told an early morning news conference.

PARIS

Hundreds evacuated after floods in France

Heavy rainfall has led to flooding in south-western France, especially in the border area with Spain.

In the departments of Landes and Pyrenees-Atlantiques, 250 firefighters and three civil defence helicopters were deployed, Interior Minister Gerald Daramanin said on Friday.

Around 400 people had to be brought to safety in four municipalities.

Only one person has been



injured so far. The city of Bayonne, where the Nive River overflowed its banks, was particularly affected.

Unexploded ordnance Iraq’s deadly legacy

In the northern Iraqi hamlet of Hassan-Jalad, almost every family has a story to tell about a time when a child, nephew or brother was lost to wartime munitions.

Located near Mosul, a former stronghold of the IS group, the area is littered with unexploded ordnance, sometimes dubbed UXO.

“We are afraid for the children,” said one local man, Awad Qado. “We show them the routes to take, the places to avoid. We tell them not to pick up things they find on the ground.”

It was in 2017 that Qado’s family was struck by a landmine explosion in the hamlet of about 50 homes.

Two of Qado’s nephews were killed while tending to their herd. His son was injured and a fourth man’s legs were severed in the blast that also killed some livestock.

Across Iraq, about 100 children were killed or injured between January and September as a result of remnants of conflict, according to the UN.

In a country that has one of the world’s highest UXO “contamination rates”, almost one in four people is exposed to risk from unexploded ordnance, say non-governmental groups.

Iraq’s successive conflicts have left a deadly legacy, from the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, to the US-led invasion of 2003 and the defeat of IS in late 2017. In the area around Hassan-Jalad, more than 1,500 explosives were found within one year, said Alaa al Din Moussa, head of operations for the private demining company GCS.

“In this region, every house has a story,” he added. “Many children are dead. Hundreds of animals have entered fields and triggered explosives.”

Clearing the UXO is painstaking and dangerous work.

Ordnance awaiting disposal is left in a desert area behind a banner that reads “STOP”.

The explosives are classed in several categories including: 107-millimetre rockets, 23-millimetre projectiles and VS500 mines.

Both Mosul and the western province of Anbar are among the most affected areas, as are other former IS strongholds.

“We see a lot of contamination in built-up urban areas,” Pehr Lodhammar, programme chief of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Iraq, said.

— AFP

Explosive hazards and explosive contamination are making it much more difficult for people to resume a normal life

PEHR LODHAMMAR
UNMAS official



Freedom a brief flight

Animal-aficionados release blue-and-yellow macaw (Ara ararauna) parrots to fly during a show in Kuwait City.
— AFP

Make mistakes, learn from them



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

THE REALITY IS THAT WE FEAR MISTAKES BECAUSE WE MAY LOSE OUR JOBS, WHEN WE SHOULD MORE FEAR THE DOWNSTREAM EFFECT OF OUR ERRORS

While we all make mistakes, a culture of accountability is an absolute need in all societies, at all levels, in all sectors. We don’t particularly want witch hunts, blame games, or finger pointing, we just want to know that if something goes wrong once, it will not go wrong again.

The old adage that “You learn more from your mistakes,” is one of life’s great truths, and you will all have experienced that sensation of déjà vu, when some set of circumstances is occurring, not for the first time in your life. That sensation, that feeling, then gives you pause... a moment to reflect... and you will absolutely, positively, not go down the same path again. It is God’s reward to those who listen. And of course, if you take no notice, and continue forward anyway, you will surely pay the price.

“Mistakes,” said actress Sophia Loren, “are part of the dues one pays for a full life,” and I guess that may well be true and she was in good company, as I think the unkempt, yet remarkably intelligent Albert Einstein said, “Anyone who has never made a mistake has never done anything new.” It probably leads us on a tangent too, to understand that if we are to celebrate and acknowledge our successes, then to be true to ourselves, we must not only learn from our mistakes, but ensure that others too learn from our mistakes.

In 2005, Elaine Bromiley was to

undergo a minor, and very routine nasal surgical procedure. At 37, and with no evident health conditions, it was to be a simple process, however after the patient was anaesthetised, the surgical team was unable to insert a device to keep her airways open. Reluctant to perform an emergency, front of airway tracheotomy of the type you see in television medical dramas every week, Bromiley was brought out of anesthesia, and though breathing erratically, was moved to a recovery suite. Tragically, she never fully recovered, and despite intensive care, passed away thirteen days later.

Her husband, airline pilot Martin Bromiley never went looking for blood. Instead, he turned his energies in two directions. Bromiley initiated an enquiry, not to apportion blame, but towards any of the medical professionals involved, but rather to identify and circulate any learnings from his wife’s demise, and secondly, in a remarkable display of compassion, Bromiley now works directly with the National Health Service to create an effective culture of responsibility and accountability among healthcare professionals.

Interestingly, he has drawn from his profession as an airline pilot where all and every mistake or error, must be reported, analysed and reported upon by independent review. The findings are then circulated to all pilots who must confirm

they have read and understood the findings, implementing any findings. It is a culture that removes blame, replacing it with continuous development, and is perhaps one reason why, in 2010, you would have been 30,000 times more likely to die in surgery, than in an airline flight.

Martin Bromiley has single-handedly changed how the world’s largest public health system operates, by introducing Human Factors and Ergonomics (HFE) to surgical operating theatres. “It is a scientific discipline that aims to understand how humans behave in a system and how to optimise the system design, to make it easy for people who work in high-risk industries such as in healthcare, and have to perform complex tasks, to do the right thing,” said Bromiley recently, “making it difficult or ideally impossible, to do the wrong thing in stressful situations.” In fact, he told a recent audience, “The intent of HFE procedures is so much focused on safer outcomes that airline pilots can not be sacked for making mistakes, thus developing an industry wide acceptance of the process.”

The reality is that we fear mistakes because we may lose our jobs, when we should more fear the downstream effect of our errors. To err is very human, and to forgive may well be divine, but not only that, it is also a remarkably compassionate human gesture.

Boris Johnson and the virtue of accountability



Chris Patten

A CENTRAL ADVANTAGE OF GENUINELY DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES IS THAT THEIR LEADERS CANNOT GET AWAY INDEFINITELY WITH BAD, CORRUPT, OR SELF-SERVING BEHAVIOUR

As 2021 draws to a close, the greeting “Happy New Year!” may sound implausibly optimistic. Russian President Vladimir Putin is massing troops near his country’s border with Ukraine. Chinese President Xi Jinping broods threateningly about whether now is the right time to invade Taiwan. And the Covid-19 pandemic continues to threaten the lives and well-being of people around the world, with the new Omicron variant reminding us of the danger of large populations remaining unvaccinated — especially in the poorest countries.

US President Joe Biden has tried to breathe a little optimism into global politics by holding a virtual summit of the world’s actual and purported democracies. The gathering has elicited predictable

hostility from China and Russia, as well as criticism within the United States about the choice of invitees. Some, understandably, have emphasised the overwhelming importance of the democracies in attendance setting an example through their behaviour, rather than simply preaching (sometimes a little hypocritically).

But, away from the summit, a tawdry political scandal in Britain — concerning parties held in Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s official residence and office during lockdowns late last year — has recently highlighted one of the central virtues of genuinely democratic societies: their leaders cannot get away indefinitely with bad, corrupt, or self-serving behaviour. At long last, Johnson now seems to be finding that out.

Although Johnson has a well-deserved reputation for maintaining an arm’s-length relationship with the truth, many voters seem to have priced this in to how they perceive him. Moreover, Conservative Party insiders, and those who previously worked with Johnson in journalism (his career before politics), have always known that he was unlikely to follow any rules that did not suit him.

In particular, Johnson’s allegedly Conservative administration, assisted by allies in the media, has set about trying to weaken many of the checks and balances that should constrain central government power.

Thus, the BBC, Britain’s great public-service broadcaster, has come under attack for not

toeing the government’s line. The Electoral Commission and judges are criticised for trying to rein in ministerial and party-political actions that contravene existing laws. Johnson routinely flouts the codes that are supposed to police the behaviour of ministers and politicians in general. The government uses parliamentary procedures to circumvent proper legislative scrutiny, and in 2019 even illegally suspended (or prorogued) Parliament itself because it looked as though the legislature might get in the way of Johnson’s Brexit plans.

All this has now crystallised in the “Christmas parties” row, which paints a picture of a government “free of the network of obligation which binds everyone else.” After all, the gatherings took place while

the government was telling the rest of the country that, because of the pandemic, parties were banned. In fact, the ban on people congregating went even further than that. People could not visit dying friends or relatives, because meetings of any sort were thought to increase the risk of spreading the deadly virus.

The most serious and generic lesson to take from the affair, at a time of increasing debate about democracy and liberal values, is that in a country that upholds them, public officials cannot reliably hide wrongdoing. Freedom of the press and accountability to voters mean that bad behaviour, on smaller and larger scales, cannot be denied without inquiry.

