

Oman welcomes Saudi efforts

The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the statement issued by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia about the outcome of last night's telephonic conversation between HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, French President Emmanuel Macron and the Lebanese Prime Minister Mohammed Najeeb Meqati. Oman's Foreign Ministry, in a statement issued on Sunday, expressed its support for all efforts undertaken to improve and upgrade intra-Arab relations and promote cooperation among Arab states and friendly countries. — **ONA**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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WITH SUPPLY
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OMAN'S
HERITAGE ON
CANVAS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
FINLAND PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sauli Niinisto of the Republic of Finland on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Niinisto. His Majesty also wished the people of Finland further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

OFA COMPLAINS
TO FIFA ON MATCH

Oman Football Association (OFA) has addressed an official letter of objection to the Fifa against what it termed as "stark clear refereeing mistakes" made during the National Football Team's match with its Qatari counterpart as part of the 2021 Fifa Arab Cup. The refereeing decision reflected negatively on the final score, OFA said. OFA identified the refereeing mistakes as: Giving a wrong penalty against Oman team, granting a controversial goal to Qatar without resort to the VAR technology and ignoring the repeated foul play against the Omani team, said OFA. — **ONA**



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NEW ERA OF COOPERATION

MUSCAT: His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will visit the Sultanate of Oman, on Monday.

A statement from the Diwan of Royal Court said that the visit is based on the deeply-rooted historical relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is aimed at consolidating the bonds of love and affection between the two peoples.

The statement said that the visit comes to complement the outcome of the meeting of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his brother King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, during His Majesty's visit to Saudi in July this year.

NEW STAGE

The Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia, led by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, are set for a new stage of economic and investment cooperation in all fields.

Last July, the two countries reaffirmed plans to engage in

joint investment in advanced technologies, innovation, renewable energy projects, industry health, real estate, tourism, petrochemical

converting industries, supply chains, logistics partnership, information technology and financial technology.

The achievements made over

the past five months and the active exchange of visits among officials reflect the keen desire of the two countries to work together. This includes the establishment of the



Omani-Saudi Investment Forum held in August in Muscat where a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed between business persons.

The Omani-Saudi Businessmen Council held a meeting here in August with a view to accelerating integration in commercial, investment and economic fields.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that the visit of Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud to the Sultanate of Oman assumes great significance and will reflect positively at various levels.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Saleh said that the visit consolidates the ties of affinity and serves the two countries interests and status at the regional and international arenas. The Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia constitute basic pillars in the GCC and they carry strategic weight towards advancing joint Arab action, said Al Saleh, noting that the two countries share identical views towards domestic development and that their visions are enshrined in Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030. — **ONA**

Sultanate sees 28% rise in budget revenues

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Coming against the renewed concern about the emergence of the Omicron variant, the Sultanate of Oman's total revenue registered a significant rise of 28.1 per cent till the end of October 2021. According to the monthly bulletin issued by the Ministry of Finance, the total revenue during the 10-month period till October reached RO 8.3 billion compared to the corresponding period in 2020.

"The recovery of oil prices, coupled with a rise in demand for fuel, with oil prices averaging \$58.89 by the end of October 2021 helped the revenue rise", said the bulletin.

The climb in the revenue is aided by an increase in net oil revenues by 35.4 per and a rise in gas revenues by 50.6 per cent, the bulletin said.

As a result, points out the report, the budget deficit until the end of October 2021 decreased by 62.9 per cent, to reach RO 1.6 billion, compared to RO 2.7 billion during the same

The recovery of oil prices, coupled with a rise in demand for fuel, with oil prices averaging \$58.89 by the end of October 2021 helped the revenue rise

BULLETIN

period in 2020. Significantly, Oman crude prices marked an increase of 35.4 per cent to around RO 4.4 billion, while gas revenues also soared by 50.6 per cent and posted RO 1.69 billion.

On Friday last, Oman oil price for the February delivery 2022 reached \$69.17 per barrel, comprising a decline by \$1.90 from the previous day when it was \$71.07 per barrel. The average price of Oman oil (December delivery) has stabilised at \$81.58, thus \$8.80 per barrel higher than November delivery.

HM GETS MESSAGE FROM SAUDI KING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The message deals with the fraternal relations and cooperation between the two countries and their peoples. The message was delivered to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received here on Sunday Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Saudi Foreign Minister. The meeting reviewed the advanced relations between the two countries and discussed several issues of common interest. It was attended by Abdullah Saud al Anazi, Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman and a number of officials from both sides. — **ONA**

'Encouraging' early feedback on Omicron's spread

WASHINGTON: Early indications of the severity of the Omicron Covid-19 variant are "a bit encouraging," top US pandemic adviser Anthony Fauci said on Sunday, while cautioning more information was still needed.

"Omicron has a transmission advantage" in South Africa, where

the variant was first reported, Fauci said in a CNN interview, noting the country had a low level of cases before it saw "almost a vertical spike upwards, which is almost exclusively Omicron."

"Though it's too early to really make any definitive statements about it, thus far, it does not

look like there's a great degree of severity to it," he said. "Thus far, the signals are a bit encouraging."

Medical experts have in recent days underscored that the South African population skews young and that more severe cases could emerge in the coming weeks.

— **AFP**

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 28°C Min 20°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 24°C NIZWA: Max 28°C Min 15°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:35 FAJR: 05:15 DHUHR: 12:03 ASR: 15:05 MAGHRIB: 17:25 ISHA: 18:40



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



CROWN PRINCE'S VISIT REFLECTS 'TIME-HONOURED AND HISTORICAL' TIES BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

FURTHER MOMENTUM TO BILATERAL TIES

SAMUEL KUTTY

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Relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are at a historical stage. And this is expected to get further momentum with the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to the Sultanate today.

The visit by the Crown Prince, another sign of warm ties between the two countries, follows the maiden trip of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in July to the Kingdom paving way for broadening of the horizons for joint action in accordance with the aspirations of the peoples of the two brotherly countries.

No doubt, the visit reflects "time-honoured and historical" ties between the two countries. Principles on which Omani-Saudi relations are established are solid and enduring. Citizens of the two countries have long-standing bonds of fraternity, framed by common history, authentic Arab customs and traditions, and popular heritage.

The positive reactions of the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia at many levels are obvious. They underscore the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud to press ahead with promoting this deep-rooted relationship.

Within the framework of the joint action



between the two countries to strengthen economic relations, the visions of the Kingdom 2030 and Oman 2040 constitute a common denominator in the field of trade and benefit from the investment opportunities available, in a way that achieves for both countries diversity in their economies and sources of income.

During His Majesty the Sultan's visit to Saudi Arabia, a number of agreements were signed for cooperation in different fields, especially real estate development, tourism, petrochemicals, manufacturing industries, logistics, information

THE KEENNESS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES ON EXCHANGING POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT MATTERS OF COMMON CONCERN HAS BEEN REFLECTED IN HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS BETWEEN THEIR LEADERS AND TOP OFFICIALS DURING THE RECENT PAST

technology and banking systems.

More important was the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of an Omani-Saudi Coordination Council co-chaired by the foreign ministers of both countries to strengthen bilateral relations in all fields.

Now what the citizens of the two countries look at is whether the historic visit will see the opening of the first direct land border crossing between the two countries, in the Empty Quarter. If opened, the land route will contribute to the smooth movement of citizens of

the two countries and the integration of supply chains as a prelude to achieving the cherished economic integration between the two brotherly countries.

The keenness of the two countries on exchanging points of view about matters of common concern has been reflected in high-level meetings between their leaders and top officials during the recent past.

Over a period of two years between 2020 and 2021, the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intensified high-level bilateral meetings.

In March last year, His Majesty the Sultan received Prince Khalid bin Salman al Saud, Deputy Minister of Defence of Saudi Arabia, who was on a visit to the Sultanate to explore aspects of existing cooperation between the two countries and ways to realise the joint interests of the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi peoples. In its political statements, the Sultanate has always expressed its support for the government of the Kingdom vis-à-vis a variety of issues.

The Sultanate welcomed the initiative announced by Saudi Arabia to reach a political settlement of the Yemeni crisis through dialogue with different parties and in cooperation with the UN efforts aimed at realising the desired political settlement in Yemen. The ongoing meetings between the leaderships of Saudi and Omani, at this time, no doubt, reflect the wisdom and foresight the two leaders enjoy in dealing with the latest developments in the region and internationally.



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



THE NEW ROAD WILL FACILITATE THE PASSAGE OF PILGRIMS AND TOURISTS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BESIDES LINKING THE CITY OF DUQM WITH NEOM

NEW IMPETUS TO ECONOMIC COOPERATION, CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLE

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The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate and the Kingdom increased by the end of 2020 to \$2.5 billion, compared to about \$1.4 billion in 2010, while the number of Saudi companies in the Sultanate increased to 1,235 in 2021, compared to 467 companies in 2010.

In a recent interview to a Saudi publication, *Asharq al Awasat*, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, said that the economic cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, has increased since the establishment of the Coordination Council in July.

He said, “The ‘Oman Vision 2040’ and ‘Kingdom’s Vision 2030’ seek to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on oil, create conditions for the private sector and investors to have a greater role in providing job opportunities, as well as seeking to

attract foreign direct investment among others.”

Saqri called for improving the maritime link between Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman by transferring oil and gas exports in the region to the Arabian Sea through the Sultanate without passing through the Strait of Hormuz.

“Two countries are seeking to accelerate and increase the volume of trade and investment exchange between them through joint strategic projects, increasing investment opportunities, and offering more joint projects and mutual



investments in various sectors,” the report quoting the minister said.

As it will reduce the travel time between two countries by 800km and the need to cross the neighbouring countries, the direct road link between the Sultanate and the Kingdom will contribute to facilitating trade exchange and transporting goods in a shorter time and at a lower cost, which will open the way for Saudi goods to enter the Sultanate and also access the Omani ports for exports to the rest of

the world.

It will also facilitate the passage of pilgrims and tourists between the two countries, besides linking the city of Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman with NEOM in Saudi Arabia. The new land route will help Omani goods to access the Saudi ports located in the Red Sea for exports to the rest of the world.

“The Sultanate launched the construction of the Industrial City project in the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate in 2020, with a total area of 10 million square metres. It is an important project and is located on the road leading to the crossing between the Sultanate and the Kingdom.”

The Sultanate and the Kingdom have also signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in the fields of land and air transportation. The MoUs will increase mutual visits between engineers, experts, and professional technicians in the fields of land roads and air navigation.



Observer

OMAN-SAUDI ROAD LINK PROJECT IN FINAL PHASE

- The 650-km road linking Oman with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is expected to open for public in the next quarter
- The Oman-Saudi Arabia road link will cut down the distance between the two countries by around 800-km



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- The road passes through Rub al Khali (the Empty Quarter) and the eastern province of Jazan in Saudi Arabia.
- The section of the road in Oman is around 160km long while around 519km falls in Saudi Arabia.



- The Saudi section links the Khorais Bithaa road to the Omani border, via Shuyfa and Umm Zamout.
- The road offers scope for great commercial exchange between Oman and KSA

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OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA HAVE GREAT PROSPECTS FOR A STEADY RISE IN THE VOLUME OF TRADE EXCHANGE DURING THE UPCOMING PERIOD AS A RESULT OF THE GROWING RELATIONS AND THE COMMON GOALS TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION



VISIT TO EXPAND TRADE, INVESTMENT LINKS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, are witnessing economic and investment cooperation in various fields.

Last July, the two brotherly countries affirmed their strive towards mutual investment in advanced technology, innovation, renewable energy, industry, healthcare and pharmaceutical industry, real estate development, tourism, petrochemicals, manufacturing, supply chains, logistics, IT technology and financial technology (fintech).

The serious desire of the two brotherly countries to bolster economic ties was reflected in cooperation through mutual visits by officials and businessmen over the past five months.

In August the two countries held the Omani-Saudi Investment Forum in Muscat. The forum came out with a number of results that included the signing of a memorandum of understanding that aimed at strengthening and encouraging mutual investments. A number of agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed during the forum between Omani and Saudi businessmen.

The Omani-Saudi Business Council, which held a joint meeting last August in Muscat, seeks to bolster trade and investment relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as developing the mechanisms and requirements for enhancing intra-trade between the two brotherly countries, accelerating economic

THE VISIT MADE BY HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA IN JULY REPRESENTED A STRONG STEPPING POINT TOWARDS ACHIEVING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES



integration, enhancing trade cooperation and raising the rate of investment opportunities between the two countries.

Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to the Sultanate of Oman carries great significance on several bilateral levels.

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), the chairman of OCCI said that the visit reflects firm fraternal ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and comes as a translation of the strong bonds between the two countries

and their peoples. Those bond include mutual interests and the regional and international status of both countries as they are basic members of the GCC bloc and major players in promoting joint Arab action. Besides, the two countries have similar strategic economic plans (Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030) which aim at boosting comprehensive development and economic diversification.

The chairman of OCCI affirmed that the statistics indicate an upward trend in terms of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which stood at RO 960 million in 2020, more than double the figure for 2010 (RO 461 million). The statistics for the first quarter of this year show an increase in the volume of trade

exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia which grew by 14.89 per cent compared to the same period last year, reaching RO 265.4 million.

The private sector's ambition to boost trade exchange comes as a translation of the strong relationship between the two countries, a trend that is encouraged by the leaderships of both countries. This trend is supported by the fact that the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have great prospects for a steady rise in the volume of trade exchange during the upcoming period as a result of the growing relations and the common goals to achieve economic integration. The opening of the land road linking the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will have a positive impact in facilitating

trade exchange and increasing its flow, the official said.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia comes in second place in the list of importers of Omani non-oil exports, fourth in terms of re-exports, and fifth in the list of countries from which the Sultanate imports. KSA also ranks fourth globally in fish imports from the Sultanate of Oman. KSA is a strategic partner in a number of economic projects established in the Sultanate of Oman, including the development of Khazaen Economic City, an Omani-Saudi partnership project that was established in 2018. KSA also established partnership with the Sultanate of Oman in the energy sector through the Ibri 2 projects, the largest solar power project in the Sultanate and the Salalah 2 project, as well as Salalah

Independent Water Desalination Plant, all these projects are in partnership with ACWA Power Saudi Arabia, the official said.

The chairman of OCCI noted that the visit made by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented a strong stepping point towards achieving economic integration between the two countries. An indicator of this is the signing of a number of agreements during the visit and the emphasis on raising the pace of economic cooperation between the two countries. This can be achieved by stimulating the public and private sectors to reach qualitative trade and investment exchanges that achieve the aspirations of the two peoples and contribute to realising the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040 and through launching a set of joint initiatives that include areas of cooperation including investments in Duqm, cooperation in energy field, and partnership in the fields of food security, and cooperation in various cultural, sports and tourism activities, the official said.

