

Saudi Crown Prince concludes visit

HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and his accompanying delegation on Tuesday left, after an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The Saudi Crown Prince was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan and other dignitaries. **DETAILS ON P4**



HM, Saudi Crown Prince hold talks

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION REVIEWED

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held a round of official talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan once again welcomed HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman and wished him and his official delegation a pleasant stay in the Sultanate of Oman. The Saudi Crown Prince expressed his gratitude to His Majesty for the warm reception and hospitality accorded upon his arrival.

BILATERAL COOPERATION

The session reviewed various aspects of bilateral cooperation, ways to consolidate ties between the peoples of the two countries and means of realising their aspirations. The two sides also exchanged views about issues of common concern.

The session was attended from

the Omani side by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior (Head of the Mission of Honour), Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Saudi Arabia.



SAUDI CROWN PRINCE CONFERRED OMAN CIVIL ORDER



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official luncheon in honour of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman. Prior to the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan conferred on HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman the Oman Civil Order-1st Class, deemed the loftiest Omani medal allocated for kings, heads of state, crown princes and heads of governments whose countries share special relations with the Sultanate of Oman. The luncheon was attended by members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, as well as some ministers. It was also attended by the official delegation accompanying the Saudi Crown Prince. – **ONA**

MoUs signed to boost cooperation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have signed 13 memoranda of understanding to activate joint action in promising economic sectors.

The pacts, signed by firms owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) with Saudi counterparts, in coincidence with the visit of HRH

Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. They manifest the two countries leaderships' vision aimed to meet the aspirations of their peoples.

OQ signed three MoUs in the fields of petrochemicals, renewable energy and green hydrogen sector: the first with ACWA Power, the

second with Aramco and the third with Sabic. In the field of dry dock and logistic services, Asyad signed an MoU with a Saudi Shipping Company.

Oman Mining Company signed an MoU with Saudi Mining Company to assess opportunities for explorations in the mining sector. **DETAILS ON P5**

Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia agree to consolidate relations

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday issued a joint communique reading as follows.

“Based on the deep-rooted ties of history and fraternity between the leaderships of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their peoples, in consolidation of their steadfast bilateral relations and in response to the directives of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, made a visit to the Sultanate of Oman on December 6 and 7.

A round of official talks was held by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They explored aspects of joint cooperation and ways of developing it in different fields and commended the level of coordination in political, economic, military and security spheres for the good of the two peoples.

The two sides also lauded the accomplishments made during the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Saudi Arabia in July 2021. They underlined the outcome of the Royal visit, which resulted in expanding the scope of bilateral relations and the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of the Omani-Saudi Coordination Council, which will contribute

- WELCOMES THE OPENING OF 725-KM OMANI-SAUDI ROAD
- DETERMINATION TO RAISE PACE OF JOINT ECONOMIC COOPERATION
- TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES IN OIL, GAS AND PETROCHEMICALS SECTOR
- SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS AIMED AT ACHIEVING MIDDLE EAST PEACE
- TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO FIND POLITICAL SOLUTION TO YEMENI CRISIS
- BOTH COUNTRIES WELCOME TRANSITIONAL DEAL IN SUDAN

government and private sectors with the aim of forging quality commercial and investment exchange to serve their visions (Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030) and consolidate partnership between the two countries' private sectors. In this respect, the two sides welcomed the opening of the 725-km Desert Highway linking the two countries and expected to significantly boost the travel of citizens and the smooth flow of supplies towards the desired full-fledged economic integration. They also welcomed the opening of border checkpoints in the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia.

In the field of energy, the two sides extolled Opec+ efforts — led by Saudi Arabia, with the participation of the Sultanate of Oman — that resulted in stabilising oil markets. They also underscored the importance of such sustained cooperation and the commitment of all participating countries to the mandates of the Opec+ agreement.

The two sides stressed the need to study all opportunities for cooperation in the oil, gas and petrochemicals sector, as well as cooperation in advancing petroleum products trade, the use of renewable energy and its technologies, electrical energy, commercial exchange and maximising benefits from local energy content for implementing power projects. **DETAILS ON P6**

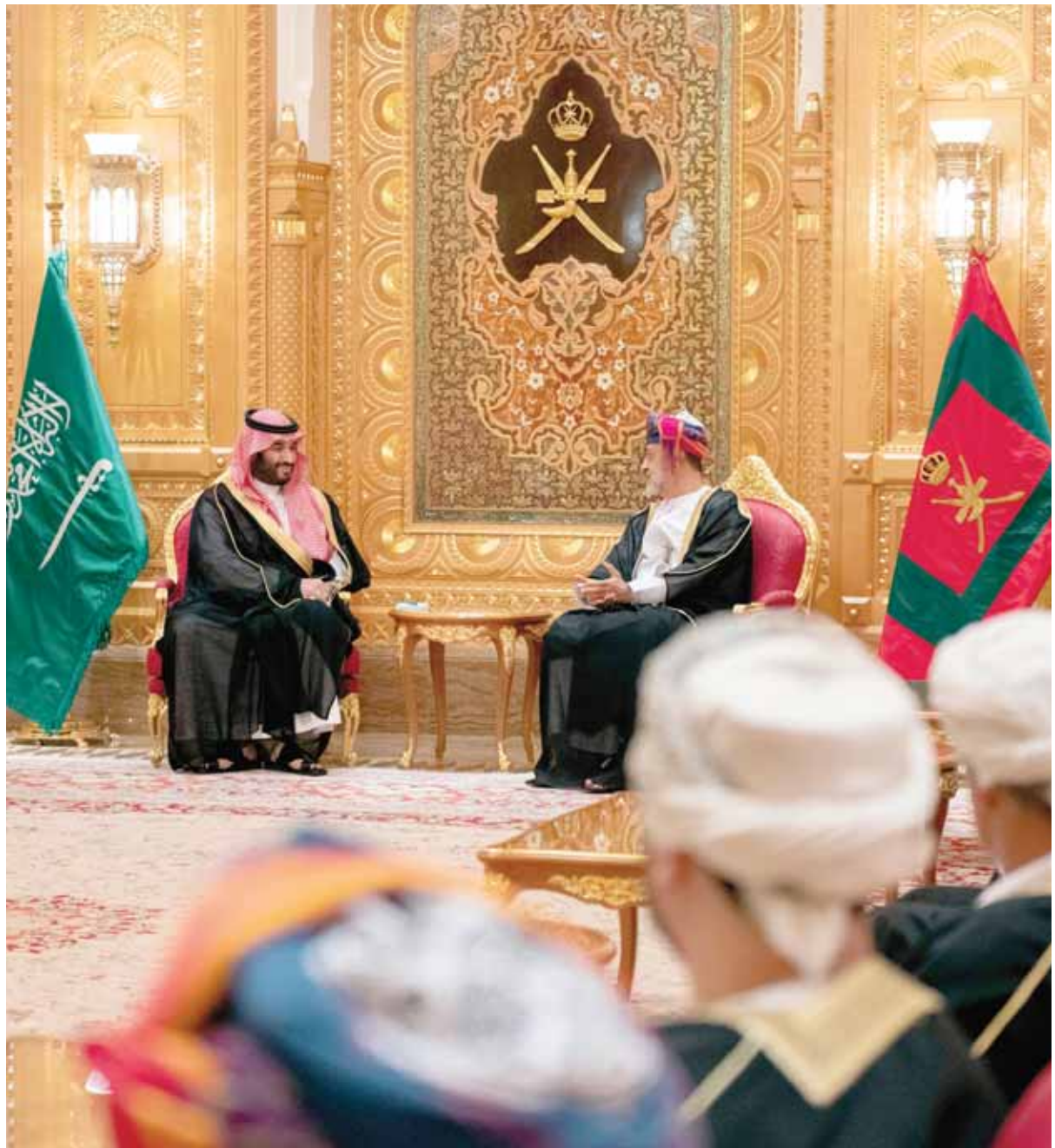


OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, hold a round of official talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