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Gained experience and exposure: coach Ivankovic

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Sultanate of Oman football team concluded their journey at the 2021 Fifa Arab Cup in the quarterfinal after suffering a 2-1 defeat to Tunisia on Friday night. The head coach of the national team, Branko Ivankovic, affirmed that the team took many advantages and gained more exposure from participation at the top footballing event in the Arab region. “The attendance in this event assisted

many new faces and players to gain the required experience and facing tough teams,” he said during the press meet post the match. The Croatian man congratulated the Tunisia team for advancing to the semifinals. “Congrats to the Tunisian team and I am wishing them good luck in the next round of the championship. It was a very tough game and the opponent was the best side during the encounter. I am not blaming the players as they delivered all their top efforts but we could not find alternative



“The attendance in this event assisted many new faces and players to gain the required experience and facing tough teams

BRANKO
IVANKOVIC
Sultanate of Oman head coach

solutions to win. Sometimes, it is not easy to register the triumph but the main significance is to take the required technical gains and get the experience,” he said. The 67-year-old affirmed that there are many crucial matches ahead for the team in the Asian qualifiers against Saudi Arabia and Australian teams. The head coach responded to the team’s performance during the Tunisia match. “There are two reasons behind that. The first is that we have played three matches during

seven days only and secondly, the opponent was Tunisia team which is a tough team and have top experienced players,” he ended. The national team began the campaign at the 2021 Fifa Arab Cup with a 1-1 draw against Iraq in the group games before falling down 2-1 from the hosts Qatar. Then, ‘Red Warriors’ bounced back strongly as they defeated Bahrain 3-0 in the concluding group game. In the quarterfinal, Red Warriors were defeated by Tunisia 2-1 as they exited from the championship.



Red Bull’s Dutch driver Max Verstappen waves in the Parc Ferme of the Yas Marina Circuit. – AFP

Red Bull’s Verstappen on pole for title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix

ABU DHABI: Max Verstappen gained a potentially decisive advantage in his epic battle for the Formula One world title on Saturday by claiming pole for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Verstappen goes into the season-closing race level on points with Lewis Hamilton, who took second in qualifying to join the Red Bull driver on the front row. Lando Norris was a surprise third to start on the second row alongside Verstappen’s teammate Sergio Perez. The last six winners in Abu Dhabi have all started from the front of the grid, with Verstappen victorious from pole last year. Hamilton, seeking a historic eighth world title, was favourite to secure the final pole of 2021 after his Mercedes left Verstappen’s Red Bull trailing in his wake in practice.



Red Bull’s Dutch driver Max Verstappen drives at the Yas Marina Circuit. – AFP

But after Red Bull’s mechanics worked on Verstappen’s car overnight, the Dutchman produced a blistering flying lap in Q3. His time of 1min 22.109sec left Hamilton over half a second

behind. That forced the seven-time world champion back onto the heavily modified Yas Marina circuit for one last throw of the dice. But although he reduced the

gap to 0.371 at a venue where he is a five-time winner he could not knock his arch rival off the top of the grid. “It’s an amazing feeling, we definitely improved the car in quali,” said Verstappen. The 24-year-old added: “I’m incredibly happy with this. It’s what we wanted but it was not easy with Mercedes’ form. I’m looking forward to tomorrow, that’s the most important.” With the two drivers locked together on 369.5 points after 21 of the 22 races the stakes could not be higher for the duelling duo. Aside from pole Verstappen has another advantage over Hamilton. Should the pair end up all square — (one finishes ninth, the other 10th with the fastest lap) — or fail to score any points then the title is his on the strength of his nine race wins to Hamilton’s eight. — AFP

MILESTONE MAN LYON SPINS AUSTRALIA TO THUMPING ASHES WIN

BRISBANE: Nathan Lyon captured a long-awaited 400th Test victim and spun Australia to an emphatic nine-wicket victory in the first Ashes Test on Saturday, with England losing eight wickets in a stunning morning collapse on day four at the Gabba.

The spin-bowling cult hero grabbed four wickets as England's batsmen crumbled by lunch, leaving 20 runs for Australia to mow down after the break.

Having dominated with bat, ball and in the field, Australia head to Adelaide for the day-night test with a surge of confidence under new captain Pat Cummins.

England, meanwhile, will pore over their failings after another horror show in Brisbane. They have now lost seven of their past nine matches at the Gabba, a venue from which series defeats seem to spring.

Question marks hang over England's selections and tactics, and there seem few ready solutions for their batting woes before the pink ball Test starts in Adelaide on Thursday. Cummins, in his first match as skipper, said he thought someone was smiling over him.

"A lot of things did go right, probably from the toss," he added.

"I thought it was a really complete performance.

"I was really happy that just about everyone fired."

England resumed on 220 for two with the match still within their grasp, but lost their last eight wickets for 77 runs to be bowled out for 297.

England paceman Ollie Robinson burnished his match stats with the dismissal of wicketkeeper Alex Carey (9), who stood in for opener David Warner as he nursed bruised ribs.



Australia's Nathan Lyon reacts to the crowd applause as he leaves the field at the change of innings after taking his 400th Test wicket. — Reuters

But Marcus Harris (nine not out) hit seamer Mark Wood to the fence to complete the rout.

England captain Joe Root was disappointed after he and Dawid Malan's big day three partnership proved in vain.

However, the match was all but over after Root won the toss and sent his batsmen in to be routed for 147.

"Frustration," he said. "We worked really hard to get ourselves back in the game last night. It's a

shame that we just couldn't quite manage to get through that initial phase because it could have been very different."

'AMAZING MORNING'

Lyon, who took 4-91 for the second innings, had been stranded on 399 wickets since the series-deciding defeat to India in January at the Gabba but wasted no time turning the contest on its head on Saturday.

In his second over, the 34-year-old veteran deceived Malan (82)

Question marks hang over England's selections and tactics, and there seem few ready solutions for their batting woes before the pink ball Test starts in Adelaide on Thursday

and produced a bat-pad catch to Marnus Labuschagne, breaking a crucial 162-run stand with Root.

"It was incredible," said Lyon. "Amazing crowd and to tick off a personal milestone is fantastic but even better to top it off with a pretty outstanding win."

England promptly lost three wickets for 11 runs with young all-rounder Cameron Green capturing the key wicket of Root for 89, the England skipper yet again denied a maiden hundred in Aus-

tralia.

Batsman Travis Head was named Man of the Match for his quickfire 152, which set up Australia's first innings 425 in response to England's paltry 147.

Carey, who replaced former captain Tim Paine behind the stumps, took a record eight catches on test debut.

However, it was Lyon's day to savour as he became only the third Australian in the 400-wicket club led by Shane Warne (708) and Glenn McGrath (563).

He had Ollie Pope caught for four at slip with a ball that reared out of the Gabba pitch. He took another two wickets to help clean up the tail.

England talisman Ben Stokes (14) combined with wicketkeeper Jos Buttler (23) for a 32-run partnership but the all-rounder fell to Cummins again, with a similar short ball to the one that got him for five in the first innings.

With Warner ailing and pace-man Josh Hazlewood also nursing an abdominal strain, Australia will be glad for the extra day off.

English fans may hope salvation lies when Adelaide Oval lights up, and with the pink ball in the hands of rested pace warriors James Anderson and Stuart Broad. — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

England first innings: 147
Australia first innings: 425
England second innings: 297
Australia second innings:
A Carey c Buttler b Robinson.....9
M Harris (not out).....9
M Labuschagne (not out).....0
Extras (NB-2).....2
Total (For 1 wkt, 5.1 overs).....20
Fall of wickets: 1-16
Bowling: Robinson 3-0-13-1, Woakes 2-0-3-0, Wood 0.1-0-4-0

England fined 100% of match fees for slow over rate in Ashes defeat

BRISBANE: England have been fined their entire match fees and docked five World Test Championship points for maintaining a slow rate of overs during their nine-wicket defeat by Australia in the first Ashes Test, cricket's world governing body said on Saturday.

Joe Root's side were ruled to be five overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration, with match referee David Boon imposing the sanction. Players are fined 20 per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time, while the team is penalised one point for each over short.

The ICC added that Australian batter Travis Head was fined 15 per cent of his match fee for using bad language in the 77th over of their first innings on Thursday, when he was beaten by a ball from England all-rounder Ben Stokes.

One demerit point was also added to Head's disciplinary



England's Joe Root reacts after his dismissal by Australia's Cameron Green for 89 runs during day 4 of the first Ashes Test. — Reuters

record after his first offence in a 24-month period.

When a player attains four or more demerit points in a two-year period, they are converted into suspension points that could bring a ban.

Nathan Lyon captured a long-

awaited 400th Test victim and spun Australia to an emphatic nine-wicket victory in the test, with England losing eight wickets on day four in Brisbane.

The second of the five Tests will run from December 16 to 20 in Adelaide. — Reuters

Australia's Cummins, Lyon excited by Green potential

BRISBANE: New Australian captain Pat Cummins described all-rounder Cameron Green as a genuine pace bowler, while team-mate Nathan Lyon said he was excited by the 22-year-old's skill set after their nine-wicket victory over England in the Ashes opener on Saturday.

Green, who made his test debut against India in Adelaide last December, picked up his first wicket by removing Ollie Pope on a disappointing opening day for England, before dismissing the dangerous Joe Root for 89 in the second innings.