The chairman of OCCI noted that Omani-Saudi Business Council is striving to boost trade and investments between the Sultanate and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by improving the mechanisms and requirements for enhancing intra-trade between the two brotherly countries. The council plans to expedite economic integration, enhance commercial cooperation, increase the rate of investment opportunities between the two countries by investing in petrochemical, mining and logistics projects. — ONA



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

Relations built on mutual respect

IN ADDITION TO ITS UNIQUE NATURAL FEATURES THAT MADE THE SULTANATE A DESTINATION FOR SAUDI AND GULF TOURISTS, WHO SHARE WITH THE OMANI PEOPLE THE RELIGION AND LANGUAGE, THE COMMON SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS HAS ENABLED THE SULTANATE TO EMERGE AS A POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATION



OMAN'S STRATEGIC LOCATION AND ITS POLITICAL AND SECURITY STABILITY HAVE PROVIDED A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TO ATTRACT FOREIGN INVESTMENTS, AND THE SULTANATE HAS SOUGHT TO EXPLOIT THIS ADVANTAGE BY ESTABLISHING A NUMBER OF ECONOMIC ZONES AND PORTS, AND FOCUSING ON PROMISING SECTORS, MOST NOTABLY THE TOURISM AND LOGISTICS SECTORS



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The Saudi-Omani relations under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik are heading steadily to broader horizons of joint action and investment in national capabilities in various fields that would bring further prosperity to the two countries and achieve the aspirations of Saudi and Omani citizens, said a recent report released by the Saudi Press Agency.

Over half a century long relations between Riyadh and Muscat have been featured by cooperation and mutual respect between the two leaderships and understanding on various regional and international issues, while the peoples of the two countries have long-standing bonds of fraternity, framed by common history, authentic Arab customs and traditions, and popular heritage.

Regionally, the two countries' efforts are joined by their brothers under the umbrella of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in accordance with common visions and strategic goals, in order to achieve coordination and integration between member states in various fields, with their roles expanding within the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the international community in the United Nations in support of peace and security efforts.

The successive changes in the region are pushing the leaderships of the two countries



for more cooperation at the bilateral, Gulf, and regional levels to move forward in establishing permanent security and stability and ensure that their positive repercussions are reflected on development programmes in service of their nations.

Within the framework of the joint action between the two countries to strengthen economic relations, the visions of the Kingdom 2030 and Oman 2040 constitute a common denominator in the field of trade and benefit from the investment

opportunities available, in a way that achieves for both countries diversity in their economies and sources of income.

Within the context of the Omani vision, which is an example of political and economic stability, has taken concrete steps to diversify its national income sources and reduce its dependence on oil.

The Sultanate of Oman's strategic location and its political and security stability have provided a competitive advantage to attract foreign investments, and the Sultanate

has sought to exploit this advantage by establishing a number of economic zones and ports, and focusing on promising sectors, most notably the tourism and logistics sectors.

In addition to its unique natural features that made the Sultanate a destination for Saudi and Gulf tourists, who share with the Omani people the religion and language, the common social customs and traditions has enabled the Sultanate to emerge as a popular tourist destination.



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NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS JOINS ROP



MUSCAT: A new batch of citizens has joined the Institute of Police Recruits at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences after passing evaluation tests and personal interviews. The new police recruits will receive military training and academic courses as well as special training on the tasks and duties of policemen. The move comes as ROP continues to recruit citizens to provide its units with qualified manpower. — ONA

Post-pandemic leadership meet reviews Vision 2040 goals

MUSCAT: Oman Economic Review (OER) magazine on Sunday organised its annual business conference entitled “Post-Pandemic Leadership” here under the patronage of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

The conference included working papers, presentations and discussion panels. It reviewed prospects for achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and challenges it faces, as well as the efforts made to enhance the capabilities of the major sectors targeted by the vision, such as tourism and logistics sectors, manufacturing industries, fisheries and agriculture.

The participants in the conference reviewed the national efforts made to enhance investment and business. They also touched on diversifying the productive base of the economy and creating a knowledge-based economy, besides providing a stimulating environment for innovation.

The conference discussed the partnership issues between private and public sectors and efforts exerted to provide job opportunities for youth.

The conference’s agenda included two discussion panels on enhancing the Omani economy and digital transformation in managing human resources. — ONA

GCC officials review Covid-19 situation

WHO URGES VACCINE FOR ALL



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The World Health Organization has urged all to take vaccine and be part of the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic as the virus is still not away from the world even as the GCC Under-Secretaries of Health Ministries held on Sunday a virtual meeting to discuss the latest developments of the new variant Omicron and efforts to combat it.

The meeting held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Under-Secretary for Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health (MoH) and attended by senior officials reviewed the global situation and actions taken for each Gulf country.

“The emergence of the Omicron variant underlines the importance of global solidarity and working together to defeat the pandemic. Now, more than ever, we need to facilitate equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, treatments and tests, and encourage everyone to follow public health measures,” Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said at a press briefing.

The WHO announcement comes in the wake of the campaign to promote access to Covid-19 tools during Fifa Arab Cup as part of global partnership between Fifa A and the world body.

The WHO observes that a large portion of the global population remains susceptible to infection and at an increased risk of severe disease and death. Inequity in vaccine is prevailing in different parts of the world.

“Nobody is safe until everyone is safe and we all have our roles to play in sharing that message. Health comes first, and through football, we can reinforce the message that high infection and death rates will persist worldwide as long as there is inequitable access to tools to fight the pandemic,” Gianni Infantino, Fifa President, said at the press briefing.

Although some Gulf countries except the Sultanate of Oman have registered few cases of the new variant, no one was admitted to the Intensive Care Units, or no related deaths have been reported until now. However, the meeting observed that its prevalence and intensity are still undetermined.

Ministerial decision on imported products validity

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, issued Decision No 190/2021 promulgating the Technical Regulation of the Concurrence System governing imported products to ensure that they do not pose risks to human health, the environment or public safety. The Technical Regulation will apply after six months from its date of publishing in the Official Gazette. It will help streamline customs procedures and encourage small and medium enterprises to tally the specifications of their local products with international standards, so that they could compete locally and abroad. — ONA

Impact of volunteering discussed



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development in cooperation with the Arab Open University organised a seminar titled ‘Volunteering and its Impact on Society’, under the patronage of HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

The seminar included several working papers on introducing volunteering and methods of developing its skills, identifying necessary information to establish voluntary projects, highlighting impacts of volunteering on the community, as well as the role of active associations in the community in the field of volunteering. — ONA

Pharmaceutical Care Conference

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, represented by the Directorate General of Medical Supplies, will hold over three days, the 10th Pharmaceutical Care Conference & Exhibition, starting on December 12.

Activities of the conference, themed “Excellence in Pharmacy Practice”, will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event will experience wide local, regional and international participations, along with the participation of officials from various advanced international organisations in the field, including World Health Organization, the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP), Pharmaceutical Care Network Europe (PCNE), Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP Canada), as well as Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi and the pharmaceutical societies of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. — ONA

Oman Air resumes Muscat-Zurich flight



MUSCAT: Oman Air resumed flights between Muscat and Zurich on December 1. The resumption of its direct service on the Muscat-Zurich-Muscat route coincides with Oman Air’s 10th anniversary flying to Zurich (ZRH) from its base in Muscat (MCT). Initially introduced on December 2, 2011, the route was paused temporarily due to the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent downturn in global aviation and travel. — ONA

Mwasalat Training Institute gets international recognition

MUSCAT: Mwasalat, a member of Asyad Group, has announced that Mwasalat Training Institute reached new levels of excellence and recognition by obtaining the prestigious City and Guilds international accreditation, adding it to the IVV and Diamond accreditation.

This proficient training institution has quickly become a leading regional training centre offering various training courses on public transportation processes and operations.

Badar bin Mohammed al

Nadabi, acting CEO of Mwasalat, hailed this major milestone as an “invaluable international recognition of the exceptional quality of Mwasalat Training Institute’s programmes offered in various vocational pathways in the public transportation sector.

Our institute aims to supply both local and regional markets with the human resources and competencies needed to cover the full scope of public transport operations and comply with health and traffic safety requirements while creating the



proper environment that ensures customer and driver safety and protects corporate assets.

This achievement was made possible by the outstanding efforts of our young professionals who proved themselves once again, as they worked tirelessly to meet all the relevant conditions and submitted a comprehensive application that allowed the institute to pass international accreditation requirements with flying colours, added Al Nadabi.

Mwasalat’s Acting CEO explained that the training

institute has been delivering numerous specialised training programmes since its establishment in 2019, bringing in experienced trainers of the highest calibre to build the competencies of Mwasalat employees and introduce international best practices in transport and safety.

The institute’s training programmes not only cover operational capacity building, but extend to contingency planning and technical support.

— ONA

Sudan top general denies military could run in polls

KHARTOUM: Sudan's top general Abdel Fattah al Burhan on Sunday denied that military and paramilitary members of the transitional administration could run for the country's July 2023 elections.

"The president of the Sovereign Council denied what the AFP reported about the participation of the military in the upcoming elections," his office said in a statement. Sudan has been run by a joint military-civilian ruling council since August 2019, but civilian members were changed following a coup in October this year.

AFP asked Burhan in an interview on Saturday whether the military components and the paramilitary members of the transitional Council will be able to participate in elections planned for 2023.

Burhan responded by saying the August 2019 deal had "included a clear clause that all participants of the transitional period will not be allowed to take part of the period that directly follows it."

But a landmark 2020 peace deal with rebel groups "granted some participants to the transitional period the right to become part of the government" that followed the transition, he said.

The statement issued on



The deal had 'included a clear clause that all participants of the transitional period will not be allowed to take part of the period that directly follows it

ABDEL FATTAH AL BURHAN
Sudan's top general

Sunday said Burhan meant that only ex-rebel groups which signed a peace deal in 2020 could be candidates in the planned elections. Burhan — Sudan's de facto leader since the ouster of longtime ruler Omar al Bashir in April 2019 — removed the

civilian government and declared a state of emergency on October 25, upending the planned three-year transition to full civilian rule. Burhan's interview was one of a series he gave to international media a day after UN chief Antonio Guterres, in a report

submitted to the Security Council, called Sudan hostile to journalists.

On November 21, Burhan signed a deal to reinstate Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok who was ousted in the coup and kept for weeks under house arrest.

The Burhan-Hamdok agreement was welcomed by the United Nations, the African Union, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It was also cautiously greeted by Britain and the United States.

But critics have lambasted it as "whitewashing" and accused Hamdok of "betrayal". Pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority.

The top general has long insisted the military's move on October 25 "was not a coup" but a step "to rectify the transition".

Meanwhile, Burhan said there are "positive indicators" that measures taken against his country following an October military takeover could soon be lifted.

The power grab triggered a wave of international condemnation and several punitive measures, with the World Bank and the US freezing aid, a blow to a country already mired in economic crisis. The African Union has also suspended Sudan's membership over what it termed the "unconstitutional" takeover. — AFP

Police kill Palestinian activist in stabbing

JERUSALEM: Israeli security forces shot dead a Palestinian in annexed east Jerusalem on Saturday after he stabbed an Israeli civilian and tried to attack police, Israeli police and Palestinian medics said.

The activist stabbed a man near the Damascus Gate to the walled Old City and then "attempted to stab a border police officer", police said in a statement. "Police neutralised the stabber," it added.

A spokeswoman for the Palestinian Red Crescent said police killed the activist.

Israel's Magen David Adom emergency service said the stabbing victim was a 20-year-old religious Jew who was taken to hospital in "moderate to severe condition".

Palestinian official news agency Wafa identified the activist as Mohammad Shawkat Ahmed Salima, 25, from the northern West Bank town of Salfit. Video released by police showed Salima tackling a man in ultra-Orthodox garb, then running to attack a police officer before he was shot.

Footage filmed by a bystander and widely shared on social media showed the assailant lying prone on a sidewalk as police continued

to fire shots.

Border police commander Amir Cohen said he "fully backed" the forces who "responded as needed to the incident" to prevent additional harm.

The force has launched an investigation into the incident, spokesman Tamir Pero said.

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett praised police for acting "quickly and decisively... against a terrorist who tried to murder an Israeli citizen".

The Palestinian foreign ministry called the shooting a "field execution".

Mohammed Hama-deh, Jerusalem spokesman for Hamas which controls the Gaza Strip, decried the "deliberate shooting of a wounded young man lying on the ground".

The police response also drew criticism from some Israeli politicians and human rights groups.

"The execution of a person who no longer poses a threat is a horrible and terrible crime," Arab-Israeli lawmaker Aida Touma-Sliman said on Twitter.

Rights group B'Tselem tweeted: "The activist wasn't 'neutralised'. He was summarily executed." — AFP

Stuck in limbo, Syrians in Denmark suffer unbearable wait

VORDINGBORG, Denmark: Bilal Alkale's family is among the hundred or so Syrian refugees in Denmark whose lives are on hold amid an insufferable legal limbo — their temporary residency permits have been revoked but they can't be deported. Now, they have no rights.

Alkale, who until recently ran his own small transportation company in Denmark, found out in March he wasn't allowed to stay in the Scandinavian country where he has lived as a refugee since 2014, as Copenhagen now considers it safe for Syrians to return to Damascus.

His wife and three of his four children were also affected by the decision taken by Danish authorities. Once the ruling was confirmed on appeal in late September — like 40 per cent of some 200 other cases examined so far — Alkale and his family were or-

dered to leave.

They were told that if they didn't go voluntarily, they would be placed in a detention centre. The family has refused to leave.

Normally they would have been deported by now, but since Copenhagen has no diplomatic relations with Damascus, they can't be. And so they wait.

Days and weeks go by without any news from the authorities. In the meantime, the family has been stripped of their rights in Denmark. Alkale can't sleep, his eyes riveted on his phone as he keeps checking his messages.

"What will become of me now?" the 51-year-old asks.

"Everything is off. The kids aren't going to school, and I don't have work," he says, the despair visible on his weary face as he sits in the living room of the home he refurbished himself in the small village of Lundby, an hour-and-a-



Syrian refugee Bilal Alkale (R) and his wife Sawsan Doungham take part in a protest against the deportation of Syrian families to their homeland in Copenhagen. — AFP

half's drive south of Copenhagen. "All this so people will get annoyed enough to leave Denmark." For him, returning to Syria

means certain death. "I can't go back, I'm wanted," he said.

And yet, he has no way to earn a living here. "As a foreigner stay-

ing illegally in Denmark, your rights are very limited," notes his lawyer Niels-Erik Hansen, who has applied for new residency

permits for the family.

In mid-2020, Denmark became the first European Union country to re-examine the cases of about 500 Syrians from Damascus, which is under the control of Bashar al Assad's regime, saying "the current situation in Damascus is no longer such as to justify a residence permit or the extension of a residence permit".

The decision was later widened to include the neighbouring region of Rif Dimaq.