HM, Saudi Crown Prince hold talks



FROM P1

It was attended from the Saudi side by HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Energy, HRH Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of State, Member of the Council of Ministers, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Sports, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Interior, HRH Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of the National Guard, HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al Saud, Foreign Minister, HRH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saud, Minister of Culture, Dr Musaed bin

Mohammed al Aiban, Minister of State, Member of the Council of Ministers, Dr Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and acting Minister of Media and Abdullah bin Saud al Anazi, Saudi Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in Saudi Arabia, was accorded an official welcome on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Al Alam Palace courtyard, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the Saudi Crown Prince to the Dais of Honour where the Royal

Anthem of Saudi Arabia was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the Saudi Crown Prince.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the Saudi Crown Prince, wishing them a pleasant stay in their second home the Sultanate of Oman. On his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis AshShura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP). After that, His Majesty the Sultan and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman proceeded to the hall where they took Arabian coffee.

— ONA



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



Official welcome for Saudi Crown Prince



MUSCAT: HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), was accorded an official welcome on Tuesday on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Al Alam Palace courtyard, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the Saudi Crown Prince to the Dais of Honour where the Royal Anthem of Saudi Arabia was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the Saudi Crown Prince. Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the Saudi Crown Prince, wishing them a pleasant stay in their second home the Sultanate of Oman.

On his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

— ONA



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



Saudi Crown Prince concludes 2-day visit



MUSCAT: HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and his accompanying delegation left here Tuesday, after an official two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Saudi Crown Prince was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numan, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior (Head of the Mission of Honour), Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, HH Sayyid Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the KSA and members of the Saudi Embassy in Muscat.

During his visit to the Sultanate of Oman, HRH Prince

Mohammed bin Salman was accompanied by an official delegation comprising HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Energy, HRH Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of State, Member of the Council of Ministers, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Sports, HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Naif bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of Interior, HRH Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Minister of the National Guard, HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah al Saud, Foreign Minister, HRH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saud, Minister of Culture, Dr Musaed bin Mohammed al Aiban, Minister of State, Member of the Council of Ministers, Dr Majid bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce and acting Minister of Media and Abdullah bin Saud al Anazi, KSA Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA





OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS



Agreements signed to upgrade cooperation

MoUs IN COMMERCIAL FIELD

ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF NATIONAL INDUSTRIES

FOREIGN TRADE, EXPLORING MARKETS AND EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES

PROTECTING NATIONAL PRODUCTS AGAINST HARMFUL PRACTICES

UPGRADING THE LEVEL OF COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE

STUDYING ON DEVELOPING THE EASE OF DIGITISED TRADE

REGULATING COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

ORGANISING PROMOTIONAL OFFERS

ENCOURAGING JOINT ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), represented by the Ministry of Commerce, signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on upgrading cooperation in the fields of trade, standardisation, specifications, quality, criteria and labs on Monday.

The pacts coincide with the current visit to Oman by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, KSA Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in Saudi Arabia.

The MoUs were signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Dr Majid al Qasabi, Minister of Commerce, Acting Minister of Media in KSA.

The MoU in the field of commerce deals with exchanging expertise on enhancing the competitiveness of national industries, protecting national products against harmful practices, studying experiences on developing the ease of digitised trade, regulating commercial activity, organising promotional offers, encouraging joint economic activities, upgrading the level of commercial exchange, foreign trade and exploring markets and export opportunities.

The MoU in the field of standardisation encourages the exchange of information and studies in research and cooperation in the fields of specifications, measurements, criteria and labs, as well as consumer protection and co-operation in achieving mutual concordance and acknowledgement. — ONA



MoUs to enhance ties in media field

MUSCAT: The governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Tuesday signed a number of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to enhance cooperation in the fields of audio, visual and print media.

The pacts were concluded within the context of the two-day official visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, KSA Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.

The MoUs were signed by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, and Dr Majid al Qasabi, Saudi Minister of Commerce, Acting Minister of Media in KSA. The MoUs provide for the exchange of legislations, expertise and views about all that might help in disciplining the media, including ethical content of satellite channels, radio FM stations, Internet-based media, artworks and electronic games.

The MoUs also deal with the ex-

change of research papers in the fields of media monitoring and statutes regulating media activity, as well as cooperation in producing cinema content and furnishing a lucrative environment for investment in the media sector.

Dr Majid al Qasabi told Oman News Agency (ONA) and Oman TV that “The visit of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman underpins the outcomes of the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to

the city of NEOM in Saudi Arabia in July this year and cements ties between the GCC peoples.”

Speaking about the significance of the memoranda of understanding signed, Al Qasabi said that media has an important role to play in highlighting the tourist, economic, cultural and social aspects of the Sultanate of Oman, while at the same time underlining investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman and the KSA.

— ONA

SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

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

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

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

Sultanate of Oman
The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary

Re-Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to re-submit the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
08/2021 Re-Tender	Maintenance Court Halls & Wooden Doors & Applying Anti-termite Treatment Solution Works at Ibra Court Complex	09/12/2021	03/01/2022	Fourth	RO. 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website :
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:

Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Media has an important role to play in highlighting the tourist, economic, cultural and social aspects of the Sultanate of Oman, while at the same time underlining investment opportunities available in both the countries

DR MAJID AL QASABI
Saudi Minister of Commerce, Acting Minister of Media in Saudi Arabia

Recall/Special Service Campaign

Date of Campaign : 8/12/2021
Campaign Type : Safety
Product Description : Rush and Avenza

Production Period	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
October 3, 2017 Through June 29, 2019	TOYOTA	Rush & Avenza	MHKMF53F9HK024218 to MHKEF8BF6LK007439	1347

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with a low-pressure fuel pump, located in the fuel tank, that supplies fuel pressure to the fuel injection system. These fuel pumps may include impellers which have been manufactured with lower density. If these impellers are also of a type with lower surface strength or of a different type but were exposed to production solvent drying for longer periods of time, higher levels of surface cracking may occur. In this condition, excessive fuel absorption may occur, resulting in increased impeller deformation. In some cases, the impeller may deform to a point that creates sufficient interference with the fuel pump body to cause the fuel pump to become inoperative. An inoperative fuel pump due to these conditions could result in illumination of check engine and master warning indicators, rough engine running, engine no start and/or vehicle stall while driving at low speed. However, in rare instances, vehicle stall could occur while driving at higher speeds, increasing the risk of a crash.