"It's huge for us, not only having an all-rounder who bowls a bit but he's a genuine fourth quick," said Cummins, adding that the team was witnessing Green's full potential after repeated stress fractures over the last four years.

"Last summer was tough, it was literally straight after stress fractures, so not only did we not want to put too many overs into him, but little things like preparing for games and getting overs, he didn't have a lot of bowling behind him.



Australia's Pat Cummins shakes hands with England's Joe Root after the Test. — Reuters

"This year he's had a real pre-season, bowled a bit more in Shield cricket, so he's back to what he was probably bowling a couple of years ago.

"He's a huge asset, bowls 140 kph (87 mph), can swing the ball and I really wanted to get him into the game."

Lyon, who captured his 400th test wicket during the game, said Green's display was remarkable.

"Just to be fielding square of the wicket — I'm used to seeing Josh (Hazlewood), Pat and

Mitchell Starc hit the wicket and the pace and bounce that they get," Lyon said.

"I was blown away with Green's rhythm and the belief that he's come in with (and the way he) whacked the pitch to get something out of it.

"I'm proper excited about his skill set. His belief will keep growing day by day, training session by training session and test by test... he's going to be an unbelievable asset for Australian cricket for a long period of time, hopefully." — Reuters

Suns sink Celtics, Bucks stop Rockets

McGee also had 15 rebounds while
Cameron Payne came off the bench to
score 17 points in front of a crowd of
17,000 at Footprint Center in Arizona

LOS ANGELES: JaVale McGee scored a season-high 21 points as the short-handed Phoenix Suns earned their 20th win in the past 21 games by cruising to a 111-90 victory over the Boston Celtics on Friday.

McGee also had 15 rebounds while Cameron Payne came off the bench to score 17 points in front of a crowd of 17,000 at Footprint Center in Arizona.

Jae Crowder and Cameron Johnson added 16 points apiece for the Suns, who played without star guard Devin Booker and centre Deandre Ayton.

Booker missed his fourth straight game with a hamstring injury while Ayton was sidelined with an undisclosed illness that the team said was not Covid-19.

Mikal Bridges added 14 points while Chris Paul and Landry Shamet scored 10 each. Paul also handed out a game-high 12 assists for the Suns, who made all 11 of their free throws.

“It was next man up,” said Paul. “We got a lot of guys on our team who understand their jobs. Whatever it takes to win I got to do it.”

Jayson Tatum had a game-high 24 points and seven rebounds for Boston, who dropped their third straight and ended a five-game road trip with just one win.

Dennis Schroder added 15 points, Robert Williams scored 10 and Al Horford had nine in the loss. Boston’s Marcus Smart missed his first 11 shots and finished with

a dismal four points — shooting just one of 13. Overall the Celtics sank just four of 26 from beyond the arc.

In Houston, Giannis Antetokounmpo’s full arsenal was on display as he scored 41 points and grabbed 17 rebounds and the Milwaukee Bucks cooled off the red-hot Houston Rockets 123-114.

Antetokounmpo also had five assists, three steals and two blocked shots as the Bucks snapped the Rockets’ winning streak at seven games.

“I was just looking to be aggressive,” Antetokounmpo said. “Last game I wasn’t as aggressive as I wanted.”

He got plenty of support from his team-mates, especially Khris Middleton and Bobby Portis, who each scored 21 points and added eight rebounds.

The Bucks extended their lead to seven points, 119-112, with 47 seconds left in the fourth when Antetokounmpo slammed a dunk home.

Milwaukee coach Mike Budenholzer said they know they can count on Antetokounmpo and Middleton down the stretch.

“When you have a good team and have players like that, you’re fortunate to put the ball in their hands and let them make plays,” he said.

Houston hadn’t lost since ending a 15-game losing streak by beating the Chicago Bulls on November 24. The Rockets led by 10 at one stage on Friday and hung



Phoenix Suns forward Jae Crowder (99) shoots over Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum (0) during the second half at Footprint Center. – USA Today Sports

around until the Bucks were able to pull away in the fourth.

Garrison Mathews finished with a team-high 23 points, including a half dozen threes, as the Rockets made Milwaukee work for the victory.

Christian Wood and Armoni Brooks chipped in with 21 points

apiece, and Wood also grabbed 13 rebounds. Rookie Alperen Sengun scored a career-high 15 points.

In Oklahoma City, LeBron James scored 33 points to lead the Los Angeles Lakers to a 116-95 win over the mistake-prone Oklahoma City Thunder.

James had an immediate impact

on the game, scoring Los Angeles’ first six points. He shot 13 of 20 from the field, including making nine of 10 shots in the opening half. Avery Bradley scored 11 of his season-high 22 points in the third quarter for the Lakers.

Oklahoma City was their own worst enemy on Friday, missing

their first 12 three-point attempts. Rookie Tre Mann scored a team-high 19 points.

In Atlanta, Kevin Durant delivered a dominating performance, scoring 31 points as the Brooklyn Nets held on to beat the Atlanta Hawks 113-105.

— AFP

OC announces launch of Domestic Tournament Leagues

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket has announced the launch of its new version of Domestic Tournament — Oman D20 & Oman D10 League in partnership with ITW Consulting DMCC. The Inaugural edition of Oman D20 will be played at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat from December 21, 2021 to January 5, 2022. The league will be played in a round-robin format between 8 teams with 2 matches on weekdays(4pm/8pm) and 3 matches on weekends(12pm/4pm/8pm).

Oman Cricket have signed ITW Consulting as their Partners for 3 years to promote its cricket and showcase them to the highest level with Oman D20 and Oman D10 League to be played atleast once a year.

The Oman D20 League will be exclusively broadcasted LIVE on FanCode App and www.fancode.com. FanCode, India’s premier digital sports destination for all fans, will continue to provide an unparalleled sports experience to sports fans through a plethora of features including interactive



data overlays, fastest interactive live scores, in-depth sports stats and analytics, and real-time match highlights. The Oman D20 league would be also carried on Sports Eye (a regional cricket broadcasting portal) and other premium platforms globally.

The official logo of the League and the Team’s jersey’s were also unveiled during the ceremony.

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket, said: “The Domestic D20 & D10 League is a new milestone for Oman Cricket, creating opportunities for

domestic cricketers to showcase their talent to grow in stature and reinforcing its growth as a key cricketing nation across the globe. We are proud to be partnering with ITW Consulting, which will broadcast our Domestic League to enhance the popularity of the

sport in the region, develop the local talent and encourage the youth to take up the sport not only in the country, but also in the region. We are pleased and thank ITW Consulting for their support and their expertise for broadcasting our domestic

leagues and are looking forward to this collaboration.”

The teams taking part in the inaugural Oman D20 League are Qurum Thunders, Amerat Royals, Azaiba XI, Bousher Busters, Khuwair Warriors, Ghubrah Giants, Ruwi Rangers and Darsait Titans.



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Karwa Motors to make coaches, city buses from 2022

BUS ASSEMBLY PROJECT:
A cornerstone of OIA's
diversification strategy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

Karwa Motors, the Sultanate of Oman's first-ever bus brand and manufacturing facility, will add 'Made in Oman' intercity coaches and city buses to its production line at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm from next year.

The state-of-the-art plant, set up by a partnership of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Mowasalat Qatar, came into operation at Duqm last month.

"This factory is a cornerstone of our commitment towards sustained economic growth for the coming decades — to set the stage for what will become the beacon of automotive and industrial progress in the Sultanate of Oman," said Dr Ibrahim al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors.

Karwa Motors is a success story in many ways for the

We aim to introduce several innovations and industry-leading production practices and technologies to the Sultanate of Oman, setting the benchmark for all future production facilities to come

DR IBRAHIM AL
BALUSHI
CEO, Karwa Motors

diversification of the Sultanate of Oman's economic development. It emphasises four key objectives in its business model, namely: Creating In-Country Value (ICV), localising global standards and

technologies, contributing to economic development of Duqm, and youth empowerment through direct and indirect employment in the transportation industry.

Dr Al Balushi added, "Located right here at one of the country's most prominent gateways to the world, our facility will now serve as the country's first foray into bus production. With our technology

transfer partners, we aim to introduce several innovations and industry-leading production practices and technologies to the Sultanate of Oman, setting the benchmark for all future production facilities to come."

The new facility is built on a site covering approximately 600,000 square metres and in its first phase comprises 40 working stations.

These are staffed by a team of highly skilled workers who form and manufacture the buses, install their various parts, paint and check their quality.

This new facility is responsible for the production of three Karwa branded bus models — initially focusing on the school bus, with the intercity coach and city bus to follow in the coming year.

The company hopes to achieve an annual production of 500 buses in its first year.

"In the first phase of our ramp-up, we plan to focus on producing the first of three Karwa branded buses and which we are proud to say constitutes our first prestigious order, as they will be used at the Fifa World Cup 2022 in Doha next year. Later next year, we will introduce the Intercity Coach and the City Bus," the CEO said.

The value Karwa Motors, as a company and brand, bring into the country is, however, not restricted just to customers and staff. By opening a vehicle manufacturing plant at a port as strategically significant as Duqm, Karwa is creating valuable opportunities for the birth of new SMEs and empowering the abundant young Omani talent in the country.