Despite a wave of Danish and international criticism, the Social Democratic government — which has pursued one of Europe's toughest immigration policies — has refused to budge.

The Alkale family is considering leaving for another European country, even though they risk being sent back to Denmark. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

4 Yemen civilians among 9 dead in coalition strike

An air strike in the battleground Yemeni province of Tazeh killed five fighters and four civilians, a local official and a medical source said. The Friday night strike targeted a military vehicle as it was passing through Maqbanah district, about 35 kilometres northwest of Yemen's third largest city Tazeh.

"The Ansar Allah military vehicle was passing down a road and four civilians got in before it was struck by coalition jets, resulting in all nine deaths,"



the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A medical source confirmed the death toll and added that two civilians were also wounded. Rebel-controlled media said 18 civilians had been killed. — AFP

TEHRAN

Defence test sparks loud blast near Iran N-site

An air defence test triggered a loud explosion near Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility on Saturday as nuclear talks with major powers stumble. The explosion was heard in the skies over the Iranian city of Badroud, just 20 kilometres from the nuclear plant, the official IRNA news agency reported. "Badroud residents heard the noise and saw a light which showed an object had just blown up in the skies over the city," a witness said.

But the spokesman of the Irani-



an army, General Amir Tarikhani, told state television there was no cause for concern. Iran's Natanz uranium enrichment facility is almost entirely underground, protected by reinforced concrete covered with earth. — AFP

AMMAN

Jordan jails hospital chief over Covid deaths

A Jordanian court on Sunday sentenced to three years in jail the director of a state hospital over the deaths of 10 patients at the facility which treated coronavirus patients.

Abdel Razak al Khashman and four aides were convicted of "causing the deaths" at the Salt state hospital where the patients died after it ran out of oxygen. The verdict can be appealed within 10 days, an AFP correspondent at the court said. The deaths in March sparked public anger in



Jordan and led to the resignation of health minister Nazir Obeidat. After the tragedy King Abdullah II visited the state hospital where hundreds of people rallied outside to vent their wrath.

French police on alert as Zemmour holds first rally

PARIS: French far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour (pictured) is to hold his first official campaign rally at a stadium outside Paris on Sunday, with police on high alert over the risk of clashes with protesters.

Zemmour, a 63-year-old author and television pundit, announced on Tuesday that he would run in next April's election, joining the field of challengers seeking to unseat centrist President Emmanuel Macron.

His first rally comes just a day after the right-wing Republicans party picked Valerie Pécresse, a former budget minister, as its nominee.

"It's incredible the level of enthusiasm, while other candidates have been in half-empty rooms," Antoine Diers, a spokesman for the Friends of Eric Zemmour group, said on Friday. "We're expecting a lot of people."

Around 19,000 people have signed up for the event, according to Zemmour's campaign, leading him to swap a concert hall for a larger capacity exhibition space in the Villepinte suburb northeast of the capital. Police are on alert for far-left activists and anarchists who disrupted Zemmour's trip last weekend to the southern port city of Marseille, which ended with



Demonstrators march during a rally to protest against French far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour in Paris on the day of his first official campaign rally. — AFP

the candidate showing the middle finger to a woman who was protesting.

Around 50 trade union and civil society groups have also called for a demonstration in Paris to denounce Zemmour, an anti-Islam and anti-immigration polemicist who is sometimes called "France's Trump" and has two convictions for hate speech.

Several thousand people are expected to gather.

Stephane Troussel, the Socialist head of the Seine-Saint-Denis region, where Zemmour's rally will take place, also launched a petition calling for the rally to be cancelled.

The event will be closely scrutinised given how Zemmour has been falling in opinion polls following a dramatic entrance into



French politics in September.

Until now, he had been travelling the country doing promotional events for his latest book — "France has not said its final word" — which served as a thinly disguised pre-campaign tour.

As well as a series of recent missteps, including the middle-finger incident, Zemmour has seen several influential figures on the far-

right distance themselves from him, including his main financial backer.

Polls show that voters currently believe Marine Le Pen, the veteran leader of the far-right National Rally party, would make a more competent president than Zemmour, who is viewed as highly divisive and arrogant by a large majority.

The latest surveys suggest he would be eliminated in the first round if the election were held now, with Macron tipped to win ahead of Le Pen, but analysts warn that the outcome remains highly uncertain.

Zemmour launched his bid for the presidency on Tuesday in a highly unusual video posted on YouTube, which saw him read a speech into an old-fashioned microphone while seated at a desk and barely looking into the camera. It was intended to recall the famous June 1940 address by war hero General Charles De Gaulle to carry on with resistance to the Nazi occupation of France.

Over images of riots, Islamic prayers and terror attacks, Zemmour warned that France was in danger of being "conquered" or "colonised" by immigrants and that French people were being "replaced." — AFP

LESBOS VISIT

Pope calls neglect of migrants 'shipwreck of civilisation'

LESBOS ISLAND: Pope Francis on Sunday returned to the island of Lesbos, the migration flashpoint he first visited in 2016, calling the neglect of migrants the "shipwreck of civilisation".

The pope has long championed the cause of migrants and his visit comes a day after he delivered a stinging rebuke to Europe which he said was "torn by nationalist egoism". "In Europe there are those who persist in treating the problem as a matter that does not concern them," the pope said as he spent some two hours at Lesbos' Mavrovouni camp where nearly 2,200 asylum-seekers live.

On the second day of his visit to Greece, he met dozens of child asylum-seekers and relatives standing behind metal barriers and stopped to embrace a boy called Mustafa.

"I am trying to help you," Francis told one group through his interpreter. People later gathered in a tent to sing songs and psalms to the pontiff. Pope Francis warned that the Mediterranean "is be-



Pope Francis greets two young refugee girls at the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos. — AFP

His (Pope) visit is a blessing

ROSETTE LEO
Congolese asylum-seeker

coming a grim cemetery without tombstones" and that "after all this time, we see that little in the world has changed with regard to the issue of migration".

He said the root causes "should be confronted — not the poor people who pay the consequences and are even used for political propaganda." — AFP

Germany's Free Democrats pave way for Scholz-led govt

BERLIN: Germany's incoming coalition cleared a new hurdle on Sunday with the Free Democrats (FDP) approving an alliance with the centre-left SPD and ecologist Greens to replace Angela Merkel's government.

The greenlight from 92.2 per cent of around 660 FDP delegates came a day after the SPD waved through the deal during their own congress. The Greens are expected to publish the results of their membership vote on Monday.

With the agreement expected to sail through too on Monday, parliament is getting ready to formally elect the SPD's Olaf Scholz as chancellor on Wednesday.

Urging his FDP to back the deal, party leader Christian Lindner said the coalition agreement would bring about a "new departure in Germany". "Germany is waiting for this new departure," stressed Lindner, who is poised to become finance minister.

Under their roadmap for



Olaf Scholz

Germany, the three parties want to bring forward an end to coal to 2030 from 2038. They also plan to put 15 million electric cars on the road by 2030, and ramp up the building of new homes to keep housing costs affordable.

At the same time, they are aiming to return to the country's no new debt rule by 2023, after the sacrosanct policy was lifted to allow the government to borrow billions to finance its way out of the coronavirus pandemic.

MERKEL TO HANDOVER: She was called "the leader of the free world" against authoritarian populists on the march in Europe and the United States, but Angela

Merkel is wrapping up a historic 16 years in power with a mixed legacy at home and abroad.

In office so long she was dubbed Germany's "eternal chancellor", Merkel, 67, leaves with her popularity so resilient she would likely have won a record fifth term had she sought it.

Instead, Merkel will pass the baton as the first German chancellor to step down entirely by choice, with a whole generation of voters never knowing another person at the top.

Her supporters say she provided steady leadership through countless global crises as a moderate and unifying figure.

Yet critics argue a muddle-through style pegged to the broadest possible consensus lacked the bold vision to prepare Europe and its top economy for the coming decades. What is certain is that she leaves behind a fractured political landscape, with her own CDU party divided as it struggles to emerge from her long shadow. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

VIENNA

Austria sees third weekend of coronavirus protests

Tens of thousands of Austrians turned out for the third straight weekend of protests against the government's coronavirus measures, police said. After several different demonstrations took place in the capital Vienna, police said their estimate of overall turnout was 'over 40,000'.

Police said that some demonstrators had thrown "pyrotechnic objects" at officers, who used pepper spray in response. Several arrests were made for civil disorder offences.



Police added that around 1,500 people had taken part in a counter-demonstration.

Austria is in a partial lockdown which started on November 22 and is scheduled to end on December 11. — AFP

LONDON

Travellers to UK to show pre-departure virus tests

The UK government has announced that those travelling into the country will need to show a negative coronavirus test pre-departure as it reintroduces Covid-19 restrictions due to the Omicron variant. From 04:00 GMT on Tuesday, anyone travelling to the UK will have to show evidence of a negative lateral flow or PCR test taken within the last 48 hours before boarding a flight, the health ministry said late on Saturday. This will apply to travellers aged over 12



from any country. Currently travellers have to take a PCR test within two days of arrival. The reintroduction of compulsory pre-departure testing prompted an angry response from the travel industry. — AFP

BANJUL

Gambia incumbent leads in presidential results

The Gambia's incumbent president Adama Barrow appeared on course for re-election as partial results from most districts placed him in the lead after Saturday's crucial polls for the young democracy.

Barrow, who ousted dictator Yahya Jammeh five years ago, was well ahead of his main challenger Ousainou Darboe in results published in the afternoon by the electoral commission for almost 40 districts, out of 53 nationwide. The figures cover more than half



of registered voters in the single-round ballot.

An electoral commission official told reporters in capital Banjul that final results should be announced later in the afternoon. — AFP

How a hand gesture became a brand

MATHIEU FOULKES

Hands resting in front of the stomach, thumbs and fingertips touching to form a diamond shape — Angela Merkel’s “rhombus” hand gesture was her most recognisable trademark.

The gesture has its own Wikipedia page, its own emoticon, “☞”, and the longtime German leader has even been immortalised adopting the pose at London’s famous Madame Tussauds waxworks museum.

But the “Merkel-Raute”, as it is known in German, became her signature largely by accident — born from a camera-shy Merkel being unsure how to pose during a photo shoot for *Stern* magazine in 2002.

Then head of the Christian Democrats (CDU) but still three years away from being elected as chancellor for the first time, Merkel “didn’t know what to do with her hands”, photographer Claudia Kempf later recalled.

“She let them hang down next to her, which made her look a bit exposed, or she joined them together. I said to her, ‘You look too much like a pastor’s daughter,’” Kempf told the *Rheinische Post* newspaper in 2009.

A few months before German elections in 2013, Merkel offered her own explanation of how the gesture had come about.

“It’s about the question of where to put your arms,” said the trained physicist, adding that the rhombus also showed “a certain love of symmetry”.

At the time of that interview, Merkel was campaigning for a third term in office. The whole parliament comes up for renewal in German federal elections, but her CDU party had decided on a very personalised campaign.

A billboard 70 metres wide by 20 metres tall was erected near Berlin’s central station featuring a giant image of the Merkel rhombus, made up of over 2,000 photographs of hands, with the slogan “Germany’s future in good hands”.

The rival Social Democrats (SPD) slammed what they called an “empty personality cult” around Merkel, while the Greens lamented: “If this is politics, we have fallen very low.” — **AFP**

“**Merkel let them hang down next to her, which made her look a bit exposed, or she joined them together. I said to her, ‘You look too much like a pastor’s daughter’**”

CLAUDIA KEMPF
Photographer



EXCEPTIONAL SETTING

Competitors take part during the 11th edition of race of Paddle organised by Nautic Festival SA within the framework of the Nautic of Paris, on Sunday. About 1,000 competitors are expected on the Seine river in Paris, between the Bibliotheque Nationale of France and the quai de Javel Bas, for a race in an exceptional setting. — **AFP**

A matter of sharing or charity!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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People are born as social creatures by nature, so their human purposes could be satisfied by engaging mostly with society, neighbourhoods, charities and even the companions we work or live with. Accordingly, people are very often standing as all for one and one for all, especially at hard times of struggles and challenges. Hence, people’s needs and interests vary based on their lifestyle and social standing too. That is why they have to support each other and look after one another within the same family, neighbourhood and society.

From owning a fancy car, beautiful spacious houses and expensive clothes to having fine dining and happy vacations, there are many ways by which people can spend their hard-earned money. Undoubtedly, there is nothing wrong in rewarding yourself, but it would be great and much commendable if you reward someone else as well. Everyone of us could share the joy of giving to others; those in need perhaps!

Always making a living comes by what we get, but we make a life by what we give to others.

Our deeds of giving should extend to others in the society, rather than limiting it to just family, relatives and loved ones. It is true that charity begins at home, but

it should never end there. Many people all over the world are in urgent need of our charity including those who are closer to our reach in this country. Helping others by sacrificing time and effort or donating money, for instance, always creates an improved sense of purpose in life or work and revives inner satisfaction.

If a person performs a deed which continues to benefit others in a good way, he/she will keep getting rewards for this charitable act as long as it benefits the recipients. In fact, the charitable activities anyone of us does return for our own good as they benefit our psychological, spiritual and emotional well-being. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said, “When a person dies his works end, except for three: ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from and a righteous child who prays for him.”

Charity, in general, as a religious and social obligation reflects on the other hand the unity and compassion of a society or a nation. Actually, it marks another form of human creatures and standing together for each other, especially all those in need. Those who deserve our contribution of giving back to the community, though they never ask for it. Some of them are seriously starving or even striving to make their own living

with the various challenges they come across everyday.

However, one has to ask himself; how much are we doing for charity?! Probably, it is not enough to serve those needy people around us! Likewise, to what extent one is interested in supporting charitable associations and the needy families or individuals within society? Sparing some of our effort or time to fund charities or to volunteer in their activities is the least that one can do.

In view of that, the world has designated December 5 as the World’s Volunteering Day, to urge people give back to their community. This mirrors the importance of volunteering and getting indulged in charitable deeds of all forms, at home, workplace, society or the world overall. As Mahatma Gandhi stated, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”.

All what one has to do to get a first-hand experience is just to seek an opportunity with a charitable association. Such an opportunity would allow you to discover the secret behind volunteering that makes it worth sustaining the sacrifice and commitment. Simply, it is because humans are paving each other’s paths to live their destiny, make a living and fulfil ambitions.

Reassessing strategies to protect us from new variants!



William A Haseltine

THE AUTHOR IS A SCIENTIST, BIOTECH ENTREPRENEUR, AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERT, IS CHAIR AND PRESIDENT OF THE GLOBAL HEALTH THINK-TANK ACCESS HEALTH INTERNATIONAL

As yet another new Sars-CoV-2 variant emerges and begins to spread — one with a worryingly large set of mutations that may make the virus more capable of evading our immune defences — we are all being forced to reassess the strategies we have come to rely on for protection.