Procedure:
As per "Technical instruction" advised by TMC.

For more information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc from 8/12/2021.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs after 8/12/2021.



OMAN-SAUDI RELATIONS

Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia step up economic partnership

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday issued a joint communique reading as follows:

“Based on the deep-rooted ties of history and fraternity between the leaderships of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their peoples, in consolidation of their steadfast bilateral relations and in response to the directives of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman al Saud, Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, made a visit to the Sultanate of Oman on 6 and 7 December 2021.

A round of official talks was held by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They explored aspects of joint cooperation and ways of developing it in different fields and commended the level of coordination in political, economic, military and security spheres for the good of the two peoples.

The two sides also lauded the accomplishments made during the historic visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Saudi Arabia in July 2021. They underlined the outcome of the Royal visit, which resulted in expanding the scope of bilateral relations and the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of the Omani Saudi Coordination Council, which will contribute to the realisation of the desired integration in all sectors.

The two sides expressed their determination to augment the rate of economic cooperation through the motivation of the government and private sectors with the aim of forging quality commercial and investment exchange to serve their visions (Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030) and consolidate partnership between the two countries' private sectors.

In this respect, the two sides welcomed the opening of the 725-km Desert Highway linking the two countries and expected to significantly boost the travel of citizens and the smooth flow of supplies towards the desired full-fledged economic integration. They also welcomed the opening of border checkpoints in the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia.

IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In the field of energy, the two sides extolled Opec+ efforts—led by KSA, with the participation of the Sultanate of Oman—that resulted in stabilising petroleum markets. They also underscored the importance of such sustained cooperation and the commitment of all participating countries to the mandates of the Opec+ agreement.

The two sides stressed the need to study all opportunities for cooperation in the oil, gas and petrochemicals sector, as well as cooperation in advancing

Two sides welcomed the opening of the 725-km Desert Highway linking the two countries and expected to significantly boost the travel of citizens and the smooth flow of supplies towards the desired full-fledged economic integration



petroleum products trade, the use of renewable energy and its technologies, electrical energy, commercial exchange and maximising benefits from local energy content for implementing power projects.

The Omani side valued the initiatives made by Saudi Arabia to address climate change, including Saudi Arabia's Green Initiative and Green Middle East launched by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They agreed to step up cooperation in the field of energy and climate change within the framework of Green Middle East to enhance gains at local, regional and international levels.

The two sides also welcomed an initiative to implement Circular Carbon Economy, launched by KSA when chairing the G20 Summit. The initiative was hailed by the economic group as an integrate and comprehensive framework to address challenges posed by gas emissions responsible for global warming. The initiative, based on the use of available technologies, constitutes an economically sustainable method to manage gas emissions.

COOPERATION IN THE COMMERCIAL FIELD

The two sides agreed to increase incentives that contribute to the easy flow of trade, cooperation in food security, joint investment in sectors of standardisation, health, medical drug production, advanced technologies, innovation, renewable energy, industry, tourism, petrochemicals, converting industries, logistics and financial technology.

To this effect, two agreements

TWO SIDES ALSO LAUDED THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS MADE DURING THE HISTORIC VISIT OF HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK TO SAUDI ARABIA IN JULY 2021



TWO SIDES AGREED TO INCREASE INCENTIVES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE EASY FLOW OF TRADE, COOPERATION IN FOOD SECURITY, JOINT INVESTMENT IN SECTORS OF STANDARDISATION, HEALTH, MEDICAL DRUG PRODUCTION, ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES, INNOVATION, RENEWABLE ENERGY, INDUSTRY, TOURISM, PETROCHEMICALS, CONVERTING INDUSTRIES, LOGISTICS AND FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY



TWO SIDES REITERATED THEIR DETERMINATION TO BOLSTER JOINT ACTION IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTOR



TWO SIDES ALSO VOICED THEIR SUPPORT FOR ALL EFFORTS AIMED AT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

were signed in the field of standardisation.

The two sides expressed their satisfaction with the outcomes of the third meeting of the Saudi Omani Business Council and the Economic Forum held on the sidelines of the meeting.

A group of leading Omani and Saudi firms signed a number of agreements. MoUs were signed by OQ and Aramco, OQ and Sabic Petrochemicals, Asyad and a Saudi shipping company, OQ and ACWA Power, Oman Mining Company and its Saudi counterpart and Muscat Stock Exchange and Tadawul stock exchange.

IN THE MEDIA FIELD

The two sides affirmed their keenness to upgrade the level of cooperation and welcomed the signing of an MoU in the field of Radio and TV, an MoU on the exchange of news between Oman News Agency and Saudi Press Agency and an MoU in the field of visual, audio and print media.

The two sides also welcomed the meeting held by Oman Journalist Association and Saudi Press Association.

IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

The two sides reiterated their determination to bolster joint action in the field of tourism and the development of the sector due to its significance in augmenting domestic product, creating employment opportunities and diversifying the economy.

In the political arena, the two sides reaffirmed the fundamentals of Al Ula Declaration issued on 5 January 2021, which approved

the implementation of the vision of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques endorsed by the GCC Supreme Council during its 36th session in December 2015.

All departments of the Council were tasked with doubling efforts towards the finalisation of the remaining steps within a specific schedule. This includes complementing pillars of the economic unity within the framework of the GCC's joint defence and security schemas, in addition to the formulation of a unified GCC foreign policy aimed to safeguard the interests and gains of the GCC, spare it any involvement in regional and international conflicts and meet its peoples' aspirations for prosperity.

ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

The two sides exchanged views about matters of common concern in the regional and international arenas. They affirmed their determination to work together to serve the joint interests and consolidate security and stability in the region and the world at large. They also voiced their support for all efforts aimed at the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

They underlined the importance of reaching a comprehensive settlement for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and related international legitimacy resolutions in a manner that safeguards the right of Palestinian people to set up their own independent state on the borders of 1967, with East

Jerusalem as its capital.

About Yemeni affairs, the two sides agreed to continue efforts to find a political solution to the Yemeni crisis based on the GCC initiative, the outcomes of the National Comprehensive Dialogue, the Security Council Resolution and the Saudi Arabian Initiative—all with the overall aim of alleviating the suffering of the Yemeni people.

The two sides also welcomed the success of the elections in Iraq and expressed their hopes for the formation of an Iraqi government capable of establishing peace and security and realising the country's prosperity.

The two sides welcomed the accord reached by parties to the Transitional Stage in Sudan and reaffirmed their support for all that might achieve security and stability in Sudan. They wished Sudanese people progress and prosperity.