These could include anything from vehicle logistics and automotive engineering and design, all the way to OEM parts manufacturing, each of whom Karwa aims to avail the services of and support in the future, he added.

CBO bans prizes on savings deposits from January 1, 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has instructed commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman to end the longstanding practice of offering prizes against savings deposit schemes with effect from January 1, 2022.

The measure came in a circular issued by CBO Executive President Tahir bin Salim al Amri on Thursday. Circular 1811 dated on December 9, 2021 directs licensed banks to scrap prize schemes while taking steps to enhance interest rates on deposits, among other measures to boost deposit mobilisation.

"The Central Bank of Oman, after careful consideration and keeping in view, amongst others, the overall interests of the banking system, and ensure enhanced effectiveness of the monetary policies, has decided to withdraw the 'Prize Scheme Linked Saving Deposits Schemes' with effect from January 1, 2022.

Banks, in the interregnum, are advised to develop

appropriate savings deposit schemes and fine-tune their funds management strategies to ensure payment of reasonable rates of interest/profit to depositors without raising the lending rates," Al Amri stated.

Almost all of the major conventional lenders in the Sultanate of Oman presently offer cash prizes against savings deposits as an inducement to customers to deposit their savings with them. These prize schemes have evolved over the schemes to also target women, children and other customer segments.

Invariably, prize-linked schemes do not offer any interest on deposits.

According to experts, the timing of the CBO directive means that licensed banks running prize schemes against savings deposits must bring their respective schemes to a complete end before the end of this year.

Proposal to make Sultanate of Oman a regional hub for freshwater imports

REVOLUTIONARY VENTURE:
Transoceanic's low-cost solution for massive freshwater transportation centres on the deployment of Ultra-Large Marine Submersible (ULMS) boats capable of carrying millions of tonnes of water

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Shipping massive quantities of freshwater to the Sultanate of Oman and its neighbours can now be an environmentally sustainable and cost-competitive alternative to desalination, according to a US firm that is seeking to revolutionise potable water availability in water stressed parts of the world.

Transoceanic LLC, based in Wyoming, says its proprietary 'Massive Freshwater Transportation System' enables the carriage and supply of several million cubic metres of fresh river water from pristine sources in the Indian sub-continent at far less than the cost of gas-based water desalination — presently the principal mode of potable water production in the Gulf region.

"Transoceanic (transoceanic.us) can transfer gigatonnes of low-cost river water to arid lands, turning them into gardens, feeding the world, getting plentiful water to cities, and capturing/arresting CO2 into the soil to grow new plants," said Silviu Dorian Chelaru (pictured), Owner and CEO, Transoceanic LLC.

"Thus you can see that Transoceanic will have a positive effect on the environment and economy."

Conceptual drawing of an Ultra-Large Marine Submersible (ULMS) boat spanning 700 metres in length and 100 metres in diameter for the InMusOm project

Transoceanic's low-cost solution for massive freshwater transportation centres on the deployment of Ultra-Large Marine Submersible (ULMS) boats capable of carrying millions of tons of water.

Based on a patent application submitted by the US firm, submersibles are typically hundreds of metres in length and diameter and built of hollow reinforced concrete hulls that enclose huge collapsible bags filled with massive volumes of fresh water to be transported over the oceans.

The mammoth size of the vessels allows for low-cost transportation per tonne, the company argues. Rigid and sturdy, transoceanic submersibles feature with concrete hulls (usually a few feet

thick) that hold the shape and depth of the contained collapsible bags which would tend to float and flatten when filled with fresh water.

The boats are configured for the cruising phases as Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUV) with some remote commands. They are fitted with advanced propulsion systems based on LNG, hydrogen or ammonia.

Transoceanic's proposal for the Omani market entails the supply from freshwater from Pakistan's Indus River — one of the richest water sources in the Indian sub-continent and located a relatively short 900 kilometres from Muscat. Water sources in southwest India and southwest Sri Lanka are alternative options as well.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Chemical industry must focus on sustainability

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 11

The chemical and petrochemical industry in the Arabian Gulf region and globally must put sustainability at the heart of everything it does in order to secure its future, agreed speakers at the 15th edition of the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Annual Forum held in Dubai last week.

Delivering the welcome address, Yusef al Benyan, Vice Chairman and CEO, SABIC, and Chairman, GPCA, highlighted the need to decouple GDP from greenhouse gas (GHG) in order to ensure economies can develop without putting the planet in jeopardy. He further pointed to



growing customer and investor expectations from businesses today to embed sustainability, environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors in their purpose and DNA.

Echoing his remarks, Dr Ilham Kadri, CEO and President of the

Executive Committee, Solvay, warned the audience that if humanity continues to consume, travel, and produce at its current rate, it will need 1.7 Earths to provide the necessary resources and absorb the associated waste from its activity.

The industry must therefore reinvent progress by collaborating with all stakeholders, including investors, employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, communities, and other industries in the value chain in order to carve out a future where sustainability and growth go hand in hand, she remarked.

The reinvention of the chemical industry should also draw upon non-digital technology, such as alternative feedstocks, new catalysts, and renewable electricity sources which will enable the industry to develop recyclable or bio-based products and to decarbonise its chemical plants, Al-Benyan told delegates.

Beyond the chemical sector, the entire regional economy would need to transform itself and “circularise” its value chains, leaving no loose ends through which carbon can escape, he concluded.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary General, GPCA, commented, “Despite facing tremendous challenges in 2020, the GCC chemical industry showed the highest growth globally and was among few regions globally with a positive trajectory.

This is an indication of its resilience, agility, and commitment to serving its customers in a reliable manner. Today the industry is at a pivotal stage of its transformation

but in order to thrive in the post-pandemic reality, it must redefine, reshape, and reinvent itself.

“ESG, sustainability, circular economy, consolidation, and asset optimisation are among the key imperatives that will govern growth in the next decades and beyond. GCC chemical companies would need to continue pivoting towards renewable energy to secure clean, reliable, and competitive power sources.

They would need to raise their investments in research and innovation, pursue long-term strategic partnerships at home and abroad, optimise their business and drive portfolio diversification.”

Proposal to make Sultanate of Oman a regional hub for freshwater imports

FROM PAGE 13

According to the CEO, Transocean’s ‘InMusOm’ project envisions the Sultanate of Oman as a hub for the freshwater imports for re-export to its neighbours Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

“InMusOm project can improve dramatically the whole area’s access to water and increases the cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and its neighbouring countries,” said Chelaru.

It envisions the need for a fleet of seven Transoceanic submersibles each of about 700 metres length and 100 metres diameter with a transport capacity of about 5.5 million tonnes each.

Total investment in the InMusOm venture is estimated at \$762 million computed with a 25-year project life. Consequently, a role for both government entities and large private corporations (as a PPP arrangement) is imperative in such an undertaking, he said.

As for the financial viability of the overall operation, Chelaru stated: “The Transoceanic water transportation costs are about one-tenth of the desalination costs (US\$0.05 to US\$0.10 per cubic metre).

The at-source cost of water is expected to be similar to the transportation costs. I hope that the delivered water will be from 3 to 5 times lower cost than destination water and at this cost, it can be used for agriculture in its raw imported state. Regular processing for city/ industrial use would be required,” he added.

KR Eshraqa launches Stemazone Centre at Children’s Museum

MUSCAT: Aligning itself to the Sultanate’s objectives of building a knowledge economy, Eshraqa, the Corporate Social Responsibility Arm of Khimji Ramdas, has announced the opening of the Stemazone Center at the Children’s Museum in Qurum — Muscat. Stemazone, the STEAM education programme aims to introduce Omani children to the wonderful world of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics. Stemazone is being presented in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth (MoYSC).

While its operations commenced in November, the museum is not open for the public yet but the new Stemazone Centre is receiving schools that have pre-booked their slots. The programme is also available online at www.stemazoneoman.om.

The online platform ‘e-stemazone’ offers virtual workshops and a host of other interactive learning tools.

“The jobs of the future will need specialised skills, hence relevant education becomes the building blocks for any nation. We have chosen the innovative STEAM educational programme for this initiative to teach and inspire students to imbibe future



skills required in the local and global labour market, in line with Oman Vision 2040,” said Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas.

“It gives me great honour to also announce that Eshraqa’s Stemazone has recently won a number of awards including the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth (MoCSY)’s Youth Proficiency Award which recognises and honours significant initiatives that are innovative and exemplary.

The initiative was also honoured with

three coveted titles at the Future Skills and HRD Awards, which were held under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labour.”

“Despite the fact that the education system was no exception to the immense challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, the initiative has proven its success in providing appropriate alternatives to benefit students

from it. We are proud to partner with Eshraqa in launching Stemazone initiative — a successful exemplary integration between the public and private sectors, building the innovative and creative capabilities of young people,” said Dr Maya al Azri, Director of the Department of Innovation and Science Olympiad, MoE.

“This comes in the framework of achieving the outlined objectives of the national agenda that aim to build an effective national ecosystem for scientific research, creativity, and innovation, based on national competencies with viable competitive capabilities that contributes towards fostering the development of Oman’s knowledge-based, diversified and sustainable economy.”