In many countries, like the United States, vaccines have been viewed as the primary ring of protection, allowing Americans to live in relative security from the virus. But the more we learn about the virus’s ability to dodge and elude the early lines of immune-system defence, the more obvious the need for additional measures becomes. Instead of relying on a single layer of protection, we should adopt a “belt-and-suspenders” approach. Vaccines remain the primary ring

of support — the belt keeping our protective pants on straight. But we would do well to add a set of suspenders for additional support, just in case the belt breaks under mounting pressure from the virus. Based on what we know, our best bet lies with the wider use of monoclonal antibodies for early treatment of Covid-19 and for long-term prevention and protection from the disease.

To see the importance of this approach, imagine a long-term care home in which one resident tests positive for Covid-19, or a ship or submarine at sea, where there would be no possibility of relief from continual and intense exposure in the event of an outbreak. If the people in these congregate settings were immediately administered a single dose of monoclonal

antibody treatment, the odds of an infection in that group leading to severe disease would be reduced by up to 70 per cent. And beyond protection from disease, the single dose would also have a powerful preventive effect for future infection, providing ongoing protection for up to eight months.

As is the case for most antiviral drugs, monoclonal antibodies will need to be tailored to counter the particular strains circulating at any given moment. But the benefit remains: a single dose could protect people for up to eight months with no additional pills and no additional doses required. Consider what this intervention could mean for all the people in congregate living settings or at higher risk of severe disease. If you are older, morbidly obese,

immunocompromised, or unable to mount an immune response after vaccination, new data show that you are much more likely than your healthier, vaccinated counterparts to have not only a breakthrough infection but also a more severe illness. This single injection could still save you.

Moreover, we already have a very good understanding of the potential adverse effects of monoclonal antibody treatments. All are manageable, which is more than can be said of the antiviral pill molnupiravir, which is currently before the FDA for emergency-use approval. Its potential side effects, heatedly discussed among the FDA experts who issued a very narrow approval, include potential birth defects and the possible mutagenesis of the virus itself, essentially supercharging

the virus’s ability to create highly mutated variants. The side effects of other pills awaiting further study are still unknown.

The challenge with applying the belt-and-suspenders approach in the past has been the cost of production and the burden of delivery of first-generation monoclonal antibodies. Initially, the therapies could be administered only intravenously, in a clinical setting, over a period of hours. To be effective, the dose needed to be delivered shortly after symptoms appeared and before severe illness set in. Between the high costs and the extra administrative demand placed on overburdened health-care systems, this treatment option simply could not have been applied broadly as a preventive tool. **@Project Syndicate 2021**

sport

Oman eye crucial victory against Bahrain

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 5

Oman national football team is eyeing a triumph to keep their hopes alive when they face Gulf Cup champion Bahrain in the Group A concluding match of 2021 Fifa Arab Cup on Monday at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan city.

The match will start at 23:00 the Sultanate of Oman Time. Red Warriors have no option except focusing on clinching the three points and hope Iraq struggles against Qatar or there is a draw between both teams.

A draw will assist the Oman national team only if Iraq is defeated by Qatar. The same calculation will be applicable for Bahrain team who have one point from two games.

The Sultanate of Oman began the campaign in the Fifa event by a 1-1 against Iraq. In the following game, Oman suffered a 2-1 loss against the hosts Qatar in the dying minutes.

Oman are at the third place in group A with one point only while Qatar are group toppers with six points.

Qatar sealed their direct ticket to the next round. Iraq was positioned in the second place with two points.

The last clash between the Sultanate of Oman and Bahrain was in the 24th edition of Arabian Gulf Cup in Doha as the match ended in a goalless draw.

The Croatian coach, Branko Ivankovic, is fully aware that Bahrain match is a do-or-die clash for the Sultanate of Oman if they want to progress further in the Fifa Arab Cup journey in Doha.

Red Warriors have no option except focusing on clinching the three points and hope Iraq struggles against Qatar or there is a draw between both teams

Branko, 67 years old, said that Bahrain match is a key game for the national team to advance into the second stage. “It is expected to be a tough fixture. I watched Bahrain in the previous games against Iraq and Qatar. They showed good performance. They are Gulf Cup champions and the team impressed me,” he added in the press meet on Sunday.

The Croatian coach affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman also showed good performance during the last two encounters.

“Spectators are expecting a better show in the Bahrain game. No injuries for players in the team and we are fresh enough for today’s game. I knew Bahrain team since I was a head coach of Iran team and they had good and well capable players. Our focus in the championship is to register positive results and advance to the forthcoming rounds,” he ended. On the other hand, the Portuguese coach Helio Sousa, the head coach of Bahrain team, told during the press meet that the team’s preparation is going well.

“Our players are focused and we need a victory to move into next stage in the event. All the players are expected to be more efficient and competent in the pitch to deliver good result,” he concluded.



Shifting winds and changing fortunes at ILCA 6 Worlds

MUSCAT: Shifting winds on Day 4 of the 2021 ILCA 6 World Championships allowed a full day of racing but one full of surprises once again influenced by the wind. When the wind was up, it was light – perfect for the sailors – but the downwind played havoc with the sailors’ tactics and performances. Two races in both men’s and women’s categories were completed at Barceló Resort Mussanah as the leader board remains tight at the top.

The men’s leaderboard remains the same for the third day in a row with the Sultanate of Oman’s Almoutasim al Farsi maintaining his good form to stay out in front, finishing fourth and third, and keeping his six-point lead over Nik Pletikos of Slovenia. Pletikos recorded a third place and second place finish.

Abdulmalik al Hinai of the Sultanate of Oman remains in

third position, closing the gap to second to just two points. Umut Eyriparmak was the day’s top performer, winning both races as he claws back the points dropped through yesterday’s retirement. He ends the day in fourth, just one point behind third place. Ali al Saadi of the Sultanate of Oman is once again in fifth position but is now ten points adrift of fourth.

The women’s category saw some major changes following the two races today. Agata Barwinska of Poland leapfrogged Julia Büsselberg to climb from third to first, leaving Büsselberg in second place for the second day in a row. Emma Plasschaert of Belgium moved up to third. However, the day belonged to Cristina Pujol Bajo of Spain who rose through the rankings to end the day in fourth after winning one race and finishing fourth in another. Olympic Champion Anne-Marie



Rindom of Denmark sits in fifth with Viktorija Andrulyte of Lithuania a point behind having dropped from fourth to sixth today. Eleven points separate first and sixth, so it could all change again tomorrow. Viktorija Andrulyte

of Lithuania, said, “Today, as has become usual, we are waiting for the wind to pick up. The wind has been unstable all day, so we were able to start. Two races today. I didn’t start well but climbed up, even to first, but lost pace in the

The men’s leaderboard remains the same for the third day in a row with Oman’s Almoutasim al Farsi maintaining his good form to stay out in front, finishing fourth and third, and keeping his six-point lead over Nik Pletikos of Slovenia. Pletikos recorded a third place and second place finish

down while trying not to get a yellow flag. But I also made some mistakes. I also picked up a penalty for an incident, but I still tried my best to the very end and finished top 20. I am improving and not losing as much in the downwind,

so I am really happy about that.” Hannah Anderssohn of Germany, said, “The races were quite tough for me, I had a very difficult start. But slowly I am improving and going a bit better. In general, it is very difficult to get off the start line.” Rosie Chapman, US Sailing coach, said, “It’s a big fleet, really awesome to see so many people make it to Oman. We have had a challenging start to the regatta and there hasn’t been a world championship for a couple of years but it is exciting to see the level of the fleet and how far it has come since the last regatta. Having had a delay on the Olympic Games, the girls coming straight from the Games are pretty busy for the next quad and there are some younger girls coming through and challenging everybody, so it’s really good to see that. The key names are here and the young girls are coming up and making a difference.”

UGB Barka, Royal Stars Barka, IAS, Al Danube enter BCL semis

BARKA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – (BCL) 1 ST EDITION 2021			
SEMI-FINALIST			
IAS ENGR.	AL DANUBE	ROYAL STARS BARKA	UGB BARKA
NET RUN RATE IN QUARTER FINALS	MATCHES		
3.875 (1)	3.80 (2)	3.23 (3)	2.56 (4)
SEMI-FINALS (17-Dec-21) FRIDAY MORNING			
IAS ENGINEERING	VS	UGB BARKA	
AL DANUBE	VS	ROYAL STARS BARKA	
FINALS (31-Dec-21) FRIDAY AFTERNOON (01 PM - 6PM) Al Hail Cricket Ground			
SEMI FINALIST 1	VS	SEMI FINALIST 2	

MUSCAT: An on-going first edition of Barka Champions League (BCL), aforementioned teams have registered successful victories over their opponents in the quarterfinal as the knockout fixtures played on Friday December 3, 2021.

The victorious team will now clash in semifinals which are scheduled to be played on coming Friday December 17, 2021.

QF-1: UGB BARKA VS BILLAH CRICKET CLUB

BRIEF SCORES: UGB Barka 135/10 in 15.5 overs (Mohd. Ibrahim 34, Muhammad Sheraz 21; Sajil Kareem 3-19) beat Billah Cricket Club 94/9 in 16 overs (Izhar Ahmed 31; Mohd. Ali Tariq 4-8) by 41 Runs.

QF-2: IAS ENGINEERING VS MENS CLUB BARKA

BRIEF SCORES: IAS Engineering 140/7 in 16 overs (Arsalan Bashir 36, Muhammad Waqas 26; Alamgir Husain 3-46) beat Mens Club Barka 78/10 in 12 overs (Sankaral Sasidharan 20; Haythim Bahar 4-37) by 62 Runs.

QF-3: BARKA SUPER XI VS ROYAL STARS BARKA

BRIEF SCORES: Barka Super XI 73/10 in 11.4 overs (Jacob Raja 32; Dijiith Divakaran 3-16, Venkit Moorthy 3-14) lost to Royal Stars Barka 74/3 in 9.5 overs (Ramees Nayan 32, Vishnu Selvaraj 14; Vinu Vijayakumar 2-12) by 7 Wickets.

QF-4: BARKA RIDERS VS AL DANUBE

BRIEF SCORES: Barka Riders 84/10 in 15.2 overs (Vishnu Venugopal 13; Sachin Hegde 3-12, Mohammad Irfan 2-7) lost to Al Danube 86/2 in 9.5 overs (Kaish Mujawar 59, Afzal Husain 17; Abid 1-17) by 8 Wickets.

Suhail clinches Indian Social Club men's singles title



Suhail Khan (L) and Shanawas K

MUSCAT: Suhail Khan proved unbeatable as he won the men's singles title defeating Shanawas K in straight sets scoring 6-2, 6-3 in the Annual Tennis Tournament conducted by Indian Social Club, Oman.

After a tough opening service game, Suhail's consistent, deep returning generated a 2-0 lead in the first set. Suhail was impeccable throughout the set; he struggled at times with his injured forehand and Shanawas's defence forced him ample errors. However, he played the match on his terms, dictating from inside the baseline, and he served well in most tight moments. After maintaining the opening break throughout the set, Suhail

conceded the first set in his favour scoring 6-2.

Suhail gained an early break and a 2-0 lead in the second set before losing two games in a row, but he remained calm throughout. The decisive game of the match followed at 3-3, the intensity skyrocketing as Suhail controlled the exchanges and Shanawas counterpunched efficiently. In the end, it was Suhail who stood firmly inside the baseline, munching a series of crosscourt backhands to finish the second set in his favour scoring 6-3.

In other matches of Mens Singles, Ganesh beat Arun Ganesh scoring 8-4; Haresh J beat Rathish 8-2; Junaith K beat Hemachandran 8-1.

India on brink of victory after all-round effort

MUMBAI: India need another five wickets to win the second Test as New Zealand chase an improbable 540 despite the Kiwis' Mumbai-born Ajaz Patel returning a record 14-225 on Sunday.

New Zealand ended day three on 140-5 after the hosts declared their second innings, after left-arm spinner Ajaz, who took 10 wickets in an innings, put up best-ever match figures by a bowler against India.

The previous best was England fast bowler Ian Botham's 13-106 in Mumbai in 1980.

Henry Nicholls, on 36, and Rachin Ravindra, on two, were batting after Indian spinners Ravichandran Ashwin (3-27) and Axar Patel rattled the New Zealand top-order. "I think it's important to keep our intent high. Get into good positions and smother the ball nicely," Ravindra, who stood in an unbeaten partnership with Ajaz to help New Zealand hang on to a draw in the previous Test, told reporters.

"It wasn't just me (who defied India in Kanpur), it was the team that did it. Two days and a lot of cricket to play here. Take it ball by ball and maybe do something special." Ashwin struck first with the wicket of stand-in skipper Tom Latham for 10 and then took down Will Young and Ross Taylor in successive overs.

Daryl Mitchell resisted and raised his third Test fifty with a boundary off fast bowler Umesh Yadav. He put on 73 runs with Nicholls for the fourth wicket.

Mitchell finally fell to Axar's left-arm spin and wicketkeeper-batsman Tom Blundell was run out on nought as a raucous home crowd roared.

Earlier Ajaz extended his bowling show for New Zealand



“It wasn’t just me (who defied India in Kanpur), it was the team that did it. Two days and a lot of cricket to play here. Take it ball by ball and maybe do something special

RACHIN RAVINDRA
New Zealand batsman

with Ravindra joining his fellow spinner for three wickets including Shubman Gill (47) and skipper Virat Kohli (36).

Axar hit an unbeaten 41 before India called off their innings in the second session at 276-7, with

New Zealand already a wicket down by tea.

The hosts did not enforce the follow on Saturday after they dismissed New Zealand for 62 and batted about two sessions, but Axar insisted they needed batting time. "I won't call it delay as there is so much time left in the game," Axar said in response to the question of India batting too long. "The idea was to bat as long as possible as this kind of a situation, you don't get every day, so the plan was to make the most of it."

AGARWAL POWER
Overnight batsmen Mayank Agarwal (62) and Cheteshwar Pujara (47) put on 107 runs to take the attack to the opposition in the first hour of play. Agarwal, who made 150 in India's first innings of 325, reached his fifty with a six off Ajaz and followed it up with another boundary to signal his attacking intent. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

India first innings:325	
New Zealand first innings:62 all out	
India second innings (O/n: 69/0):	
M Agarwal c Young b Patel	62
C Pujara c Taylor b Patel	47
S Gill c Latham b Ravindra	47
V Kohli b Ravindra	36
S Iyer st Blundell b Patel	14
W Saha c Jamieson b Ravindra	13
A Patel (not out)	41
J Yadav c and b Patel	6
Extras (B-6, LB-3, NB-1)	10
Total (For 7 wks dec, 70 overs)	276
Fall of wickets: 1-107, 2-115, 3-197, 4-211, 5-217, 6-238, 7-276	
Bowling: Southee 13-1-31-0, Ajaz 26-3-106-4, Jamieson 8-2-15-0, Somerville 10-0-59-0, Ravindra 13-2-56-3	
NEW ZEALAND SECOND INNINGS	
T Latham lbw Ashwin	6
W Young c (sub Suryakumar) b Ashwin	20
D Mitchell c Jayant b Axar	60
R Taylor c Pujara b Ashwin	6
H Nicholls (not out)	36
T Blundell (run out)	0
R Ravindra (not out)	2
Extras (B-8, LB-1, NB-1)	10
Total (For 5 wks, 45 overs)	140
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-45, 3-55, 4-128, 5-129	
Bowling: Siraj 5-2-13-0, Ashwin 17-7-27-3, Axar 10-1-42-1, Jayant 8-2-30-0, Umesh 5-1-19-0	

Oman Sailing Festival charms traditional maritime city of Sur

MUSCAT: Sur, a city synonymous with boat building, sailing and exploration was the next stop for the Oman Sailing Festival and the locals were enthralled by the chance to try sailing and windsurfing with professional coaches. Over two days, on December 3-4, 2021, 321 visitors took part in the festival while many, many others enjoyed the atmosphere.