About the situation in Lebanon, the two sides affirmed the importance of conducting comprehensive reforms to help Lebanon emerge from its crisis and to make sure that it will not constitute a hotspot for any terrorist or criminal acts that might compromise the stability of the region.

The two sides affirmed the significance of reaching political solutions for the Syrian and Libyan crises to help end the suffering of the Syrian and Libyan peoples and safeguard their territorial integrity.

The two sides expressed the importance of consolidating security and stability in Afghanistan. They warned against harbouring terrorists or extremists or any acts of recruitment of Afghan refugees in areas of conflict. They also voiced their support for relief efforts and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. In this context, the Omani side valued KSA's call for an extraordinary meeting of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, scheduled to be held in Pakistan on 19 December 2021.

The two sides also underscored the significance of cooperation in terminally and effectively addressing the Iranian nuclear file, its components and its repercussions to help contribute to the establishment of regional and international security and stability. In this context, they affirmed their support for principles of good neighbourliness, respect for UN and international resolutions and the need to spared the region all destabilisation activities.

At the end of the visit, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman thanked His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to him and his delegation.

On his turn, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes for the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud. He wished Saudi people further progress and prosperity.” — **ONA**

In brief

SEOUL



KIM CALLS FOR 'ABSOLUTELY LOYAL' MILITARY OFFICERS

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country's military education system must redouble efforts to turn out officers who "remain absolutely loyal" to the country's ruling party, state media reported. Kim made the remarks at the Eighth Conference of Military Educationists of the Korean People's Army held in Pyongyang over the weekend, state news agency KCNA said.

"He underscored the need to prepare all the military educationists to be true soldiers immensely loyal to the idea and leadership of the Party and to organise and provide the military education, strictly guided by the Party's idea, policy and method so as to bring up all the cadets to be commanding officers who remain absolutely loyal to the Party Central Committee". — Reuters

LAHORE



BODY OF FACTORY MANAGER KILLED BY MOB FLOWN HOME

Pakistan on Monday repatriated the remains of a Sri Lankan factory manager who was beaten to death and set ablaze by a mob after they accused him of blasphemy. The attack has sparked outrage, with Prime Minister Imran Khan calling it a "day of shame for Pakistan". Priyantha Diyawadana was killed on Friday in the central district of Sialkot, in Punjab province, about 200 kilometres southeast of the capital Islamabad.

"The dead body of the Sri Lankan manager has been airlifted and sent to Colombo," Tahir Ashrafi, a religious scholar and special representative of the prime minister on religious harmony, said. — AFP

KABUL



MOBILE LIBRARY RESTARTS IN AFGHAN CAPITAL

A mobile library bus chugged to a Kabul orphanage and opened its doors for the first time since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, eliciting beaming smiles from children. "I'm really feeling happy. I'm studying the books I love again," says 11-year-old Arezo Azizi, whose favourite tome is a counting aid about a cat who gets more pieces of cheese the higher it can count.

The library "didn't come for three months, until now," she explains, sitting on a converted public bus and her voice rising above the excited chatter of her peers. — AFP



Excavators are seen covered in volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Semeru volcano in Sumber Wuluh Village, Lumajang, East Java province, Indonesia. — Reuters

Indonesia bolsters recovery efforts

VOLCANO KILLS 34

JAKARTA: Indonesian President Joko Widodo promised on Tuesday to bolster evacuation efforts and repair damaged homes after visiting the site of a volcanic eruption on Java that has killed at least 34 people.

The 3,676-metre Mt Semeru volcano erupted on Saturday sending a cloud of ash into the sky and dangerous pyroclastic flows into villages below. Thousands of people have been displaced and 17 remain missing, according to the disaster mitigation agency.

After visiting evacuation centres and surveying the area by helicopter, getting an aerial view of villages submerged in molten ash, the president said recovery efforts would be bolstered now and in the months ahead.

"I came to the site to ensure that we have the forces to locate the victims," said the president, speaking from Sumber Wuluh, one of the worst-hit areas. "We hope that after everything has subsided, that everything can start — fixing infrastructure or even relocating those from the places we predict are too dangerous to return to."

At least 2,000 homes would need to be relocated to safer areas, he

said. Search and rescue efforts continued on Tuesday but have been hampered by wind and rain, and limited equipment in some areas.

Mt Semeru erupted three times on Tuesday. Indonesia's Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation said on Monday there was potential for further flows of hot gas, ash and rocks.

Mt Semeru is one of more than 100 active volcanoes in Indonesia, in an area of high seismic activity atop multiple tectonic plates known as the "Pacific Ring of Fire".

Reports said most of the victims died after being hit by searing volcanic debris during Saturday's eruption, with many burned beyond recognition, officials said. More bodies were found on Tuesday, bringing the death toll to 34, with 16 listed as missing, said Wayan Suyatna, head of preparedness at the search and rescue agency in East Java.

The eruption sent villagers in Lumajang district fleeing their

homes in terror as a huge column of smoke rose into the sky and searing molten rocks and gas barrelled down the slopes.

At least 68 people suffered burns caused by hot volcanic materials, local officials said. Television footage showed ash from the volcano burying homes, with only their roofs remaining visible.

Nearly 2,000 people have been displaced by the disaster. They received temporary shelter in mosques and government offices, among other locations, the agency said.

"This morning I came to the location to ensure that we do everything possible to find those still missing," Joko said.

The nearly 3,700-metre volcano, part of Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, has erupted several times since December last year.

It is the highest mountain on Java island, home to 145 million people. Indonesia sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area known for seismic upheaval, and has about 128 active volcanoes. — AFP/dpa

Burning mud, ash rains destruction on village

CURAH KOBOKAN, Indonesia: Three days after Indonesia's Mount Semeru erupted and rained burning mud and ash on it, the village closest to the volcano was shrouded in grey — many of its homes destroyed, streets full of debris and trees felled like matchsticks.

Fewer than 20 kilometres from the crater of Java island's tallest mountain, Curah Kobokan was largely deserted on Tuesday as emergency crews combed through husks of buildings with tools and rescue dogs, hoping to find survivors — or bodies.

As the hot ash spewed by Semeru on Saturday descended on the village, thatch roofs were ripped off weaker structures. The volcanic debris even tore through corrugated metal.

Only a handful of homes appeared to have been spared the worst. "My family house here in Curah Kobokan is destroyed," said sand miner Marzuki Suganda, who lives and works in a nearby village. "I'm traumatised, I asked my relatives if they were brave enough to go back to Curah Kobokan and they all said no, they'd rather sleep under a tree."

Inside the living room of one home, volcanic dust stained everything — including the coffee table and couch next to it.

The family photos on the walls were hidden behind layers of ash.

The shattered remains of the roof filled all the rooms of the house. Through one destroyed door, some clothes and a backpack hung covered with dark grey dust. — AFP

UN shelves decision on Myanmar, Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations on Monday indefinitely postponed recognising Afghanistan's Taliban regime and Myanmar's military junta, depriving both of the international legitimacy they desperately crave.