Through Stemazone, Eshraqa aims to promote future skills learning through STEAM education methodology and open up promising career paths that are in alignment with the vision of a knowledge economy

The Stemazone programme in the Children’s Museum follows all Covid-19 protocols set by the Supreme Committee and the MoE and is limiting the number of students per session.

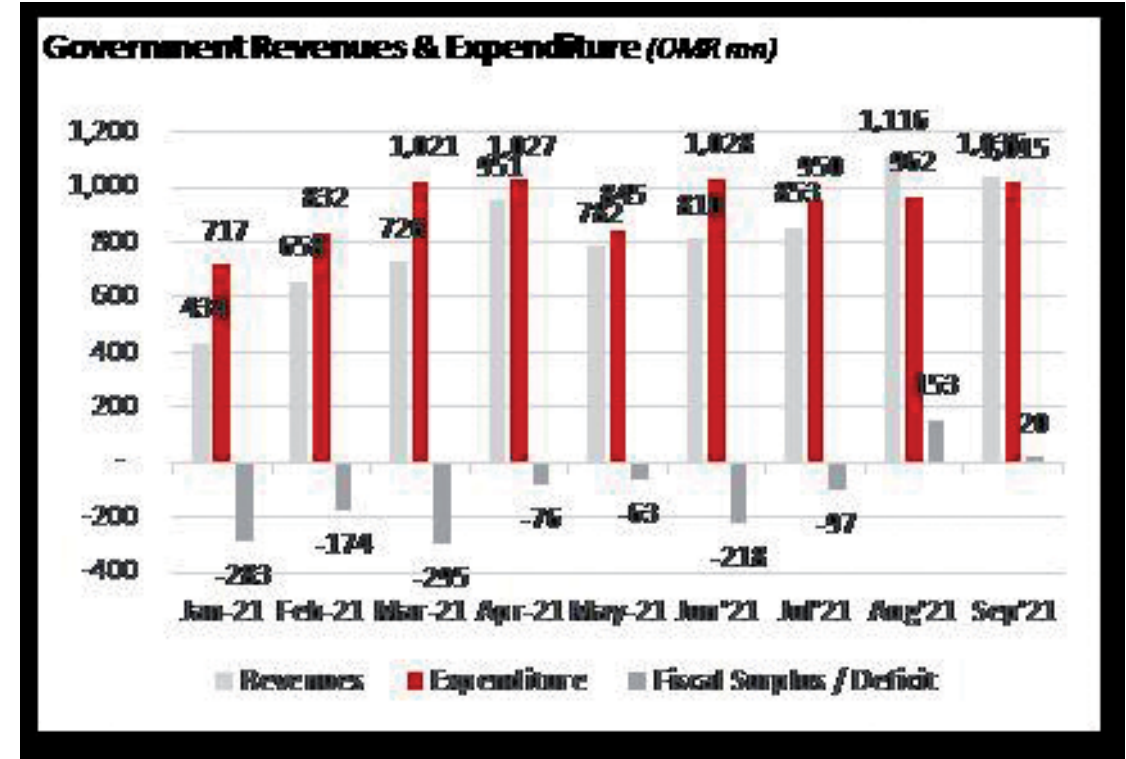
MSX30 ends the week marginally higher

MUSCAT: The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.33 per cent. All sub-indices ended higher except Services. Industrial & Financial Index closed higher by 0.61 per cent and 0.32 per cent, respectively while Services index closed lower by 0.64 per cent. MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 0.79 per cent.

Al Maha Ceramics says it has completed the due diligence exercise linked to the non-binding MoU it has signed along with Al Anwar Investment SAOG (Al Anwar) and shareholders of Al Hael Ceramics Co LLC to explore the possibility of acquiring majority of the existing shares of Al Hael. Al Maha Ceramics is currently negotiating with the shareholders of Al Hael.

Al Madina Investment has obtained the board’s approval to merge the firm by inclusion with Shaden Development Company, according to a disclosure last week.

The board issued the approval of the merger on Thursday based on the book



value of both companies, the investment banking firm told the Muscat Stock Exchange on which its shares are listed.

SMN Power last week updated on the on-going dispute with the Tax Authority regarding the allowance of liquidated damages for SMN Barka Power Company SAOC

in tax year 2009.

The appeal court in its judgment dated December 5, 2021 in Muscat, rejected the Company’s appeal regarding the disallowance from the tax authority of liquidated damages paid to OPWP, although liquidated damages received from the subcontractor

Doosan were taxed in the hand of the Company for the tax year 2009.

The Company will review the position and will consider the appropriate action in consultation with its legal and tax advisers. Omantel disclosed that Zain Telecommunications Kuwait,

a subsidiary of Omantel, has received a non-binding offer to acquire 100 per cent share stake in Zain Sudan and Kuwait Sudanese Holdings by Invictus Holding Limited (a subsidiary of Dal Group) for the amount of \$1.3 billion.

The board of directors has agreed to proceed with the due diligence process to provide the initial approval. However, this offer does not include Zain South Sudan.

Oman Budget Deficit was recorded at RO 1.0 billion in 9M-2021. The surplus recorded in the month of September 2021 was at RO 20 million compared to surplus of RO 154.1 million in the month of August 2021. With higher oil prices and government control on the expenditure side, the deficit of Oman is gradually reducing which should be taken positively by the investors.

Overall, revenue stood at RO 7.36 billion in 9M21 while the expenditure stood at RO 8.39 billion in 9M-2021.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]



Canada threatens trade action over US electric car plan



A car hauler transports newly assembled vehicles from the FCA Windsor Assembly plant in Ontario, Canada. — Reuters

OTTAWA: Canada threatened to impose sweeping tariffs on US goods and suspend parts of a landmark trade deal if Washington rewards electric cars made in US union shops, to the detriment of Canada's auto sector.

In a letter to US senators, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said Ottawa is "deeply concerned" by an electric vehicle tax credit proposed in the Build Back Better Act that it says violates the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

The proposed tax credit is equivalent to a 34-per cent tariff on Canadian assembled electric vehicles, Freeland said, adding that this poses "a significant threat to the Canadian automotive industry and is a de facto abrogation of the USMCA."

The proposal encourages US production of electric vehicles by offering a bigger tax credit for local union-built electric vehicles (EV) and phases out for imported EVs after five years.

Mexico and Canada have argued that it threatens the integrated North American auto supply chain enabled by the USCMA signed in 2020 following negotiations.

Non-union automakers led by Toyota and Tesla have also balked at the Biden proposal, calling it a sop for the United Auto Workers labour union that could hinder the transition to EV autos.

If the measure is passed, Freeland said Canada could impose retaliatory tariffs on the US auto industry and several other sectors, suspend US access to the Canadian dairy market and hold up implementation of new copyright rules in the USMCA.

— AFP

Biden orders US to stop financing new carbon-intensive fossil fuel projects abroad

WASHINGTON: The Biden administration has ordered US government agencies to immediately stop financing new carbon-intensive fossil fuel projects overseas and prioritise global collaborations to deploy clean energy technology, according to US diplomatic cables.

The cables, seen by Reuters, say US government engagements should reflect the goals set in an executive order issued at the start of the year aimed at ending American financial support of coal and carbon-intensive energy projects overseas.

"The goal of the policy... is to ensure that the vast majority of US international energy engagements promote clean energy, advance innovative technologies, boost US cleantech competitiveness, and support net-zero transitions, except in rare cases where there are compelling national security, geostrategic, or development/energy access benefits and no viable lower carbon alternatives accomplish the same goals," a cable said.

The announcement was first reported by Bloomberg. The policy defines "carbon-intensive" international energy engagements as projects whose greenhouse gas intensity is above a threshold lifecycle value of 250 grammes of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour and includes coal, gas or oil.

The policy bans any US government financing of overseas coal projects that do not capture



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

US to sell 18 million barrels of oil from reserve

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Energy said on Friday it will sell 18 million barrels of crude oil from its strategic petroleum reserve (SPR) on December 17, as part of a previous plan to try to reduce gasoline prices.

The Biden administration announced last month it would release about 50 million barrels

from its reserves in conjunction with other consumer countries including China, India and South Korea to combat the rising cost of fuel.

The White House has been trying to deal with Americans' worries about high fuel costs and inflation as drivers emerge from the pandemic, even though the president has few tools to deal

with the price of crude, a global market influenced by numerous factors.

"The president rightly believes Americans deserve relief now and has authorised the use of the SPR to respond to market imbalances and reduce costs for consumers," said Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm.

or only partially capture carbon emissions, allowing federal agencies to engage on coal

generation only if the project demonstrates full emissions capture or is part of an accelerated

phaseout.

It exempts carbon-intensive projects for two reasons: they are

The goal of the policy is to ensure that the vast majority of US international energy engagements promote clean energy, advance innovative technologies, boost US cleantech competitiveness, and support net-zero transitions, except in rare cases where there are compelling national security, geostrategic, or development/energy access benefits and no viable lower carbon alternatives accomplish the same goals

deemed to be needed for national security or geostrategic reasons or they are crucial to deliver energy access to vulnerable areas.

The policy formalises the goals set by the administration and reiterated in multilateral forums such as the G7 meeting in France and UN climate summit.