The festival also included a beach clean up operation at Khor Al Bath, as volunteers joined hands with Oman Sail, Be'Ah and the Environment Society of Oman to help conserve the beautiful beaches for generations to come and leave a cleaner ocean for marine life to thrive.

Ali al Shuhaimi, Centre Manager of Al Mouj Sailing School and project manager of the Oman Sailing Festival, said, "We are delighted to see so many people from the Sur area come along over the weekend to learn how to sail, try windsurfing and help us to take care of the environment. This city is famous for its maritime heritage and the spirit is still strong. We



hope that many of the people who tried the sport for the first time this weekend become interested

in learning more and becoming regular sailors."

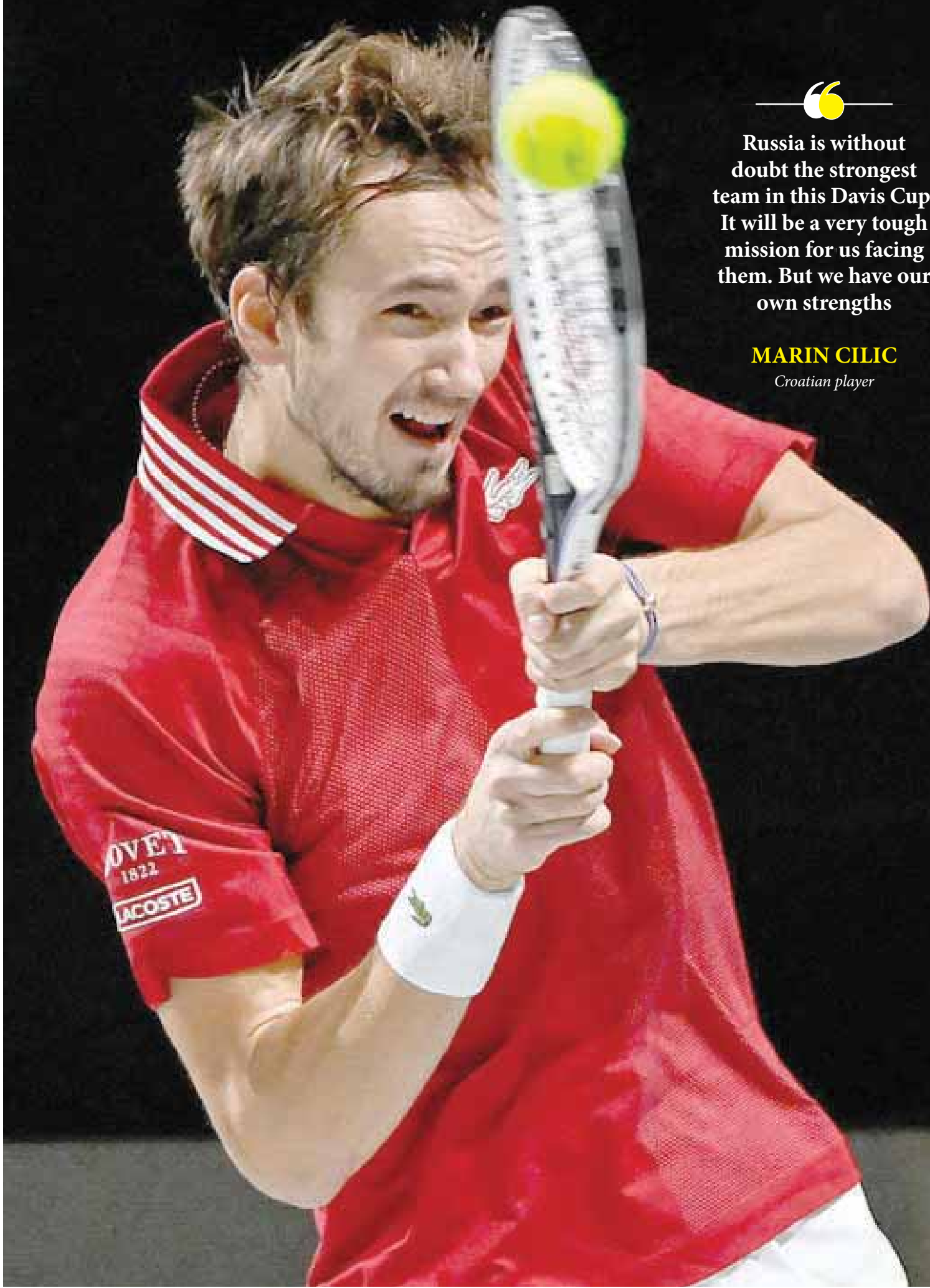
The next stop for the Oman

Sailing Festival is Barceló Mussanah Resort from December 11-18, 2021 and then Hawana Salalah from January 6-8, 2022 before wrapping up in Duqm from January 11-15, 2022.

Barceló Mussanah Resort is currently hosting the 2021 ILCA 6 World Championships where some of the best male and female sailors from around the world, including past World Champions and Olympic gold medallists are competing to become the 2021 World Champion. Meanwhile in Muscat, the finale of this year's Sailing Arabia — The Tour, created by Oman Sail, is under way. The action wraps up on December 5, 2021 at Al Mouj Muscat where the winners will receive the trophy.

The Oman Sailing Festival is proudly supported by platinum sponsor OQ, gold sponsors Oman Air and Salsabeel, and environmental partners Be'ah and the Environment Society of Oman. To pre-register for Oman Sailing Festival events, please visit www.omansail.com/sailing-festival-activities or search #SailWithUs on social media.

MEDVEDEV WINS TO SET UP DAVIS CUP FINAL WITH CROATIA



“Russia is without doubt the strongest team in this Davis Cup. It will be a very tough mission for us facing them. But we have our own strengths

MARIN ILIC
Croatian player

MADRID: Daniil Medvedev sealed Russia's place in the Davis Cup final with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Jan-Lennard Struff giving his team an unassailable 2-0 lead over Germany on Saturday.

The world number two backed up Andrey Rublev's 6-4, 6-0 win over Dominik Koepfer in the first rubber to set up a clash with Croatia on Sunday.

The Russians, like the Croats, will be bidding for a third win in the competition.

"Russia is without doubt the strongest team in this Davis Cup," said Croatia's veteran number one Marin Cilic.

"It will be a very tough mission for us facing them. But we have our own strengths.

"It is our third final in five years, which is something exceptional, and does not happen very often," added the 33-year-old 2014 US Open champion.

The Croats' task is certainly a formidable one.

The Russians strength in depth is unquestionable with four players all ranked in the top 30 (Rublev is fifth, Aslan Karatsev is 18th and Karen Khachanov 29th).

They have lost just one rubber in the whole tournament, Rublev going down to Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez in their first match.

Croatia are hoping to win one of their singles and leave it down to their unbeaten world number one doubles pairing of Mate Pavic and Nikola Mektic.

The Wimbledon and Olympic champions have yet to drop their service in the competition.

"They have the best doubles pair in the world, thus we will have to try and wrap this up in the singles," said Medvedev.

This the Russians did clinically against the Germans — admittedly without their number one Alexander Zverev who opted to miss the finals.

Rublev ruthlessly exposed the gap between himself and the 54th-ranked Koepfer. Rublev delivered nine aces, won 54 points — opposed to 32 for his opponent — and took all four break points.

"I was focused from the beginning to the end," said 24-year-old Rublev, who eased to victory in 50 minutes, with Medvedev needing just 17 more to beat Struff.

Germany later claimed a consolation win in the doubles with Kevin Krawietz and Tim Puetz seeing off Aslan Karatsev and Karen Khachanov 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Once that was done and dusted their venerable non-playing captain Shamil Tarpsichev could enjoy a cake baked to honour his 100th match in charge with almost 45 years in his role.

The organisers were denied the mouthwatering prospect of Medvedev potentially facing world number one Novak Djokovic as the Croats ousted Serbia 2-1 in the other semi-final on Friday. — AFP

Wijnaldum rescues PSG after Lens leave Messi in a daze



Paris Saint-Germain's Georginio Wijnaldum celebrates after scoring during the French L1 match against RC Lens. — AFP

PARIS: Georginio Wijnaldum's injury-time equaliser allowed Paris Saint-Germain to snatch a 1-1 draw away to Lens in Ligue 1 on Saturday in a match which confirmed Lionel Messi's difficulties adapting to the physical nature of French football.

Messi was floored by a strong tackle and some PSG players stopped playing in the build-up to Seko Fofana's goal which gave Lens a 62nd-minute lead in northern France.

It looked as if that would be enough for Lens to claim a victory which would have been just reward for an outstanding performance that delighted the crowd of close to 37,000.

However, PSG equalised in the second minute of injury time as Kylian Mbappe crossed for fellow substitute Wijnaldum to head home.

It is a second draw in as many matches for the Qatar-owned club, who extend their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to 13 points from Marseille, beaten 2-1 at home by Brest earlier on Saturday. Despite their big lead at the top, it was yet another unsatisfactory performance from Mauricio Pochettino's disjointed team of superstars, who have usually had enough individual talent to get results this season but have rarely been convinced.

"Lens is a very good team and very physical. They made us suffer. Overall I think we knew how to suffer in different periods of the game and I think the draw is a fair result," Pochettino told broadcaster Canal Plus. — AFP

Hamilton on Saudi Arabian pole as Verstappen hits wall

JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia: Lewis Hamilton snatched pole position for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Saturday, boosting his hopes of staying on course for a record eighth Formula One world title.

Championship leader Max Verstappen was third fastest in the Red Bull after hitting a wall on his final flying lap on the tight Jeddah street circuit just as he appeared poised to unseat his rival.

Hamilton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas was second and will share the front

row on Sunday.

"What a tough track this is. It's amazing what they've built, the speed and the pace around here is phenomenal," said Hamilton.

"It's a great result for the team and a great job by Valtteri — he's the best teammate there's ever been in this sport."

For Hamilton, who has cut Verstappen's championship lead with successive wins in Brazil and Qatar, it was a fifth pole of the season and 103rd of his career.

Verstappen, who has an eight-point lead over Hamilton

with just two races left, can claim his first world title on Sunday if he wins the race and Hamilton finishes outside the top six.

If not, the 2021 title battle will go down to the wire in Abu Dhabi next weekend.

"I don't really understand what happened (on the final flying lap). I locked up a bit," Verstappen.

"P3 is disappointing but today did show that the car is quick around here so we'll see what happens tomorrow."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc

and Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull made up the top five for Sunday's race, the first to be held in the kingdom.

Pierre Gasly (AlphaTauri), Lando Norris (McLaren), Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri), Esteban Ocon (Alpine) and Antonio Giovinazzi (Alfa Romeo) complete the top 10.

Securing pole capped a dramatic day for seven-time champion Hamilton. — AFP



Mercedes' driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates in the parc ferme after taking pole position in the qualifying session of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. — AFP

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CMA readies draft of standard insurance policy for boats, vessels

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has prepared the first draft of the standard insurance policy for fishing boats and vessels, which will be made public to elicit feedback from stakeholders.

The standardised policy will help provide for a safer business environment for investors exploring opportunities in economic activities involving the use and operation of fishing boats and vessels.

The initiative is in line with the government's efforts under the Oman Vision 2040 strategy to bolster FDI inflows in the country.

The CMA has presented the policy to specialised panel with members from the Central Bank of Oman, the Finance and Insurance Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), representatives of Oman Development Bank, Omani Fishermen's Society, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and other relevant government agencies.

The overall goal of the standardised policy is to ensure basic insurance coverage for the owners of fishing boats and vessels from various perils and to compensate them for the loss or damage they incur to their fishing vessels and gear, as well as personal accidents or death of the owner or crew, in addition to any third party liability coverage.

The move aims to encourage fishermen to continue practicing their trade, which is an important source of national income. Improved coverage will provide a safe environment and create financing opportunities from banks and other financing institutions.



Yibal Khuff Project: A marvel of oilfield engineering

LANDMARK PROJECT: Covering an area of 1.68k sqm, YKP is described as a venture of high strategic value in meeting the Sultanate of Oman's growing medium and long- term oil and gas demands, as well as reducing PDO's net non-associated gas import

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

A showpiece of oilfield engineering design and construction ingenuity is being formally unveiled today in the far west of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Yibal Khuff project, a complex undertaking that joins the likes of land ventures, such as the Rabab Harweel Integrated Project of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), and the Khazzan Central Processing Project of BP Oman, will be inaugurated on Monday (today) at a ceremony presided over by His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

Set up with an investment of around \$2.6 billion, it ranks among



the largest of Oil & Gas projects in the upstream sector of the industry.

Majority government-owned PDO, the country's largest producer of oil and gas, has also billed it as the company's second project and the most technically complex as well in its history. Located around 360km southwest of Muscat, the Yibal Khuff Project (YKP) began production in September.

Four sour wells drilled as part of the project were opened, yielding sour oil that was pumped to the

YKP Central Processing Facility. Since then, crude oil from the facility has begun flowing into the Main Oil Line.

When fully operational, the mega project will be delivering five million cubic metres of gas per day and around 20,000 bpd of crude.

Covering an area of 1.68km2, YKP is described as a venture of high strategic value in meeting the Sultanate of Oman's growing medium and long- term oil and gas demands, as well as reducing PDO's net non-associated gas import.

UK-based Petrofac, one of the biggest hydrocarbon, refining and petrochemical contractors in the Sultanate of Oman, was selected in 2015 to oversee the development of the giant Yibal Khuff project as part of an engineering, procurement and construction management contract. Petrofac said at the time that the contract value was around \$900 million.

The project processes a mix of hydrocarbons from a cluster of sour Oil & Gas reservoirs.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Green Energy Oman project to cover 6,500 sq km area

Giant scheme: Mega green hydrogen venture rebranded as 'GEO'

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)



Oman has high potential to be a major producer of green hydrogen, taking into consideration the potentially low levellised costs of energy and hydrogen, the huge government support, proximity to markets in the East and West, and the presence of infrastructure that facilitates such large scale projects

AHMED AL RAWAS
Project Manager, OQ Alternative Energy unit



When fully operational, it will be large enough to meet the green energy (green hydrogen and its derivatives like green ammonia) requirements of Oman, the wider Gulf region and, to some extent, the international market as well.