A resolution denying either state representation was adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote on the recommendation of a committee that included the United States, Russia and China. No change to their status is expected in the short to medium term, officials said. For Afghanistan and Myanmar, competing applications for accreditation from both old and new regimes were on the table at the UN.

The Taliban and Myanmar's military rulers are separately desperate for international recognition in the hope of having targeted sanctions lifted and getting access to assets and funds held abroad. Both criticised the UN for not confirming their chosen ambassadors. The move ignores "the legitimate rights of

The Taliban, Myanmar's military rulers are desperate for global recognition in the hope of having targeted sanctions lifted and getting access to assets held abroad.

the people", the Afghan foreign ministry said in a statement.

Zaw Min Tun, the Myanmar junta spokesman, said the committee's choice did not reflect the reality on the ground.

TALKS IN CAMBODIA

Myanmar's military-appointed Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwin, held talks in Cambodia on Tuesday, a day after the junta drew global condemnation for sentencing deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi to jail for incitement and breaching Covid-19 rules.



Myanmar's military-appointed Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin meets Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh. — Reuters

Wunna Maung Lwin met Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen at the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh, with the men tapping elbows in a greeting before talks, government handout pictures showed. Cambodia will chair the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) next year, a bloc that has seen divisions over member Myanmar since Suu Kyi's government was overthrown in a February 1 coup.

With some Asean members angered by the Myanmar military's unwillingness to deliver on its commitment to end hostilities and start dialogue, its leader Min Aung Hlaing, was not invited to a virtual summit of Asean leaders in October, in an unprecedented snub.

But Hun Sen, who has over the years faced criticism from rights groups and Western governments over what they see as his suppression of democracy, said on Monday junta officials should be invited to the bloc's meetings.

— Reuters

Biden to warn Putin on invading Ukraine

WASHINGTON/MOSCOW: US President Joe Biden will tell Russian President Vladimir Putin in a video conference that Russia and its banks could be hit with the toughest economic sanctions yet if it invades Ukraine, US officials said.

They said the sanctions, which one source said could target Russia's biggest banks and Moscow's ability to convert roubles into dollars and other currencies, were designed to dissuade Putin from using tens of thousands of troops massed near the Ukrainian border to attack its southern neighbour.

The Kremlin, which said before the meeting it did not expect any breakthroughs, has denied harbouring such intentions and has said its troop posture is defensive. But Moscow has voiced rising vexation over Western military aid to Ukraine, a fellow former Soviet republic that has tilted towards the West since a popular revolt toppled a pro-Russian president in 2014, and what it calls creeping Nato expansion.

Moscow has likewise questioned Ukrainian intentions and said it wants guarantees that Kyiv will not use force to try to retake territory lost in 2014 to Russia-backed separatists, a scenario Ukraine has ruled out.

"We're looking for good,

Putin, Biden to discuss Ukraine amid war fears as Kremlin says it does not expect any breakthroughs

predictable relations with the United States. Russia has never intended to attack anyone, but we have our concerns and we have our red lines," said Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

Calling for everyone to keep "a cool head", Peskov said it was vital that Putin and Biden speak given what he called the extraordinary escalation of tensions in Europe.

The Russian rouble weakened slightly on Tuesday, with some market analysts predicting the talks would de-escalate tensions and others saying that the US sanctions threat eroded hopes of finding common ground.

Ahead of his first direct talks with Putin since July, Biden discussed the sanctions plan with European allies on Monday, seeking a strong joint stance in support of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

He spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi



US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin

and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

They called on Russia to defuse tensions and return to diplomacy and said their teams would stay

in close touch, including in consultation with Nato allies and EU partners, on a "coordinated and comprehensive approach", the White House said.

Biden's team has identified a set of economic penalties to impose should Russia launch an invasion, a senior Biden administration official said.

A separate source familiar with the situation said targeting Putin's inner circle has been discussed but no decision made. Sanctions against Russia's biggest banks and curbing the conversion of roubles into dollars and other currencies were also being considered, another source said.

German Gref, the chief executive of Russia's top bank Sberbank, on Tuesday called that idea "nonsense" and "impossible to execute". CNN reported sanctions could include the extreme step of disconnecting Russia from the SWIFT international payment system used by banks around the world.

Bloomberg reported that the United States and European allies were weighing measures targeting the Russian Direct Investment Fund. The United States could also restrict the ability of investors to buy Russian debt on the secondary market, Bloomberg said, citing people familiar with the matter.

The White House declined to comment, while Latvia's foreign minister said in an interview in London on Tuesday that Moscow needed to know before it acted what "the economic price tag" would be, something he said should extend to Russia's \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany. — AFP

■ NOBLE LAUREATES CHILL OUT



German laureates of the Nobel Physics Prize Klaus Hasselmann (R) and of the Nobel Chemistry Prize Benjamin List (L) pose with chocolate Nobel Prize medals after attending a Nobel Symposium at the Swedish embassy in Berlin. Benjamin List of Germany and David MacMillan of the United States won the Nobel Chemistry Prize 2021 for their work developing a new tool to scale up chemical reactions in an environmentally friendly way, known as 'organocatalysis' and Klaus Hasselmann of Germany, US-Japanese scientist Syukuro Manabe and Giorgio Parisi of Italy won the Nobel Physics Prize 2021 for climate models and the understanding of physical systems. — AFP

UAE to shift to Saturday-Sunday weekend

DUBAI: The UAE will shift to a working week of four and half days with a Saturday-Sunday weekend from the start of next year to better align its economy with global markets, but private companies will be free to choose

their own working week.

From January 1, however, the weekend will start on Friday afternoon, including for schools, a government circular said.

"Each company, depending on the sector they operate in

and what suits and serves their business best, can choose the weekend they decide for their employees", Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation Abdulrahman al Awar said.

— Reuters

EU health ministers meet as Omicron cases rise in Europe

BRUSSELS: EU health ministers met on Tuesday as national governments step up measures to try to curb the Omicron Covid-19 variant spreading across Europe as winter closes in.

The gathering was expected to aim for greater coordination of bloc-wide measures in response, such as travel recommendations, and to hear pleas to accelerate vaccinations.

"I will be calling on all health ministers to close the immunisation gap to increase their vaccination rollout programmes and... adhere to non-pharmaceutical measures (like) wearing masks and social distancing," EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said as she went into the meeting.

"We still don't know everything about Omicron," German Health Minister Jens Spahn said as he joined EU counterparts in Brussels.

"Consequently, travel



A health care worker carries a symbolic syringe shaped item on her head as she participates in a trade union demonstration against their mandatory anti-Covid 19 vaccination in Brussels. — AFP

restrictions (into the EU) are important so as to keep the incidence of the new variant in Europe and in Germany as low as possible," he said.

Member states retain final say on their individual health-related decisions, raising the prospect of a patchwork of restrictions across the 27-nation European Union as Christmas and ski trips loom.

The Omicron issue is the first order of business for an EU summit next week, on December 15 and 16, according to a draft agenda seen by AFP.