At the UN climate talks in Scotland, the Biden administration pledged with 40 countries and five financial institutions to end new international finance for unabated fossil fuel energy by the end of 2022, except in limited cases.

"The administration has elevated climate change as a core tenet of its foreign policy," a State Department spokesperson said.

— Reuters

Japan inflation hits record high as price pressure broadens



Shoppers buy food at a supermarket in Tokyo. — Reuters

TOKYO: Japan's wholesale inflation hit a record 9.0 per cent in November, pushing gains for a ninth straight month, a sign upward pressure on prices from supply bottlenecks and rising raw material costs were broadening.

The rising cost pressures, coupled with a weak yen that inflates the price of imported goods, add to pain for the world's third-largest economy as it emerges from a consumption slump caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Japan imports a lot of goods,

so prices may rise for a range of products. That could dent consumption," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

The year-on-year rise in the corporate goods price index (CGPI), which measures the prices companies charge each other for their goods and services, was the fastest pace since comparable data became available in 1981.

It exceeded a median market forecast for an 8.5 per cent gain and a revised 8.3 per cent rise in October, Bank of Japan data

showed on Friday.

An index measuring yen-based import prices rose a record 44.3 per cent in November from a year earlier in a sign a weak yen was inflating input costs for Japan, which relies heavily on imports for energy and food products.

Oil and coal prices spiked 49.3 per cent in November from a year earlier, accelerating from a 44.4-per cent gain in October. Other key drivers were steel goods, which rose 23.9 per cent, and chemical goods, which were up 14.1 per cent. — Reuters

Starbucks union vote a victory for Gen Z workers



Workers speak to the media after union vote in Buffalo, New York. — Reuters

NEW YORK: The Starbucks employees who led a landmark fight to form a union are overwhelmingly in their 20s and

show a zeal to improve working conditions at the coffee chain.

They won their bid to create the first union in one of the Starbucks'

company-owned US cafes, despite heavy pressure from management to defeat the effort.

"This generation, this Gen Z, has the highest favorability of unions in my lifetime," said Richard Bensinger, a seasoned trade union organiser who helped the young baristas in their fight. "They are people that have no hope of owning a home. They have two jobs. They have student debt. They understand there's the billionaire class, and there's everybody else."

Will Westlake, 24 and a member of organising committee Starbucks Workers United, says he experienced that dynamic his own life. He saw his big sister, 11 years his senior, as she struggled to find work in her field and was forced to

do odd jobs to pay off the \$100,000 she borrowed for her studies.

He wants to be able to earn a decent living, even by working in a cafe. "The United States is not a manufacturing hub that it used to be. This is a service economy," he said.

Failing to improve working conditions for those jobs would condemn "70 per cent of our population to being poor in the long term," Westlake said.

His colleague Natalie Wittmeyer was hired at Starbucks only a month ago but quickly joined the union movement, offended by the methods management used to monitor employees since the start of their campaign. "I think I speak for a lot of the

young people in America who are tired of being treated like garbage because we work fast food... or because you're young," she said.

RJ Rebmann, 26, said the victory "just goes to show that at the end of the day, working-class people know what their interests are, and even when we are being lied to and union busted and intimidated, we can still prevail in the end."

The mobilisation of these young people may not be surprising given Buffalo's history of strong labour movements, which allowed generations of workers to achieve decent standards of living.

Bensinger said Starbucks employees work just as hard as unionised factory workers, and they want a voice in their

working conditions and to "not be patronised by the company." He proudly watched them speak one after the other at the press briefing on Thursday following their victory: a clear vote in favour of a union at the Elmwood Avenue cafe in Buffalo, and a majority of the votes at the Genesee Street location, near the airport.

Rebecca Kolins Givan, a union specialist at Rutgers University, is more optimistic. "Even though it's one Starbucks out of thousands in the country, it shows that it can be done and that workers can succeed," she said. And it serves as an example for "young workers in the US that don't have very much experience with unions, with what it means to be in a union." — AFP

EU gig economy faces lengthy fight

The European Commission has belatedly joined the global fight to protect self-employed workers. A draft directive published would, if implemented, force companies from Uber Technologies to Deliveroo to reclassify millions of freelancers as employees. Ride-hailing and food delivery companies would face increasing costs and a dent in demand.

So-called gig economy companies have long treated drivers and couriers as independent contractors, avoiding the responsibility of employing them directly.

Many Uber drivers and Deliveroo cyclists see this as an attractive and flexible way to earn income on the side, while setting their own hours and working for multiple employers.

Others would prefer the rights and protections that come with a steady job.

Commissioner Margrethe Vestager's proposal is an attempt to provide legal certainty.

So-called gig economy companies have long treated drivers and couriers as independent contractors, avoiding the responsibility of employing them directly

Brussels estimates its plan would change the employment status of up to 4.1 million of 28 million Europeans currently classed as self-employed, entitling them to a minimum wage, sick pay, holidays and legal protections.

That would be a seismic shift for companies which depend on gig workers.

A study by consultancy Copenhagen Economics, published last month, estimates up to 75,000 couriers across the European Union could leave the workforce if flexible employment is no longer an option. With fewer drivers, customers would have to wait longer for a ride or meal delivery.

Alternatively, gig economy companies could pass on the extra employment costs, shrinking demand for their services.

It will be years of debate before the directive finds its way into national laws. However, the Commission's efforts are in tune with other attempts to redefine gig work.

Some have already accepted the coming change. Just Eat Takeaway.com, the \$13 billion Dutch delivery group, treats the majority of its drivers in continental Europe as employees.

The extra layer of costs will slow ride-hailing and food delivery companies' path to profitability. The alternative is a series of lengthy and expensive legal battles. The fight has only just begun. — Reuters



TRICKY SALE

A vendor tries to attract pedestrians along Hollywood Boulevard with a sign directing towards \$5.00 goods in Hollywood, California. US consumer prices rose last month at a rate not seen in nearly 40 years, the government reported on December 10, underscoring how inflation threatens the world's largest economy. — AFP

3 SaaS models to re-imagine



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

THERE IS THIS MYTH IN THE START-UP COMMUNITY, THAT IN ORDER TO SUCCEED IN CREATING THE LATEST TECH UNICORN, FOUNDERS MUST REINVENT THE WHEEL

I often receive messages on LinkedIn from new tech entrepreneurs excited to pitch me an ultra-innovative idea. While some of them are certainly visionary, others seem to overestimate the potential of the market to adapt to completely new models.

On the other hand, there are segments of technology that have not evolved in a long time. Those are in my opinion the low hanging fruits for innovating old tech ideas. In this two-parts column I will share which are the 3 categories that, in my opinion, need not to be reinvented, but rather re-imagined.

There is this myth in the start-up community, that in order to succeed in creating the latest tech unicorn, founders must reinvent the wheel. This concept is often referred to as "Category creation".

Those who believe this is the way to go would maintain that the most important building block for success is an idea that could completely change an industry with a new Software-as-a-Service.

I found myself agreeing with this theory, before I realised that some of the existing SaaS players had mutated into something that no longer solved the problem they identified.

Moreover, getting investors to see a niche that does not yet exist, is much more challenging than explaining a start-up idea with a simple: "We are like XYZ, but better."

This is what a company like Super Human did. They realised that the e-mail experience with Gmail was getting more and more cumbersome. So they invented an innovative way of approaching e-mails, and went out to investor with the promise: "We are like Gmail, but better." And it worked great. So before re-inventing the wheel, I reckon that 3 segments of SaaS could immensely benefit from such an improvement approach.

Let us start from Customer Relations Management software. CRMs today are incredibly ripe for disruption because all the existing large CRM players are continuously trying to go upmarket.

Salesforce who started as CRMs is not really a CRM company anymore. They do not even specialise anymore. They seem to have stopped thinking of how to transform CRMs.

They have kept adding new products by acquiring other start-ups, but the result is an unfocused tool with an incredibly complex licensing model.

That could mean that CRMs today do

not need to be rebuilt from scratch, but just reimagined for our time. Especially after the pandemic, we work differently, but CRMs were designed for pre-Covid era.

I personally have yet to find a company that had no troubles implementing a CRM solution.

Usually the configuration is so complicated that companies need to hire third party specialised agencies to run the initial setup.

Imagine how different the industry would be if only CRM software were easy to understand across the whole organisation. Therefore I believe there is enormous room for improvement in the CRM space for the next 3 to 5 years.

In the second part of this column – next week – I will describe the other two categories that need to be re-imagined: Marketing Automation, and Customer Support.

The common thread, we will see, is that existing players have decided to stop innovating the core, and moved to up-selling a multiplicity of other solutions instead. Thus losing the focus that brought them the initial success.

[The writer is a member of the International Press Association]

Managing energy crises in an age of climate disruption



JÖRG HAAS The author is Head of International Politics at the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

A recent report by Goldman Sachs reached a surprising conclusion: Over the past eight years, financial markets have been increasing the cost of capital for big, long-term, high-carbon investments in sectors such as offshore oil and liquefied natural gas.