"To meet the future demand, the GEO consortium believes it is necessary to build a large-scale project from the beginning, rather than have several small projects at a time, and due to the synergies offered by a large project, there are several key parameters that are optimised, such as by reducing the levellised

cost of hydrogen and ammonia," said Al Rawas.

The large scale of the project, he further added, will also help optimise the capex cost, while any small fluctuations in electricity output — due to the project's dependence on solar and wind resources — will have a lower impact on the overall system.

Speaking at the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO), which was held in Muscat last week, the Project Manager said the GEO project, powered by 25 gigawatts (GW) of solar and wind generation

capacity, will produce 1.8 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen and 10 million tonnes of green ammonia at full capacity.

"Oman has high potential to be a major producer of green hydrogen, taking into consideration the potentially low levellised costs of energy and hydrogen, the huge government support, proximity to markets in the East and West, and the presence of infrastructure that facilitates such large scale projects," he pointed out.

Favourable solar and wind conditions make the Duqm area of Al Wusta Governorate the "most suitable location" for the implementation of the project, said the official. Complementing this feature is the available of vast tracts of flat land within and around the SEZ in Duqm and its proximity to export infrastructure on the coast.

"The plan for the GEO project is to select up to 6,500 sq km of land to set up wind and solar generation sites," said Al Rawas. "Although this may seem like a

large area, in reality, the footprint of the upstream facilities will be much smaller than 6,500 sq km, and will amount to more or less about 10 per cent of this area."

The midstream components, comprising the electrolyzers, air separation system and associated piping infrastructure, will be integrated with a downstream green fuels processing hub, which will be located close to Duqm SEZ and Ras Markaz, where a major crude oil terminal and storage park is under construction.

A Final Investment Decision (FID) targeted sometime in early 2026 will pave the way for construction work on the mammoth project to commence in 2027. Implementation is envisioned over a 10-year period with expansions dictated by international demand for green energy.

The project itself will have an operational life of around 50 years, he added. Partners in the GEO consortium include Enertech of Kuwait and Intercontinental Energy (ICE).

ETFs offer access to fast-growing digital asset market

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

Digital assets are quickly becoming a major investable asset class, headlined by cryptocurrencies and blockchain. With the market capitalisation of cryptocurrencies surpassing \$2.5 trillion at the end of October, many investors are exploring the value that cryptocurrencies and other digital assets bring to portfolios.

Global inflows into digital asset investment products total \$8 billion on a year-to-date basis, with October month seeing record inflows as the result of the first futures-based bitcoin ETF listing on the New York Stock Exchange.

“The blockchain industry has evolved at a remarkable pace over the last year, with digital assets becoming an important emerging asset class for investors,”



said Chris Mellor, Head of EMEA ETF Equity and Commodity Product Management at Invesco. “While cryptoassets gather much attention, the entire digital asset ecosystem presents an opportunity for investors, and the way investors can access this alternative asset class is expanding rapidly.” Digital assets encompass more than just cryptocurrency and blockchain; the ecosystem

also includes companies that mine cryptocurrencies and provide technology, as well as companies that might benefit from blockchain technology. Large global corporations and governments have begun to explore the advantages of leveraging cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology to improve their operations. “As adoption grows, digital assets can play an important

role in a diversified investment portfolio,” said Mellor. Digital assets, as do most alternative investment classes, operate independently from traditional asset classes such as equity and fixed income, potentially offering diversification benefits in the event of a stock or bond market downturn.

Moreover, with the growing threat of inflation, digital assets with a finite supply in circulation, such as Bitcoin, may have the potential to hedge a portfolio against inflation as more assets cannot be created beyond the limit.

The possibility for capital appreciation is also a consideration for investors, as digital assets could potentially move higher in value as more investors include it in portfolios.

“Investors need to recognise and balance the risks and rewards of including this new asset class

in their portfolio,” cautioned Mellor.

In addition to owning digital assets directly, several investment vehicles have emerged that allow investors to add diversified exposure across the blockchain spectrum to their portfolio.

Exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in particular offer investors exposure to narrow or broad aspects of cryptocurrencies and the blockchain ecosystem in one fund, without physically owning the underlying assets.

Several ETFs on the markets today have allocations to companies with exposure to the sector, focused on digital assets and blockchain. The field of funds with direct exposure to cryptocurrencies is narrower.

The recently launched futures-based Bitcoin ETF on the NYSE gives exposure to bitcoin futures contracts, rather than the spot-market price.

Outside of the US, international markets offer cryptocurrency ETF/ETP (exchange-traded products) that are directly invested in spot crypto.

Alessio Cirilo, Sales Director at Invesco EMEA, said: “These new ETPs give investors an excellent, cost-effective and liquid means to gain exposure to the growing digital asset class. With the growing number of ETPs on offer in this space in both the Americas and Europe, MENA-based investors interested in cryptocurrencies or blockchain have a broad range of opportunities to consider.”

ETPs are investment vehicles that are listed on regulated exchanges and can be traded like stocks throughout the day. ETPs are reputed for being relatively cost-effective and efficient investment vehicles to gain exposure to diverse assets.

OAB joins national initiative to plant 10 million trees



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently announced its contribution to the Environmental Authority's national initiative to plant 10 million trees.

This initiative is in line with the bank's sustainability strategy and its focus on Environmental Responsibility. The objectives of this project are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, specifically its goal to develop sustainable governorates and cities that balance environmental, economic and social factors.

The focus is on the optimal use and investment of natural resources to ensure high returns for both society and the environment.

Since the start of the initiative the Environment Authority along with several other private and government institutions, planted over 190 thousand trees.

The Bank will aim to plant an additional 2,800 trees throughout 2022. Moreover, the initiative aims to sustainably increase vegetation coverage and restore biodiversity across the Sultanate.

It will also contribute towards the rehabilitation of degraded sites and reduce desertification, while simultaneously raising the level of awareness around the importance of increasing green spaces and its benefits to the environment and the community.

Since 2020, OAB has made a concerted effort to ensure sustainable practices throughout its network of stakeholders.

This initiative by the Environment Authority aligns with this goal and raises awareness about environmental responsibility to society at large.

NBO opens remittance counter at Sri Lankan Embassy

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of His Excellency O L Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, National Bank of Oman (NBO) introduced remittance services to the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Muscat.

Continuing to make banking more accessible and convenient, the service will help the Sri Lankan community to make affordable transfers to friends and family in their native language using the bank's secure and approved international transfer network.

With competitive exchange rates in several currencies, NBO customers can also instantly send funds of up to RO 7,500 from their account using the bank's digital remittance service available anywhere at any time through the award-winning NBO Mobile App. Plus, the first instant transfer is



free, and thereafter just RO 1,500.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, “NBO has been at the forefront of delivering seamless, convenient and flexible banking

experiences. Adding to the growing number of affiliations with embassies, we are proud to partner with the Embassy of Sri Lanka to provide our customers working and visiting there with

greater access to our services, and more value to their banking needs.

They can also pay the way they like, whether its directly from their bank account, or using a credit or debit card.”

Ominvest holds Knowledge Exchange session on environmental conservation

MUSCAT: In line with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest), one of the leading investment firms in the region, held a Knowledge Exchange session in partnership with ‘Oman in Focus’.

The session served as a platform for sharing knowledge and expertise by international and local environmental experts with members of the local community, university students, academics, and environmentalists.

The dialogue focused on environmental conservation, local wildlife resources, and the development of the Sultanate of Oman as a destination for eco-tourism. Ominvest is the Main Partner of ‘Oman In Focus’ for the documentaries-production project titled ‘Not Discovered Yet’ that highlights the natural beauty of the Sultanate of Oman. A team of international and local experts and filmmakers have been exploring 12 landmark destinations in the Sultanate of



Oman to be showcased in two documentaries.

The documentaries will cover various aspects of the country's wildlife and landscapes and will be broadcast on several well-known regional and international news networks and TV channels.

The Knowledge Exchange session held by Ominvest hosted speakers from the documentary project's international team, in addition to local organisations that contributed to the project.

The speakers included: Stefania Muller, Director and Producer, Oman in Focus; Dr Mansoor

al Jahdhami, Acting Director, General Office for Conservation of Environment, Diwan of Royal Court; Aziza al Adhoobi, Wetland Management Head Section, Environment Authority; and Omar al Riyami, Board Member, Environmental Society of Oman.

Ominvest's Group CEO Abdulaziz al Balushi lauded the initiative and said, “Our partnership with Oman In Focus aligns with Ominvest's corporate purpose and its support of environmental conservation efforts and the development of eco-tourism in the Sultanate of

Oman. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) best practices are highly regarded at Ominvest internally and through our community-based initiatives.

Accordingly, promoting the natural beauty and resources of our country and encouraging dialogue around environmental protection would further contribute to the wider collective efforts in this area.” Al Balushi added “I would like to thank the participating speakers at the Knowledge Exchange session, the reputable organisations they represent, and the wider audience who took part in this enriching and enlightening dialogue. We are also grateful for the diligent efforts and dedication showcased by the Team at Oman In Focus. We look forward to a successful launch of the awaited documentaries in the near future.” Maisa al Hooti, Founder of Oman in Focus said, “It has been an immense pleasure working on our latest project with the generous support from Ominvest. Together, we share the common goal of promoting responsible tourism in Oman.”

Meethaq's National Day offers to continue till December end



MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to strong participation in national events and offering the best value proposition to its customers, Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman from Bank Muscat, is continuing to celebrate the Sultanate's Glorious 51st National Day with a number of special deals and exclusive offers for its customers. The bank has announced that the special offers will continue till the end of December 2021.

Meethaq Islamic Banking currently has several offers for the benefit of its customers including a cash incentive of RO 51 when opening a Term Deposit of RO 5,000 or more for a period of 3 years and above.

New Meethaq customers can also get gift voucher of RO 51 on starting a Hafawa Priority Banking relationship with a deposit of RO 30,000 during this period. Meethaq Credit cardholders will also get a chance to win RO 51 every month for a period of three months if they are amongst the 100 highest spenders each month. An attractive profit rate of only 4.99 per cent is currently available to all customers who apply for home, auto and personal financing facilities during the National Day campaign. All new and existing Meethaq customers availing fresh financing from the bank can benefit from this offer.

Strong oil price recovery helps slash Oman's deficit

Key trends: The price of Oman crude averaged \$58.89 per barrel for the first ten months of this year, up from \$48.54 per barrel for the corresponding period of 2020.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 5

The Ministry of Finance reported a 28.1 per cent increase in public revenues, which climbed to RO 8.7 billion for the ten months ended October 31, 2021, up from RO 6.502 billion for the corresponding period of 2020.

The uptick helped bring down the budget deficit for the year to RO 1.006 billion, down from RO 2.713 billion for the corresponding period of 2020



— an improvement of around 63 per cent over the period.

According to the monthly bulletin on the Sultanate of Oman's fiscal performance, the rise in revenue is attributable to a strong recovery in oil prices driven by demand for energy.

The price of Oman crude

averaged \$58.89 per barrel for the first ten months of this year, up from \$48.54 per barrel for the corresponding period of 2020.

Crude production was also up slightly to 960k barrels per day this year, up from 955k per barrel last year.

Net oil revenues soared to

RO 4.443 billion this year, up from RO 3.282 billion for the corresponding period of last year. Gas revenues surged 50.6 per cent to RO 1.698 billion, up from RO 1.127 billion for the corresponding period of 2020.

Moreover, current revenues increased by 40.8 per cent at the

end of October 2021, totalling RO 2,128.9 million as compared to RO 1,512.5 million during the same period in 2020.

This included tax and fees revenue which amounted to RO 1,024.1 million and non-tax revenue of RO 1,104.8 million.

Public spending was maintained at current trends, with an amount of RO 9,339.2 million spend during the first ten months of the year, compared with RO 9,216.5 million registered during the same period of 2020.

As part of the government's continuous efforts to energise the national economy, a Fee Setting Policy Handbook was prepared with the aim of standardising the pricing of government services in order to speed up and facilitate such services. This

handbook was applied on a number of government entities, which resulted in a reduction and cancellation of 548 services' fees, the ministry said.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has reduced fees for 30 services by 17-95 per cent.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism reduced fees of 29 services by 17-60 per cent. In the case of municipal services, fees pertaining to as many as 489 services were either waived or reduced by 29-96 per cent.

The Covid-19 Supreme Committee has announced earlier that some enterprises shall be granted exemptions from paying renewal fees and late fees for their businesses licence. Such exemptions will be valid until the end of December 2021.

Yibal Khuff Project: A marvel of oilfield engineering

FROM PAGE 13

Adding to its complexity are the ultra-high concentrations of sulphur, as well as other contaminants, that must be filtered out to meet the stringent specs set by PDO for the processed streams of oil and gas emerging from the complex.

Around 235 tonnes of solid elemental sulphur will be produced daily as a result of sulphur recovery operations.

According to PDO, YKP has achieved several significant firsts, including the first to deliver the tallest column ever fabricated for PDO in Oman.

This 'Made in Oman' acid gas recovery unit absorber stands at 48 metres high, four metres in diameter, and weighs 291 tonnes. It has also delivered one of PDO's first Steam Turbine Generators, taking the heat from some of the facilities' processes and using it to generate steam.

The plant will be able to generate 13MW of electrical power, supplementing the 45MW of the Yibal Khuff Power plant. Around 1,200 Omanis have been employed on site in the construction of the facilities, with a further 200 nationals deployed as fully qualified welders.

Around \$400 million were also awarded to Omani companies for the provision of goods and services.

Goldman Sachs cuts US GDP growth forecast for 2022

WASHINGTON: Goldman Sachs on Saturday cut its outlook for US economic growth to 3.8 per cent for 2022, citing risks and uncertainty around the emergence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Goldman economist Joseph Briggs said in a note that the Omicron variant could slow economic reopening, but the firm expects "only a modest drag" on service spending.

The firm now sees 2022 gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 3.8 per cent, down from 4.2 per cent previously on a full year basis, and Q4/Q4 growth of 2.9 per cent, down from 3.3 per cent before, Briggs said.

"While many questions remain unanswered, we now think a moderate downside scenario where the virus spreads more quickly but immunity



Tourists gather around the Charging Bull statue, also known as the Wall St Bull in New York. — Reuters

against severe disease is only slightly weakened is most likely," he said. Worker shortages could last longer if people do not feel comfortable returning to work due to the variant, according to the note.

Goldman pointed the spread of the virus could worsen supply shortages should other countries implement tighter restrictions, but increase

in vaccination rates among foreign trade partners would prevent severe disruptions.