While questions about Omicron's severity and ability to escape immunity cannot be answered for a couple more weeks, initial data confirm its high transmissibility. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAIKONUR

Tycoon 'excited' ahead of trip to ISS

Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa said he was feeling 'excited' ahead of his mission to the International Space Station, which marks Russia's return to space tourism. Maezawa, a space enthusiast who made his wealth in online fashion, and his production assistant, Yozo Hirano, will spend 12 days on the ISS.

Their Soyuz rocket operated by Russia's Roscosmos space agency will blast off from the Moscow-leased Baikonur cosmodrome



in Kazakhstan on Wednesday. "I feel excited. I'm like an elementary student waiting for a school trip," Maezawa said at a press conference on the eve of the launch. — AFP

DUBAI

Coalition bombs Sanaa in tit-for-tat violence

The coalition fighting in Yemen said it bombed military targets in the capital Sanaa after Ansar Allah launched ballistic missiles and armed drones into Saudi Arabia, including at Aramco oil facilities in Jeddah. The tit-for-tat violence has escalated dramatically over the last months despite efforts by the US and the United Nations to engineer a ceasefire in the seven-year-old war that has caused a dire humanitarian crisis.

The coalition conducted



"precision strikes on legitimate military targets in Sanaa" and in the last 24 hours also struck Ansar Allah targets in Marib and Juf, a statement from the coalition said. — AFP

NAIROBI

38 killed in huge Burundi prison fire

A massive fire tore through an overcrowded prison in Burundi before dawn on Tuesday, killing dozens of inmates and seriously injuring many more, the country's vice president said. Many prisoners were still asleep when the blaze took hold in a penitentiary in Burundi's political capital Gitega, witnesses said. Vice President Prosper Bazombanza, who visited the scene of the tragedy with several ministers, told reporters that 38 people were killed and 69



seriously hurt. The blaze broke out at about 4 am and grim images posted on social media showed huge flames engulfing the prison, and bodies of men lying on the floor. — AFP

Hurdles high as Africa needs to make own vaccines

CLEMENT UWIRINGIYIMANA

Africa needs to make its own vaccines to avoid a repeat of its supply problems in the Covid-19 pandemic but faces big obstacles in turning itself from a pharmaceutical testing ground into a place where vaccines are created, experts said on Tuesday.

The Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM) has set as a target that 60 per cent of the continent's routine vaccine needs, or between 1.4 and 1.7 billion doses yearly, should be met by local manufacturing by 2040, up from about 1 per cent now.

Experts meeting at a PAVM conference in Rwanda said the pandemic had shown Africa urgently needed to tackle its dependence on imported vaccines. But they outlined daunting obstacles, from brain drain to power shortages.

Martin Friede, coordinator of the World Health Organization Initiative for Vaccine Research, said Africa had produced many scientific researchers but not a workforce capable of designing and making vaccines.

He urged the continent's political and scientific leaders to focus on changing that skillset, drawing a contrast with Africa's customary role in pharmaceuticals. "Right now Africa is a test tube for many pharmaceutical companies. This is where we bring products to test them," he said.

Charles Gore, head of the United Nations-backed Medicines Patent Pool which seeks to boost drugmaking in developing countries, said seeking licences from pharmaceutical firms elsewhere was not a sustainable solution for Africa as it had few incentives to offer those firms.

"Simply having the development done in the developed world and always transferring it is not an answer to this," he said.

Gore also cautioned against launching too many separate initiatives across the continent that would risk yielding only "white elephants", instead urging governments, companies and research hubs to collaborate to create complementary capacities.

— Reuters

Right now Africa is a test tube for many pharmaceutical companies. This is where we bring products to test them

MARTIN FRIEDE
Coordinator



NESTING SEASON

Paslama (or Lora) hatchlings make their way to the sea at La Flor Wildlife Refugee in San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, during the turtle nesting season. La Flor is one of only seven beaches in Central America where more than hundreds of paslama turtles nest each year.

— AFP

Why so much hype about Omicron?



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttypv

A READING BETWEEN THE LINES SHOWS A LOT OF OVERREACTION WITH MEDIA COVERAGE FOCUSING ON THE POTENTIAL SCARY OUTCOMES OF OMICRON

The emergence of Omicron has happened at a time when most countries in the world looked like they were getting out of the shadow of Covid-19 pandemic. But we are into another bizarre world of renewed worries!

The new variant, dubbed as a "variant of concern", has been detected in over two dozen countries and sent scurrying back under the safety of fresh restrictions.

However, much remains unknown about the effects of Omicron. So should we be scared or sanguine? What we know is that the variant is confusing and puzzling. The World Health Organization (WHO) says there has not been any death related to the new variant but people should still be aware of the risks.

"We're in a different situation today than we were at the beginning of 2020, we have tools, we know what to do. We know what works. This is something we had expected, that new variants would emerge, we've been through rounds of other variants," says Soumya Swaminathan, WHO's Chief Scientist.

She also says it is something to worry about, as "we didn't want to see another variant emerge and spread around the world at this stage of the pandemic,

certainly not what we wanted, but we're not entirely surprised and I think we're much better prepared to handle it."

If her words are to be believed, then why so much hype that has stirred up worries in the world, pounding markets, triggering travel bans and raising a number of questions.

A reading between the lines shows a lot of overreaction with media coverage focusing on the potential scary outcomes of Omicron. I believe there is only very little information so far. What we witness is confusion around whether or not Omicron will actually spread more easily than other strains of the virus.

In its official statement, WHO said that the new variant is not as dangerous as the ones that emerged before, and till now, no death has been reported due to the Omicron variant, which is a good sign for all the countries.

Then why did different governments and the media press the panic button before ascertaining how the mutations in Omicron may affect the virus' transmissibility and mortality rate and whether or not existing vaccines are effective against it?

This has forced people to tweet like

"journalists, particularly newsroom leaders who set the tone of coverage, should resist the temptation to hype conjecture."

Experts say it is too early to determine whether Omicron is likely to infect people who are vaccinated against Covid-19, and whether it brings a bigger threat of severe illness.

But we are more equipped today to fight the variant than we had been before the breakout of the pandemic two years back. With good public health mitigation efforts, we should be able to reduce the spread and its risk.

As suggestions emerge that the Omicron variant may be more contagious or transmissible in nature, as compared to the Delta variant, which caused the deadly second wave of the pandemic, we should be more cautious.

So get vaccinated if you haven't yet, get a booster if you're eligible and step up other precautions you may have relaxed, like wearing a mask and avoiding crowds. If possible, avoid eating out at restaurants and being inside public places where masks cannot be used.

For gathering with family and friends, make sure everyone is vaccinated!

High stakes for Ukraine in Putin-Biden virtual summit

PAUL HANDLEY

Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin will face off in a high-stakes video call on Tuesday, with the US president aiming to convince his Russian counterpart to refrain from attacking Ukraine.

Washington and its European allies are uncertain if the tens of thousands of ground forces that Moscow has moved to Ukraine's borders are a genuine invasion threat or a bluff by the Russian leader. The presidents — who met in person in Geneva this summer — will speak at 15:00 GMT (18:00 pm Moscow time).