But when it comes to renewable projects, the "hurdle rate" — the minimum rate of return required by investors — has been declining. The difference is significant, translating into an implied carbon price of about \$80 per ton of carbon dioxide for new oil developments and \$40 per ton of CO2 for LNG projects.

Capital markets seem finally to be internalising the message that high-carbon investments should carry a significant risk premium.

This insight has not emerged spontaneously. It is the result of many years of in-depth research, targeted analyses by groups like Carbon Tracker and the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, pressure from investor alliances, hard-hitting NGO campaigns, and divestment decisions by foundations, churches, universities and pension funds.

The shift in capital-market sentiment has been reinforced by political action.

At last month's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, nearly 40 countries and institutions pledged to end public finance for oil, gas, and coal projects overseas.

These efforts, though still partial in their coverage and insufficient, are to be welcomed as a sign that financial flows are now starting to align with the goals of the

2015 Paris climate agreement, as mandated by article 2.1(c) of that treaty.

But the implicit carbon price demanded by capital markets so far covers only the supply side: the oil, gas, and coal fields, refineries, and transport infrastructure that feed fossil fuels into the global economy.

Unfortunately, similar progress on the demand side for coal, oil, and gas has been lacking.

Despite much talk of green recoveries from the Covid-19 shock, huge government stimulus programmes have largely failed to discriminate between green and dirty economic activity, and have thus stabilised the global economy on the old growth path.

Moreover, these interventions have created significant consumer demand as the economy bounces back. Movement profiles point to renewed car use and air travel,

while energy-intensive industries like cement, steel, plastics, and chemicals are again fueling demand for electricity, gas and coal.

The current surge in fossil-fuel energy prices reflects a multitude of highly idiosyncratic factors. But today's situation may well presage a future in which a misalignment of supply- and demand-side climate policies generates significant price swings.

Hydrocarbon lobbyists have been quick to exploit the recent uptick in fossil-fuel energy prices to advocate for renewed government financing and subsidies, as well as favourable regulatory treatment for their clients' investments.

In essence, they are calling for the public sector to step in to help fossil-fuel producers at a time when private capital is quite rightly shying away from climate risk and slowly withdrawing from the

sector. Efforts to ease the energy crunch can and must be aligned with solving the climate crisis.

Each well-insulated house, wind park and solar panel reduces the strain on gas supplies.

Making cities attractive for cycling and walking, and upgrading public transport, is not only good for public health and safety; it is also an investment in weaning ourselves off the oil that is straining our purses and killing our planet.

Similarly, reducing demand for single-use plastic packaging will further decrease demand for the fossil-fuel feedstocks of petrochemicals. And innovations like flying taxis, supersonic air travel and space travel that benefit only the super-rich and create new, wasteful energy demand could easily be restricted or even banned before they are widely adopted.

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features



What to do if a snake bites you

Approximately 40% of the Sultanate's snakes are non-venomous, 20% are moderately venomous and 40% are very venomous. They can also be found in a lot of places and in winter, may get attracted by the warmth of your tent while you're out camping. Here's a few expert advice on what to do if you get bitten by a snake in the wild... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

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Hobbit, Sauron and Gollum makeovers in New Zealand as *Lord of the Rings* turns 20

MIDDLE-EARTH CAME to everyday living once again this week as New Zealand celebrated 20 yrs because the premiere of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy with distinctive screenings, costume exhibition and artwork shows.

Friday marked the 20th anniversary of when the to start with element movie of the JRR Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" trilogies premiered at Odeon Leicester Square in London on December 10, 2001, bringing prompt fame to New Zealand's roll-

ing hills, meadows and forests, which were the backdrop for the mythical Center-Earth.

Screenings had been planned in cinemas in Auckland and Wellington, which include an outdoor screening on Friday in Hobbiton, a sheep and beef farm about 160 kilometres from Auckland, popular as "the household of the Hobbits".

"This celebration was marketed out quicker than any we have ever finished," explained Shayne Forrest, typical manager of Hobbiton.

Followers coming to the screening have been planning their costumes for just about 12 months, Forrest said, including he expects to see numerous dressed as Hobbits, the Dark Lord Sauron, Orcs and Gollums.

"We have a Sauron coming who has a full armour go well with and a comprehensive head costume, and he is not heading to match on our bus," Forrest mentioned.

New Zealand's tourism marketplace has been hurt above the final 20 months by border closures and pandemic constraints. Hobbiton acquired 6,500,000 tourists every 12 months just before the pandemic, but noticed just 90,000 readers in the last 12 months. It minimize its staff to 50 folks from about 320.

The celebrations this week ended up an prospect to place New Zealand on the globe phase again, Forrest reported.

The hairy toes and pointed-ear Hobbits are established to strike the screens once more as Amazon Studios began filming of the "The



Lord of the Rings" collection in New Zealand previous year, a Television set display extensively tipped to be the most high-priced ever designed.

But Amazon stated the second time of the multimillion-greenback television sequence will be filmed in the United Kingdom, transferring Middle-earth out of New Zealand for the 1st time.

The series' accomplishment aided New Zealand's movie field

catch the attention of some of the most significant Hollywood productions, like James Cameron's "Avatar" and far more just lately Jane Campion's "The Electrical power of the Canine" and Netflix collection these types of as "Sweet Tooth".

A lot of productions selected New Zealand previous year for the reason that of the country's Covid-19 free standing. — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Arab women lead 'new generation' in documentary film-making



ALONGSIDE CELEBRITIES gracing the red carpet at film festivals in Egypt, the traditional powerhouse of regional cinema, young Arab women directors are making their mark with documentaries tackling subjects ranging from femicide to revolution.

Taking a break from networking at the El Gouna Film Festival on the Red Sea in October, Iraqi actress and director Zahraa Ghandour, 30, discussed her feature documentary "Women of my Life".

"The main theme is the life and death of young women and girls in Iraq. It explores how Iraqi society deals with femicide as if it's normal," she said.

Ghandour said that "in the last few years, a new generation has come to the fore born in the 90s and 2000s with a new direction", especially after October 2019 protests calling for the toppling of the ruling class in Iraq.

"We want to break free from the stereotypes that world cinema boxes us into," she said.

"It's like there are trends and they (international backers) want us to fit into these funding guidelines," said Ghandour.

"What if I want to make a horror movie? I want to make what I want as long as it's of high quality."

"Women of My Life", in which she plays one of the main characters, follows the gruesome death of a young woman suspected to have been carried out by male relatives.

"As Iraqis in general, our lives are unstable but the targeted killing of women in particular... cannot be trivialised," she said.

RICH TABLEAU

For Rafia Oraidi, an independent Palestinian producer, the fractured landscape of life under Israeli occupation provides a rich tableau for narratives.

Working with Palestinian-

American film-maker Hind Shoufani on "They Planted Strange Trees", the international crew has been adding final touches in post-production.

"It's a meditative journey set in Galilee that tracks the daily life of residents of the village where the director hails from," said Oraidi.

Oraidi points to independent Palestinian directors such as Hany Abu Assad and Elia Suleiman whose films have won Oscar nominations and prizes at Cannes.

"Without the personal attention of film-makers, patience and persistence... despite the conditions we're living under, we wouldn't have a single film on screen," she said.

"We want to show there are lots of other stories in Palestine besides war, destruction and the occupation," Oraidi said.

She said the biggest challenge for independent Arab film-makers was a lack of facilities such as custom-made studios.

This "balloons the budget and we're forced to partner up with other co-producers to get funding", she said.

Faring better than Hollywood

Tunisian screenwriter and director Fatma Riahi is in the early stages of a long feature, "My Father Killed Bourguiba", that attempts "to tell the history of Tunisia in the last 30 years through a biographical and personal narrative".

Focused on her father, the documentary follows his role in a plan to overthrow Habib Bourguiba's regime in a 1987 military coup and its current reverberations after the 2011 revolution that toppled his successor Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

"I hope the film... gives an alternative reading... of Tunisian history... from coups to revolutions to what we're currently experiencing under (President) Kais Saied," the director in her mid-thirties said. — AFP

ART

From art shows to theatre, Baghdad sees cultural revival



ART EXHIBITIONS, book fairs on the Tigris and Godot in Baghdad — after decades of conflict and strife, the Iraqi capital is experiencing an artistic renaissance.

"People need art, they want to develop their artistic taste — it's an escape route," said Noor Alaa al Din, director of art space The Gallery.

"We are like any country, we have the right to art to entertain us."

The Iraqi capital often makes grim headlines for violence and geopolitical rivalry.

But behind the conflict, tensions and recently the pandemic, a fledgling cultural renaissance has emerged in recent years, recalling a golden age when Baghdad was considered one of the Arab world's cultural capitals.

Galleries have opened and festivals have blossomed, attracting crowds eager to make up for lost time.

The Gallery opened its doors barely a month ago, but visitors queue around the corner on opening night of any show.

In a recent show, Iraqi-Canadian artist Riyadh Ghenea paid tribute to his late mother with a series of brightly coloured abstract compositions.

She "suffered all the phases that Iraq has been through," said the artist, who came back to Baghdad in 2011.

Upon his return, "I found neither my mother nor the country that I had left behind," he said.

ALLEVIATE STRESS

Years of sectarian violence followed the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein.