Goldman Sachs' US forecast comes after the International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on Friday that the lender was likely to lower its global economic growth estimates due to the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

— Reuters

More Chinese property developers to issue ABS

BEIJING: Some of China's major property developers are planning to issue asset-backed securities in the near term, a further sign that regulators are marginally broadening financial channels for developers amid Evergrande's debt crisis.

China Evergrande, wrestling with debts of more than \$300 billion, said on Friday that there was "no guarantee" it would have enough funds to meet debt repayments, prompting the country's top financial regulators to calm the market.

The regulators said any fallout was controllable, and that developers' normal funding needs would be met, but the sector is facing another year of tight funding conditions and refinancing risks, Moody's said in a note last week.

Country Garden, the country's top property developer, said on Sunday that the company is considering applying for the issuance of supply chain asset-based securities (ABS) in the near term.



A man walks in front of unfinished residential buildings at the Evergrande Oasis, a housing complex developed by Evergrande Group, in Luoyang, China. — Reuters

"As an innovative financing tool, supply chain ABS products can support upstream suppliers' financing and ease financing difficulties for small and medium firms," the company said.

It also pledged to control company's risks via prudent operations, according to the statement.

Four other developers, including Huafa Industrial and Greentown China, have received regulatory feedback on their plans to issue ABS totalling nearly 16 billion yuan (\$2.51 billion). — Reuters

Opec to continue with supply adjustments for oil market

MILAN: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) will continue with its supply adjustments for the oil market, the Opec Secretary General said on Saturday.

"We will continue to do what we know best to ensure we attain stability in the oil market on a sustainable basis," Mohammad Barkindo said in a webinar organised by Italian think-tank ISPI.

Oil prices fell on Thursday after Opec and its allies stuck to their existing policy of monthly oil output increases despite fears a release from US crude reserves and the new Omicron coronavirus variant would put renewed pressure on price. Barkindo said in terms of oil demand the estimate at the moment was for a growth of 5.7 million barrels per day.

"In 2022 we expect another 4.2 million," he said.

He said the uncertainty and volatility on the markets was also



We will continue to do what we know best to ensure we attain stability in the oil market on a sustainable basis

MOHAMMAD BARKINDO

Secretary General, Opec

due to extraneous factors such as the ongoing Covid pandemic and not necessarily the fundamentals of oil and gas.

"Now we are on course of returning the level of consumption in 2022 to pre-Covid levels," he



Employees work next to tanks for liquefied natural gas (LNG) at a factory in Xian, Shaanxi province, China. — Reuters

said.

Barkindo said that the forecast was for oil and gas to account for more than 50% of the global energy mix in 2045 or even to mid century.

"In all the pronouncements we had from Glasgow we have not yet seen any concrete road map or plans of how to replace this 50% ... without creating unprecedented turmoil in the energy markets,"

he said, referring to the Glasgow climate conference.

"Oil and gas will be needed for the foreseeable future."

Meanwhile, Asia liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices fell this week as spot demand from China remained muted despite the start of winter and as natural gas supplies from Russia continued to flow steadily to Germany. But the drop in prices was kept

in check by outages in Australia which curbed cargo loadings, trade sources said.

The average LNG price for January delivery into Northeast Asia fell to \$34.60 per metric million British thermal units (mmBtu), down \$1.50, they said.

Chinese LNG buyers are pulling back on spot purchases of the super-chilled fuel as prices remain high and inventories are ample, several trade sources said. Another source added that the government's tolerance of additional coal burning has also dampened appetite for more expensive LNG.

Beijing Gas entered the market to purchase LNG cargoes, but they are for delivery in the middle of next year.

Royal Dutch Shell shut production at its Prelude floating LNG site and Chevron Corp shut one of three processing units at its Gorgon LNG plant, both off northwestern Australia, the companies said.

Shell said Prelude was hit by a power outage on Thursday after smoke was detected in an electrical utility area, and the facility is operating on back-up diesel generators, while Chevron shut Train 3 at its 15.6 million tonne a year Gorgon LNG plant on Wednesday.

Neither company gave a timeframe for restoring output. Cheniere Energy may have temporarily shut a production train at its Sabine Pass plant in the United States following dense fog, one source said, though details were not immediately available or confirmed.

South Korea's Korea Midland Power Co (KOMIPO) bought a cargo for delivery in mid-January at around \$34 to \$36 per mmBtu, an industry source said.

Russian natural gas supplies to Germany through the Yamal-Europe pipeline have been stable for the past 24 hours, data from German network operator Gascade showed. — Reuters

‘Metaverse’ fuels digital property market

The idea of spending millions on non-existent land may sound ludicrous — but feverish predictions of a virtual reality future are pushing investors to bet big on digital real estate.

This week, New York-based company Republic Realm announced it had spent a record-breaking \$4.3 million on digital land through The Sandbox, one of several “virtual world” websites where people can socialise, play games and even attend concerts.

Such websites bill themselves as a prototype of the metaverse, a future Internet where online experiences like chatting to a friend would eventually feel face-to-face thanks to virtual reality (VR) headsets.

“Metaverse” has been a Silicon Valley buzzword for months, but interest soared in after Facebook’s parent company renamed itself “Meta” as it shifts its focus towards VR.

The Facebook rebrand “introduced the term ‘metaverse’ to millions of people a lot faster than I would have ever imagined,” said Cathy Hackl, a tech consultant who advises companies on entering the metaverse.

According to crypto data site Dapp, land worth more than \$100 million has sold across the four largest metaverse sites, The Sandbox, Decentraland, CryptoVoxels, and Somnium Space.

And while it may be some time before these sites operate as true metaverses, transporting us elsewhere with VR goggles, digital land is already functioning as an asset just like real land, said Hackl. “They can build on it, they can rent it out, they can sell it,” she said.

Tokens.com has bought a prime patch in Decentraland’s Fashion Street district, which the platform hopes to develop as a home for luxury brands’ virtual stores. “If I hadn’t done the research and understood that this is valuable property, it would seem absolutely crazy,” admitted Tokens.com CEO Andrew Kiguel.

Kiguel spent 20 years as an investment banker focused on real estate. He insists the Decentraland plot makes exactly the same kind of business sense as it would in the real world: it’s in a trendy area with high footfall. — AFP



The Facebook rebrand introduced the term ‘metaverse’ to millions of people a lot faster than I would have ever imagined

CATHY HACKL
Tech consultant



FLOWER DEMAND

A woman dressed in traditional costume is doing a livestream at the Dounan Flower Market to sell flowers with her phone in Kunming in southwestern China’s Yunnan province.

Demand for cut flowers has soared in China as standards of living have risen, with the southern province of Yunnan at the epicentre of that boom thanks to its all-year mild climate. — AFP

Information war needs vigilance



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A number of media platforms in existence today are merely tools used by organisations and even countries in waging informational warfare, some in the name of human rights and charitable causes. Through this tool, they falsify facts and influence public opinion, thereby sparking tensions between nations in the virtual world. Such phenomena were unheard of in previous generations.

Some may think that wars mean only military battles, but wars are also fought with the goal of intellectual, political, and economic oppression. The objective is to influence the opinions of people and even brainwash them into believing certain narratives.

But there is a difference between information warfare and social media skirmishing. The former targets cultures and drives people into embracing and accepting certain positions and things, while media skirmishing occurs between nations in the virtual world.

Nevertheless, the good thing is that such

sparrring nations may be duelling today on social media, but coming together in reconciliation tomorrow.

Among the types of informational wars that have spread recently and perhaps without prior planning is what may be referred to as the scepticism war.

An example of this is the tendency for people, regardless of their personal opinion, to criticise the decision of an official and question its merits.

This tendency to criticise just about any decision can be attributed to scepticism built over the years following officialdom’s failure to deliver on previous promises. Building public trust and transparency in the decision-making process is key to addressing sceptical people.

The netizens of today are quite unless their peers of past years. The mobile phone is like a weapon in their hands with which they fire their opinions and voice their resentments. Armed with this weapon, they take it along with them wherever they go, airing their views through posts and videos.

Take, for example, the information war being waged around the coronavirus pandemic. Many governments had initially faced opposition from some quarters to their public safety and social distancing procedures.

This was primarily the result of misinformation disseminated on some social media platforms sowing doubts in public minds about the reality of the epidemic, as well as promoting vaccine scepticism.

Recall former US President Donald Trump’s response when asked about the truth surrounding the pandemic. His infamous answer: ‘Ask China!’ Indeed, misinformation has prompted the competent authorities to issue strict laws to compel the general public to comply with decisions issues in the national interest.

Right-thinking, forthright and professional members of society will always be guided by the interests of their fellow citizens and the homeland, and will not be swayed by insidious forces using social media to influence opinion.

Time to overhaul the global financial system



JEFFREY SACHS

The author is Director of the Centre for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

THESE DAYS, THAT GROWTH CAN AND SHOULD BE GREEN AND DIGITAL, AVOIDING THE HIGH-POLLUTION GROWTH OF THE PAST

At last month’s COP26 climate summit, hundreds of financial institutions declared that they would put trillions of dollars to work to finance solutions to climate change. Yet a major barrier stands in the way: The world’s financial system actually impedes the flow of finance to developing countries, creating a financial death trap for many.

Economic development depends on investments in three main kinds of capital: human capital (health and education), infrastructure (power, digital, transport, and urban), and businesses.

Poorer countries have lower levels per person of each kind of capital, and therefore also have the potential to grow rapidly by investing in a balanced way across them.

These days, that growth can and should be green and digital,

avoiding the high-pollution growth of the past. Global bond markets and banking systems should provide sufficient funds for the high-growth “catch-up” phase of sustainable development, yet this doesn’t happen.

The flow of funds from global bond markets and banks to developing countries remains small, costly to the borrowers, and unstable.

Developing-country borrowers pay interest charges that are often 5-10 per cent higher per year than the borrowing costs paid by rich countries. Developing country borrowers as a group are regarded as high risk. The bond rating agencies assign lower ratings by mechanical formula to countries just because they are poor. Yet these perceived high risks are exaggerated, and often become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When a government floats bonds to finance public investments, it generally counts on the ability to refinance some or all of the bonds

as they fall due, provided that the long-term trajectory of its debt relative to government revenues is acceptable.

If the government suddenly finds itself unable to refinance the debts falling due, it likely will be pushed into default – not out of bad faith or because of long-term insolvency, but for lack of cash on hand. This is what happens to far too many developing-country governments.

International lenders (or rating agencies) come to believe, often for an arbitrary reason, that Country X has become uncreditworthy.

This perception results in a “sudden stop” of new lending to the government. Without access to refinancing, the government is forced into a default, thus “justifying” the preceding fears. The government then usually turns to the International Monetary Fund for emergency financing. The restoration of the government’s global financial reputation typically takes years or

even decades.

Rich-country governments that borrow internationally in their own currencies do not face the same risk of a sudden stop, because their own central banks act as lenders of last resort.

Lending to the United States government is considered safe in no small part because the Federal Reserve can buy Treasury bonds in the open market, ensuring in effect that the government can roll over debts falling due.

Low- and lower-middle-income countries, by contrast, borrow in foreign currencies (mainly dollars and euros), pay exceptionally high interest rates, and suffer sudden stops.

The major credit-rating agencies (Fitch, Moody’s, and S&P Global) assign investment-grade ratings to most rich countries and to many upper-middle-income countries, but assign sub-investment-grade ratings to nearly all lower-middle-income countries and to all low-income countries. Moody’s, for

example, currently assigns an investment grade to just two lower-middle-income countries (Indonesia and the Philippines)

Trillions of dollars in pension, insurance, bank, and other investment funds are channelled by law, regulation, or internal practice away from sub-investment-grade securities. Once lost, an investment-grade sovereign rating is extremely hard to recover unless the government enjoys the backing of a major central bank.

During the 2010s, 20 governments — including Barbados, Brazil, Greece, Tunisia, and Turkey — were downgraded to below-investment grade. Out of the five that have since recovered their investment-grade rating, four are in the EU (Hungary, Ireland, Portugal, and Slovenia), and none are in Latin America, Africa, or Asia (the fifth is Russia).

An overhaul of the global financial system is therefore urgent and long overdue.

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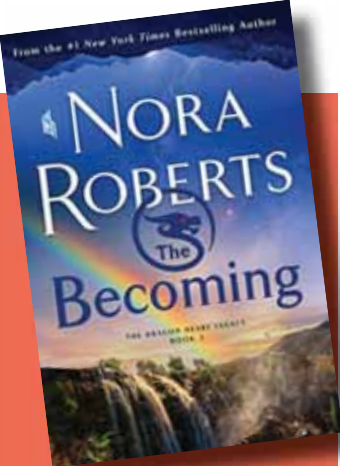
Preserving heritage on canvas

Thirteen artists are currently taking part in the Method of Creative Imagination” exhibit taking place at Cure8art Gallery in Grand Hyatt Muscat. A product of the course introduced by Dr Nasser Palangi, the collection is one of the best ways to preserve heritage through art... **P20**



ENTERTAINMENT

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THE BECOMING

BY NORA ROBERTS

The second book in the Dragon Heart Legacy series. Breen returns to Talamh as her grandfather Odram plots destruction.

More minority faces in film, TV, music as audiences demand diversity

More minorities are showing up in mainstream US entertainment, from films and TV to music, as audiences demand stories that reflect the world's diversity, showing that inclusion is good business, industry executives said.

"Our industry has caught up with reality. The majority of the world is actually Asian," said Bing Chen, president of Gold House, a nonprofit collective that promotes Asian Pacific Islander voices, on a panel at the Reuters Next conference broadcast on Thursday.

"Audiences are craving things

they've never seen, never heard of."

"Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," the first Marvel movie to star an Asian superhero, surpassed \$400 million at the box office less than two months after its mid-August release. "The Eternals," which opened in November, features a diverse cast including Marvel Studios' first deaf superhero and the first gay kiss in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

The proliferation of audience data debunks much of Hollywood's conventional wisdom that had devalued women and other minorities,



said Liz Jenkins, chief operating officer of Hello Sunshine, the women-led media company cofounded by actor Reese Witherspoon.

"American audiences will watch stuff with subtitles. It's not just about

ticking a box for DE&I (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), about being the right thing to do. It's really being great business."

Global megahit "Squid Game," which debuted in September, helped

Netflix Inc NFLX.Owin more new customers than expected to the world's largest streaming service.

"Hellbound," another South Korean series, followed with a global debut at No. 1 on Netflix in November.

Chen credits decades of work by executives like CJ Group Vice Chairwoman Miki Lee, an early DreamWorks investor who was a lead producer and funder of "Parasite." The South Korean feature was the first non-English-language film to win the Oscar for best picture. Through her CJ E&M company, Lee helped propel K-pop idols such as BTS to the world stage.