"Our president is ready to convey his concerns to his American colleague, listen to his concerns and give appropriate explanations," Kremlin spokesman

Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

"Russia has never planned to attack anyone," he said. "But we have our own 'red lines'".

Moscow — which annexed Kiev's Crimea peninsula in 2014 and backs pro-Russia rebels in eastern Ukraine — has described Western accusations of an imminent invasion as "hysteria."

It has also spent weeks decrying US-led military exercises in the Black Sea and Putin wants a promise from the West that Ukraine will not join Nato. If he decides to attack Ukraine, Putin risks a coordinated Western response that could aim to cripple Russia's economy. A senior Biden administration official said on Monday that the US and its allies are prepared to punish Moscow with "substantial economic

countermeasures" if it launches an attack.

On the eve of his virtual meeting, Biden spoke with the leaders of France, Germany, Italy and Britain, with the Western powers expressing their "determination" that Ukraine's sovereignty be respected.

The Kremlin said the conversation will take place in a "difficult period" when "the escalation of tensions in Europe is off the charts." "This requires a personal discussion at the highest level," Peskov said.

In their first direct conversation since July, the two presidents will have to negotiate a history of mutual suspicion. Both want to put on a show of strength, which could leave little room for compromise during the talk.

Biden said last Friday he would make it "very, very difficult" for Russia to launch an invasion.

A senior official said that any Russian military action against Ukraine would be met with harsh economic penalties and a buildup of US forces in Eastern Europe. But the official stopped short of threatening direct intervention of American military force.

Such talk, the official added, "would be precipitous conflict saber-rattling, and we'd prefer to keep those communications with the Russians private." Biden will make clear that there "will be genuine and meaningful and enduring costs to choosing to go forward should (Russia) choose to go forward with a military escalation," the official said.

Biden and Putin have a full list

of topics to discuss, from mutual talks on reducing strategic and nuclear threats, to the rise in cyberattacks that Washington says Moscow encourages, to persuading Iran to halt its nuclear programme.

But Russia's massing of troops to the Ukraine border region — estimated by Kiev at 100,000 — has forced the virtual summit to focus on that one issue. Putin has said Russia was "taking adequate military-technical measures," claiming Nato military infrastructure was moving "close" to Russia's borders.

He said Moscow seeks "legal guarantees" that Ukraine will not become a part of Nato, the transatlantic alliance created to confront the former Soviet Union.

— AFP



SULTANATE OF
OMAN TO FACE
TUNISIA IN
QUARTERFINAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 7

The Sultanate of Oman secured their spot in the quarterfinals at the inaugural edition of 2021 Fifa Arab Cup after defeating Bahrain 3-0 late on Monday at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan city, Qatar.

With the triumph, ‘Red Warriors’ confirmed their attendance in the last eight round

taking the advantage of Qatar’s victory over Iraq with the same result at Al Bayat Stadium.

The Sultanate of Oman team will meet Tunisia in the next round on Friday at Education City Stadium while Qatar will take on UAE in a Gulf Cup clash.

Al Mundher al Alawi, Arshad al Alawi and Khalid al Hajri were the match stars after showing top performance and scoring the teams goals.

The head coach of the team, Branko Ivankovic, expressed his joy post the encounter. “I am very glad with the team’s victory and moving to the next round in the championship. The team players delivered top show and created many scoring attempts against a tough Bahraini team. The players deserve this crucial triumph,” he added in the press meet after the game.” The Croatian coach told the press meet that players

showed top performance. “After the opening goal, the team did not went back but we enhanced our attacking towards Bahrain’s side and managed to score more goals. Some players played for the first time in Bahrain match and they produced a perfect attendance in the game. The goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini was one of the match stars and he was very confident,” he said. Responding to an inquiry on the forthcoming game against

Tunisia, the 67-year-old answered that the team will prepare well for the encounter. “ Tunisia is a strong team in Africa and I am respecting all the teams. Our focus is to enter all the games with victory target and vibes,” he said.

Coach Ivankovic concluded his statement in the press conference that the team deserved the triumph since the opening match against Iraq and in the following game against Qatar. However, the

players proved in the concluding game their worth to move into the quarterfinal round.

The Sultanate of Oman ended their group matches as runner up with four points. The team commenced the campaign with a 1-1 draw from Iraq after falling 2-1 to Qatar. Then, the team registered a 3-0 win over Bahrain in the final group game. Qatar topped the group with full standing at nine points.

Bellingham fined 40,000 euros for match-fixing comment

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham was on Tuesday fined 40,000 euros (\$45,000), but escaped a ban after making explosive comments about the referee following last weekend’s Bundesliga home defeat to Bayern Munich.

The German Football Association (DFB) said they have fined Bellingham for “unsportsmanlike conduct”.

The 18-year-old claimed costly decisions by referee Felix Zwayer in Saturday’s 3-2 loss in a top-of-the-table league clash, were to be expected given the ref was implicated in the worst match-fixing scandal in German football

history.

In a statement, Borussia Dortmund said the club “and the player have accepted the verdict, Jude Bellingham is thus eligible to play in the Bundesliga game on Saturday at VfL Bochum.”

The England midfielder was fuming when Zwayer awarded Bayern a penalty on Saturday for a Mats Hummels handball, which resulted in the winning goal.

Moments earlier, Zwayer had waved on play and refused Dortmund a penalty after Bayern defender Lucas Hernandez appeared to foul Marco Reus in the area.

“You can look at a lot of the



decisions in the game. If you give a referee who has match-fixed before the biggest game in Germany, what do you expect?” Bellingham told Norwegian channel Viaplay.

He was referring to Zwayer’s alleged role as a 23-year-old linesman in a 2005 scandal involving referee Robert Hoyzer.

MAFIA MONEY

The latter confessed to taking Croatian mafia money in return for affecting the outcome of German Cup and lower division matches including awarding penalties for fictitious offences.

Hoyzer was jailed and Zwayer suspended for six months for

keeping silent though he knew what the referee was doing and for accepting 300 euros (\$340).

Bellingham was not alone in questioning Zwayer’s decisions in a heated match.

Dortmund coach Marco Rose was shown a red card after arguing with Zwayer over his awarding of the key penalty 12 minutes from time. “Mr Zwayer can go ahead and whistle a few more Dortmund games,” fumed Rose on Saturday when asked about Zwayer officiating future Dortmund games.