The rise of the IS group in 2014 saw more brutality and bloodshed.

Amir, a 25-year-old pharmacist, acknowledges that his entire childhood was accompanied by conflict.

"Art allows us to alleviate

the stress of our daily lives," he said from outside The Gallery.

Normality hangs by a thread in the Iraqi capital, where rocket and drone attacks sometimes target its highly fortified Green Zone, and where a July suicide attack on a market killed more than 30 people.

It was also the site of massive youth-led anti-government protests in 2019, and an ensuing bloody crackdown.



But on a balmy November afternoon, thousands of visitors gathered along the banks of the Tigris for the eighth edition of a book festival.

Organisers of the "I am an Iraqi, I read" event were distributing 30,000 books for free, from fiction to philosophy and foreign languages.

An old Arab adage goes that books are written in Cairo, printed in Beirut and read in Baghdad.

A singer accompanied by traditional instruments performed local folk music as the fashionably dressed youth, couples with small children and senior citizens enjoyed the event.

GOOSEBUMPS AND TEARS

Individuals and foreign institutes have largely driven Baghdad's cultural rebirth in the oil-rich country.

Last month however, the

city hosted the second edition of an international theatre festival, organised by the culture ministry.

"The audience overflowed from the hall" in the opening days, said host venue director Ali Abbas.

"Iraqis used to be afraid to go out into the streets," he said. "The situation has changed dramatically."

Troupes hailing from Egypt, Tunisia, Germany and Italy

performed for free, and Iraqis too had a chance to shine.

Among them was director Anas Abdel Samad, who staged a performance of his piece "Yes Godot".

German actor Hanno Friedrich, on his first trip to Baghdad, was among the foreigners performing at the festival with his play "Tyll", adapted from a novel mixing European folklore and the Thirty Years War religious conflict that was fought primarily in central Europe during the 17th century.

"They told us 'don't go, it's dangerous,'" the 55-year-old said — but his experience shattered those stereotypes.

"People climbed on stage and hugged us. They told us they had never seen anything like that," he said.

"We had goosebumps, and tears in our eyes."

— AFP

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
rashabooks@yahoo.com

Disconnect to live

IN HIS BOOK DISCONNECT AND LIVE (original title: Desconéctate y vive (2019), Spanish author Victor Font invites you to abandon urban life for a second and delve into nature, as it has all the answers. Growing up in a small village nearby the French Pyrenees, Font became in tune with nature and everything organic. He worked for eleven years as a falconer in Barcelona's airport and later went on to create his own company Disconnections, where through nature he helps both companies and individuals to flourish and become whole.

Written in a simple language that is engaging and easy to follow, Font shares his personal experiences and emphasises how our own are equally important to turn us into self-sufficient individuals. He believes that information provided by guides and self-help books could confuse being impersonal and irrelevant.

One of the chapters that I enjoyed most was the one dedicated to animals that taught him important life lessons. He lists animals that he'd either worked with or kept as pets including dogs, ferrets, geese, different raptors and a crow.

The name of each animal and the lesson learned are used as a title (e.g. Urpa: to pardon). Some of the stories are heartbreaking, especially the ones where raptors were killed either by cars or hunters. Others are fascinating mainly when it comes to training falcons and the bond forged between trainer and bird.

Font also points out how urban life had killed our innate relationship with nature and the instinct and intuition we had. But how could nature cure this? One of the activities that the participants in Font's programmes do is by switching off their mobile phones and removing their watches before starting a walk into the forest or climbing a mountain.

According to him, these activities — or any other nature-involving ones like sitting still watching the sunset — help re-gain the inner-equilibrium and hence instinct and intuition. Font shares funny yet eye-opening professional experiences, especially when dealing with Nomophobics and city dwellers who wonder if canyons and meadows were natural or artificially designed by a landscaper.

Even better; if the vegetables grown on his farm are as good as the ones sold in the supermarket. Another fascinating experience shared is of him living with a native tribe in the heart of Amazon for weeks, learning the importance of close-knit community life — especially for children — and how the concept of time in a tribe is perceived as seasons.

Font is also a keen observer of current technological advancement and highlights its many disadvantages that affect children and parents alike such as overloading them with unnecessary information that causes anxiety and depression over time. Moreover, technology dependence had made children anti-social, overweight and deprived them of a normal inquisitive childhood were playing and outdoor activities are essential for healthy growth.

In the last chapter of the book, Font invites the readers to try different activities that puts them directly in touch with nature, such as visiting the beach or strolling in the park (detachment from your phone before the activity is necessary. Sorry!). While doing this, pay attention to your surroundings. Learn about the local flora and fauna surrounding you (i.e., what type of plant is in front of you? And that bird singing at a distance?).

Continue immersing yourself in the experience by sitting still and practising mindfulness, take all the time needed for gratification to start flowing. And how would that help you? The answer lies in the quote that ends the book: "In that silence, you can hear a very familiar voice that you'd never felt".

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: The World According to Bahja. rashabooks@yahoo.com



What to do if a snake bites you

By Ruqaya Al Kindi
Photo by Ahmed Al Busaidi

Whether you're scared of snakes or you subscribe to the idea that 'they won't bother me if I don't bother them', if you regularly go out to the desert or mountains, it's good to know what you should do if you get bitten by a snake.

"There are approximately 3,000 species of snakes around the world. Twenty-two species of snakes had been registered in the Sultanate of Oman so far," said Ahmed bin Humood al Busaidi, a Snake and Wildlife Specialist at Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre, University of Nizwa.

Being bitten by a snake requires a little first aid and then a quick run to the hospital.

"Approximately 40 per cent of the Sultanate's snakes are non-venomous, 20 per cent are moderately venomous and 40 per cent are very venomous. Some venomous snake bites, also, are dry without injecting venom, and some of them may be dangerous, so it is recommended to visit a doctor after being bitten," Ahmed said.

There are many steps that should be followed after being bitten by a venomous snake.

"Don't try to catch, injure or kill the snake — you're likely to come off second best. Try to identify the type of snake by looking at it. At the hospital, staff have access to a range of tests that can help them determine the likely snake which you have been bitten by, enabling them to give you the most appropriate treatment," he advised.

"Stay away from the site. Don't panic. Avoid making muscular effort or movement as these movements may increase the heart rate and therefore, spread the venom faster," he said.

Ahmed further explained that if you are in the wild, "Contact colleagues or call

them for help without making any effort. (It is preferable to complete the necessary procedures for the person while he is lying down or seated!)"

"Apply basic first aid while waiting for medical assistance which includes cleaning the wound with Alcohol or soap or even just by water. If you've got a pad or even a piece of plastic like cling wrap, put it over the bite site to either soak up or protect the venom for later testing, while making sure that you don't block the circulation of blood," he pointed out.

Ahmed stressed that the person need to go to the hospital to take the necessary serum.

"The best solution is to rush the injured to the nearest hospital, but in case no one is available to provide the help, you must call the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance number 24343666 or the emergency number 9999," Ahmed said.

The injured, he warned, should not be left to walk, but rather carried to the nearest car, because some toxins lead to paralysis of the diaphragm or heart muscle and weakness in breathing, and movement as well may increase the heart rate which may allow the venom to spread through the blood circulation faster.

There are a lot of wrong habits that some people do when they are bitten by venomous snakes, and they may lead to serious complications. He clarified that "cutting the wound with a sharp object such as a razor blade to extract the poison is a wrong habit because it may increase the spread of the poison throughout the wound and may lead to infections."

He added that "sucking the wound to extract the poison will not help dealing with the case because the poison will transfer to the mouth and reach the gums that would absorb the poison quickly."

Wrapping the wound tight may rupture the small blood vessels, and then larger complications may occur. Ahmed warned about taking any medications to reduce pain, justify-

ing that some medications may have dangerous side effects, such as aspirin and others.

Ahmed shared some advice that protects you from snake bites.

Important of all is to "stay alert when you are in places likely to harbour snakes."

"Do not surround the snake because it will attack you as a normal reaction, just leave it, and if it is in the house or farm, it must be carried with tongs from specialists and left in places far from the dwelling and I do not recommend killing it," he advised.

"Snakes are an important part of an ecosystem that is connected to a complex network of the food chain. This means that animals feed on each other to continue their lives, and if one species is endangered, this will contribute to the destruction of the environment," he said.

When camping, Ahmed advised that the lights must be lit and the tent should be closed when sleeping to avoid snakes or even scorpions from entering as these animals are usually attracted by the warmth.

He said, "Do not make your home a haven for snakes. It is, therefore, preferable to fix the cracks in the walls, get rid of the accumulated stones and wood, trim the low trees, mow the weeds constantly, and control insects and rodents."

The toxins in snakes are classified into four main types according to their direct effect on the victim's body: Heamotoxin which destroys the properties or functions of the blood, Cytotoxin which destroys cells of the body, Neurotoxin which destroys the nervous system, and Mycotoxin which is a poison that destroys the muscular system.

He mentioned some of the dangerous Omani snakes like "false horned viper" which is scientifically called "Pseudocerastes persicus" and located at Hajar mountain range, Arabian cobra in Dhofar Governorate, and Arabian sand horned viper located in the sandy desert.