"This is about minorities founding different companies and trying to reshape what media looks like," Chen said. "It's about incumbents who've always been doing twice as much to get half as far. It's just good that we've finally arrived." Hello Sunshine, founded in 2016 to put women at the center of stories, was sold for \$900 million to a firm backed by private-equity giant Blackstone Inc BX.N in August. — Reuters



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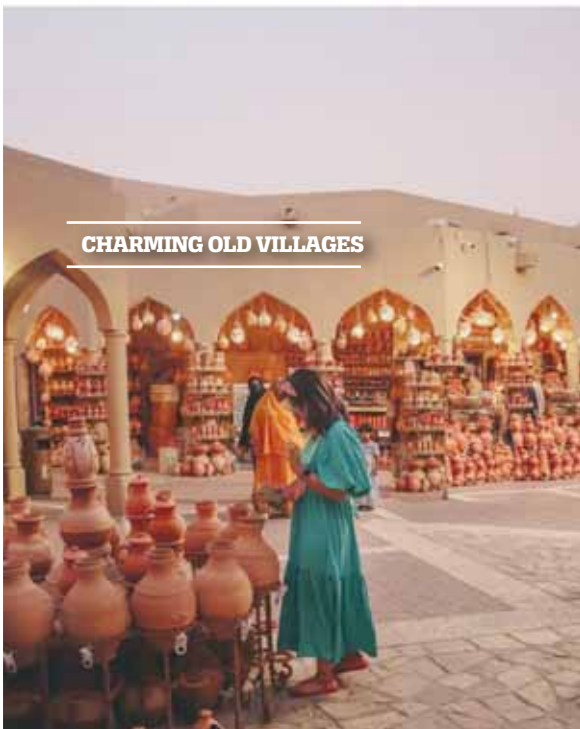
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AROUND THE WORLD

AUCTION / DISCOVERY

Iconic items that belonged to Karl Lagerfeld go under the hammer



FROM HIS ICONIC leather mittens to his furniture and small bowls with the image of his cat Choupette: accessories that belonged to fashion tsar Karl Lagerfeld, who died in 2019, are going under the hammer.

According to auction house Sotheby's, the more than 1,000 items will be sold in several auctions in Paris, Cologne and Monaco, where the first 443 are expected to change hands by Sunday.

Among the highlights of the three-day auction in Monte Carlo that ends on Sunday are a portrait of the star designer by Takashi Murakami, estimated to be worth between 80,000 and 120,000 euros (90,500-135,700 dollars), a Rolls Royce Phantom and a "Balloon Venus" bottle packaging designed by US artist Jeff Koons for the famous Dom Perignon champagne brand.

The furniture, artworks, clothing and accessories were taken from Lagerfeld's various residences including his home in Millefiori in Monaco and Louveciennes Castle in France.

In Paris, the continuation of the auction "Karl Lagerfeld's Estate" is scheduled to take place on December 14 and on December 15 in Cologne. — dpa

Eleventh-century gold earring found in Danish field

A RARE 11TH-CENTURY golden earring, presumably from the Middle East, has been found in Denmark, the National Museum of Denmark announced on Sunday.

The piece of jewellery was discovered by Frants Fugl Vestergaard, with the help of a metal detector, in a field in West Jutland.

It is the first discovery of such an object in Scandinavia, the Copenhagen museum said in a statement.

The earring probably originated in Byzantium or Egypt and is thought to be a gift from the emperor of Byzantium to a Viking chieftain, it added. It will be on display at the museum from Monday.

"It is completely unique for us," said museum expert Peter Pentz. "We know of only 10 to 12 other specimens worldwide and we have never found one in Scandinavia."

The Vikings brought back thousands of silver coins from their forays, travels and trading expeditions, but hardly any jewellery, Pentz said.

He expressed surprise at the discovery site, as there was no known Viking site nearby. Gold from Byzantium had previously been found as burial objects in Viking graves.

The earring consists of a crescent-shaped gold plate inlaid with enamel in a frame of gold threads decorated with small gold balls and gold bands. The motif is two stylised birds around a plant symbolising the tree of life. — dpa

FASHION



Tweed weaves a way from Scottish islands to catwalk

IN THE CLUTTERED workshop of his home off the coast of north-west Scotland, Ian Mackay patiently weaves a bright green wool, surrounded by bags of fabric, spools and tools.

He makes a steady clatter as he pedals his machine in the shed of his croft on the village of South Shawbost on the Isle of Lewis, watching closely for any defects.

"It's handwoven... or rather foot-woven," the 51-year-old weaver jokes in his sing-song accent typical of the Outer Hebrides.

Mackay spins wool for 10 hours a day, resting only on Sundays, when most shops and services are shut on the religiously conservative islands.

Once complete, his handiwork — authentic Harris Tweed — could be shipped to the other side of the world, as the rough woollen fabric becomes more popular than ever.

Long associated with the wind-swept Scottish islands, the textile's ecological and sustainable properties have inspired designers to be more environmentally friendly.

"It doesn't really matter how bad the weather is outside if you are weaving," Mackay told AFP as an icy November wind whipped across the ochre-coloured moor where sheep were grazing.

"There's no point in being really fast, doing mistakes. You are better doing slow, quality work."

Such is its status, Harris Tweed, traditionally made from 100 per cent pure virgin — unrecycled — sheep's wool, is the only fabric protected by an act of parliament.

The Harris Tweed Act 1993 stipulates that it "has been handwoven by the islanders at their homes in the Outer Hebrides, and made from pure virgin wool dyed and spun in the Outer Hebrides".

A distinctive Orb stamp globe with a cross on top certifies the fabric's origin and authenticity.

HIGH FASHION EXPORT

Harris Tweed, mostly woven with a plain weave, twill or herringbone structure, was originally associated with Britain's aristocracy

and gentlemen farmers.

Jackets and plus-fours made from the durable fabric that can withstand harsh climates were a must for traditionally outdoor upper-class pursuits such as hunting and fishing.

But British designer Vivienne Westwood turned that image on its head by integrating it into her punk



wardrobe in a subversion of culture and tradition.

Now other major brands, including Chanel, Dior, Yves Saint Laurent and Hermes, are making it a key element of their collections.

"Recently we have been working extensively with Polo Ralph Lauren in the USA," said Margaret Ann Macleod, sales director for Harris Tweed Hebrides.

Seventy people work at the company's lakeside factory, where the wool is dyed and spun, then sent to some 120 home weavers, where skills have been passed down for generations.

Once woven, it is returned to the factory 18 miles (29 kilometres) from Lewis' main town of Stornoway to be washed, dried and fin-

ished in Shawbost Mill.

A third of the Shawbost factory's output goes to the UK, while two-thirds is exported to all corners of the world.

"We export extensively to France, Germany, Italy and a lot of other countries in Europe," Macleod said.

"We also have a big export business in South Korea, Japan and the US, and increasingly China has become a new export market for us as well."

COLOUR AND CULTURE

In total, some 160 home weavers live in the Outer Hebrides, working hand in hand with three factories that produce a total of 15 million metres of the fabric every year.

Tweed, immortalised by Mr Toad, one of the main characters in Kenneth Grahame's 1908 classic novel "The Wind in the Willows", is used to make jackets, trousers, coats, but also shoes, handbags, armchairs and even teddy bears.

Fifteen years ago, the sportswear brand Nike chose Harris Tweed for a collection of trainers — a huge publicity coup for the Hebridean craftsmen.

But more recently the public has rediscovered the fabric in its dozens of different patterns and shades through popular television series.

From the aristocrats of "Downton Abbey" to the gangsters of "Peaky Blinders" and the royal family in "The Crown", virtually everyone wears tweed.

"We start with about 60 colours and we blend each of these colours to create over 180 different yarn shades and they would reflect the landscape and the seascape of the Outer Hebrides — the rich browns are the tones of the moorland, the blue of the Atlantic Ocean," Macleod said.

"Young designers are coming and are looking for the colours. They are looking for authenticity, the fact that we are hand-weaving (and) creating our own yarns is really important to them."

"They want to capture a little bit of the island, of the Outer Hebrides in their creations as well." — AFP

AROUND OMAN IN 3RD GEAR



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

The adventure of a blonde and a very old car #20

"OHH, LET'S STOP here and stock up", Mrs J was as excited as a child on Christmas morning — and just as loud.

After a very zen drive on the road from Mirbat, her excitement was heart-attack inducing, I had watched the rolling green hills with their grazing cows and goats in amazement, realising that they reminded me of home. That is, until a large herd of goats would crowd the road, led by an old Omani woman beautiful in her traditional dress, carrying a newborn baby goat in her arms. That's when the similarities stopped. In the low afternoon sun, everything looked so soft and peaceful that I was sure Mozart must have written his piano concerto No 21 after visiting this place.

It was therefore a bit of an insult to my senses and zen mood when Mrs J pointed to a small building with an impressive signboard — 'Commercial Market'. It seemed so out of place.

"Commercial market? Isn't that a bit like having a sign saying 'tooth dentist'? Or 'food restaurant' or, or." I couldn't come up with anything else. "Aren't all markets commercial? Isn't that the sole purpose of a market? To exchange goods for money?" I had worked myself up to a good rant and gone was my zen state of mind. "And don't even get me started on the word 'market'. Why are all shops in this country called markets? Whatever happened to 'shop' was plain and simple. It's not like we are out in the open on a Saturday in the 1800 century, strolling around at a Farmers Market. It's a shop. If it was on a corner, which it is not, it would be a corner shop!"

Mrs J looked at me with a raised eyebrow. "Finished? Can we go in and get some milk now?"

We parked and walked towards the shop, me still mumbling to myself about hypermarkets and inflated sense of grandeur, and Mrs J was telling me to hush. Outside the shop were several old plastic washbowls and handle-less buckets and near the door boxes of empty Vimto bottles.

Hassan looked up from his phone as we entered his shop. "Welcome", he beamed. The shop (or market) was an Aladdin's cave of stuff you might need if you live 130 km from Salalah and this is your only shop, and stuff you never

thought you would need. Ever. Down from the ceiling hung bunches of onions next to crocheted muzzles meant for snapping camels, homemade plywood shelves tempted you with everything from Chips Oman to Chinese plastic flip flops. Fresh milk.. not so much. Hassan shook his head and pointed us towards the tinned variety instead. Although fine for our tea, the stuff tasted horrible with cornflakes. I'm just telling you.

Hassan waited patiently while we ah-h-ed and ooh-ed our way through his selection on display. He was originally from Kerala, but now managed this splendid commercial market with a customer base of 10 houses, he told us. "How did you end up here?", Mrs J asked with a sweeping arm movement to include all 10 houses spread out for miles. He just shrugged and smiled.

We were interrupted by the little cowbell over the shop door announcing another customer. The man greeted us warmly and quickly picked up a carrier bag full of groceries and left. Hassan opened a wooden drawer with only a few 100 baisa notes and a well-worn black notebook. He tapped his pen a few times and flicked through the pages before he meticulously entered the date, name and amount. Out here people still bought 'on account'. Hassan knew everybody, their likes and dislikes, and kept a tally of everybody buying on credit. At the end of the month, Hassan would wait for them to come and settle their tab. He knew who struggled, he knew who prospered and he knew who showed kindness and paid someone else's bill without expecting anything back in this life. This was how small communities worked.

A loud commotion outside caught our attention. A young goat herder in worn army boots and a cloth bag slung over his shoulder had parked his herd in the car park. Literally, a hundred goats were bleeding and pushing each other to get to the bowls and buckets of water, while their herder went inside to get a top-up card for his phone.

"Corner shop, indeed", Mrs J grinned. This is truly a local watering hole, an oasis for the famished.

I smiled to myself. I knew she wouldn't be so poetic the next morning when all she had to breakfast was cornflakes with tinned milk.



Preserving heritage on canvas

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

The Cure8Art art gallery has just opened in town and it has been launched with a group art exhibition titled, "Method of Creative Imagination," featuring the artwork of 13 artists. The gallery is located in Grand Hyatt Muscat. The exhibition is to be held until December 15.

The founder of the gallery, Sarah Ahmed Faris al Aulahi, who is an Omani artist, curator, photographer and director of Cure8Art said the artworks are a result of the course, Method of Creative Imagination led by Dr Nasser Palangi, Associate Professor of the Fine Arts Department of the Scientific College of Design in Muscat who, everywhere he travels, tries to preserve the ethnicity of art as well as create an art movement.

"Dr Palangi believes in preserving heritage through art at the same time contemporising it. In the gallery we focus on two things: educating on techniques in art, basics and on to how to collect, how to value art and how to stand on your two feet as an artist," said Sarah.

The course had begun at the National Museum of Oman by showcasing the designs, patterns, images seen throughout Omani history and at the same time giving the artists the tools to unlock their creative imaginations like an illusion.

"We tend to lose creativity as we grow; for example, when we are young we look at the clouds and imagine different shapes, but as we grow older we lose that. Dr Palangi comes up with techniques to unlock the fundamentals," she explained.

The result is the art exhibition. The curator of the exhibition, Farideh Zariv said it was easy to choose their artwork for the exhibition because they knew their work already. "There is a common language between them and that is the language of art," she said.

The participating artists are Al Zahra Hussain, Abeer al Moosawi,

Afra Talal al Said, Elizabeth Davis, Iman al Maskari, Mirna Youssef, Boushra Khalfan al Shabibi, Maya Youssef, Minorca al Zedjali, Raya Saleh al Maskari, Sahwa Mustahail al Mashani, Sara Abdulrazaq Madan and Shalini Gupta Kumar.

A supporter of art, Mona al Ritchie said she wanted to support

Especially proud of his students is Dr Nasser Palangi.

The artist after practising methods of creative imagination explored the illusion method.

"They did hundreds of artwork practising collages, 2D and 3D. Behind this series, we can see the experimenting processes. Then I

According to him, the visual alphabets are limited in a way, but it is infinity in another way. "Shape, volume, composi-



the work of this talented group of women. "This is an incredibly talented group of women who have come out with wonderful pieces of art, which are reflections of their creativity. I think the art scene in Oman has grown exponentially over the years. I remember earlier there were few people. Of course, we have Anwar Sonya, Hassan Meer and so many others and then it is also lovely to see this amount of creativity coming along as well. I am not an artist but I love to see what is being created and being shown to the world. Art brings us together and it transcends culture. Art is a universal language," Mona reflected.

asked them to select their final artwork," said Dr Palangi.

The artists went through critique sessions with visual principles and encouraged them to try to achieve harmony, balance and focal point.

"Art is there to achieve unity. Just getting to the unity and beauty of nature as well as your imagination through your art, you make your personal unity and space. In our paintings here you can see the unity of warm colours, harmony in grey, different paintings with a variety of forms, textures, light and colour and then the focal point. It is in a way creating a symphony," reflected Dr Palangi.

tion and texture; in addition to energy, harmony, movement, balance, repetition and contrast - it is how we deal and make the connection with the alphabets and principles. This is where the challenge is. This is the challenge everyone should take to make their own personal symphony," urged Dr Nasser Palangi.