“He can throw a few more stones and sticks in our way. We’ll keep going.” — AFP



FIA WORLD CUP FOR CROSS-COUNTRY RALLIES - DRIVER STANDINGS:	
1. NASSER SALEH AL ATTIYAH (QAT)	92.5 PTS
2. LUCIO ALVAREZ (ARG)	64.5PTS
3. YAZEED AL RAJHI (SAU)	57PTS
4. DENIS KROTOV (RUS)	53PTS
5. MATTIAS EKSTROM (SWE)	27PTS, ETC

FIA WORLD CUP FOR CROSS-COUNTRY RALLIES - CO-DRIVER STANDINGS:	
1. MATTHIEU BAUMEL (FRA)	92.5 PTS
2. ARMAND MONLEÓN (ESP)	64.5 PTS
3. KONSTANTIN ZHILTSOV (RUS)	53 PTS
4. MICHAEL ORR (GBR)	35.5 PTS
5. EMIL BERGVIST (SWE)	27 PTS, ETC

FIA WORLD CUP FOR CROSS-COUNTRY RALLIES - T3:	
1. CRISTINA GUTIERREZ (ESP)	90.5 PTS
2. FERNANDO ALVAREZ (ESP)	76.5 PTS
3. PAVEL LEBEDEV (RUS)	53.5 PTS, ETC

FIA WORLD CUP FOR CROSS-COUNTRY RALLIES - T4:	
1. AUSTIN JONES (USA)	98.5PTS
2. EUGENIO AMOS (ITA)	55PTS
2. KEES KOOLEN (NLD)	55PTS, ETC

Lucio Alvarez



Nasser al Attiyah



Nasser al Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel

ATTIYAH, ALVAREZ GO HEAD-TO-HEAD

RIYADH: Competitive action gets underway at the Hail Cross-Country Rally, the final round of the FIA World Cup for Cross-Country Rallies, on Wednesday.

Qatar's Nasser al Attiyah and Argentina's Lucio Alvarez both drive V8-engined Toyota Hiluxes, built in conjunction with Toyota Gazoo Racing and Overdrive Racing, and they will go head-to-head to decide the outcome of the 2021 FIA World Cup Drivers' Championship.

To win his first FIA World Cup title, Alvarez needs to overturn a 28-point deficit. The Argentine will need to win the rally outright and score at least three additional bonus points for daily stage performances and, even then, the outcome will depend on whether Al Attiyah finishes lower than

eighth overall and fails to secure a single bonus point.

Al Attiyah said: "I won in Hail back in 2008 and 2011 and with Matthieu (Baumel), my current co-driver, we won the first of the Bajas last December. We will do our best to take the win again and seal the championship. We have a good car. The rally is also very useful experience for us before the Dakar Rally in January."

It's a big ask for Alvarez, but the battle has at least confirmed that Overdrive Toyotas should fill the top two places in the points' standings unless Russia's Denis Krotov can seal a top four result and Alvarez fails to finish. Krotov drives an X-Raid Mini and starts the rally four points adrift of local hero Yazeed al Rajhi. The Saudi knows that a top finish could also

see him overhaul Alvarez and snatch second place in the series.

Hoping to upset the applecart and challenge for honours in their own right are the Orlen Team's Jakub Przygonski and Argentina's Sebastien Halpern in their X-raid Minis and Czech driver Miroslav Zapletal in a Ford F-150. Former Spanish enduro rider Laia Sanz also joins the German X-raid team to drive a Mini John Cooper Works Rally in readiness for the Dakar challenge that awaits.

With the FIA T3 and T4 Championships already settled in favour of Spain's Cristina Gutierrez and America's Austin Jones, pride and pre-Dakar experience are at stake in both the hotly-contested categories.

Eight teams line up in the T3 section, with Russian Pavel

Lebedev leading the way in his Can-Am and facing competition from local favourite Saleh al Saif, fellow Saudis, Mashael al Obaidan, Dania Akeel, Esra Aldkheil and Hamed al Harbi, Germany's Annett Fischer and Uzbekistan's Anvar Ergashev.

"This is a great opportunity for me to test for Dakar," said Al Obaidan. "This is my third race after Sharqiya and Aragón in Spain. It's the first time that Jacopo (Cerutti), my co-driver, and I participate together. I've been here a couple of times but never in an official race. There are three Saudi females, including myself. The sport is really booming here. I believe there is a really bright future in the Kingdom for everyone."

Six crews will battle it over the next four days for T4 honours.

South Racing Middle East's Thomas Bell tops the field and faces competition from Poland's Marek and Michal Goczal, Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri, Australia's Molly Taylor and Ukraine's Levgen Kovalevych.

There is also a National Rally running behind the main FIA rally, a separate event for motorcycles and quads, a truck category and dispensation for several 2022 specification machines to compete with teams carrying out pre-Dakar testing.

Czech WRC star Martin Prokop wheels out the latest Ford Raptor Cross-Country, running under the Benzina Orlen Team banner, both Frenchman Ronan Chabot and Argentina's Juan Cruz Yacopini try out Overdrive Racing's latest Toyota Hilux T1+ and Sweden's

Sebastien Eriksson gets his hands on the latest T3-2022 South Racing Can-Am Maverick.

The Hail Cross-Country Rally is being organised by the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation (SAMF) under the supervision of the Hail Regional Development Authority in co-operation with the General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage and the General Authority for Sport.

On Wednesday, competitors tackle the first of four selective sections through the Al Nafud desert. The competitive stage starts 82.59km from Rally HQ, includes a passage control and refuelling point after 173km and runs for 258.14km. A liaison of 47.31km guides competitors back to the bivouac.

Sajid's six-wicket haul adds life to rain-hit Test against Bangladesh

DHAKA: Off-spinner Sajid Khan's maiden five-wicket haul for Pakistan brought some life back to the rain-hit second Test in Dhaka on Tuesday.

Sajid's 6-35 held Bangladesh to 76 before bad light forced early stumps on the first day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Shakib Al Hasan was unbeaten on 23 alongside Taijul Islam (0) at stumps, with Bangladesh still needing 25 runs to avoid the follow-on.

Mohammad Rizwan hit an unbeaten 53 while Fawad Alam added 50 not out as Pakistan declared their innings on 300-4 an hour into the post-lunch session.

Sajid then took Mahmudul Hasan and Mehidy Hasan for ducks along with Shadman Islam (3), Mushfiqur Rahim (5), Liton Das (6) and Najmul Hossain (30), while skipper Mominul Haque was run out for one.

Shakib fought back with some



aggression of his own to hit three fours and survive a run out chance to give some small relief for Bangladesh.

Captain Babar Azam "told every one of us to go for the win. Everyone did that. We attacked them and got rewarded," Sajid said after the day's play.

"In the first match, the ball wasn't turning like this. Even

when the ball turned there, the batsmen got time to cope with it," he added.

"The plan is to get these three wickets, send them to bat again and then bowl them out again."

Only 63.2 overs of play were possible in the first three days because of rain and bad light, with Pakistan reaching 188-2 after electing to bat first.

Pakistan lost two quick wickets early in the day after yet another delayed start following day three's complete wash-out.

Ebadot Hossain dismissed Azhar Ali for 56 runs in the second over of the day as wicketkeeper Liton Das took a simple catch after a top-edge.

Pace bowler Khaled Ahmed trapped Azam leg-before for his maiden Test wicket three overs later and the Pakistan skipper was out for 76 runs, adding just five to his overnight 71.

Rizwan was given out twice, on zero and 12, off the bowling of Ebadot and Taijul Islam respectively, but on both occasions he survived on review.

Taijul took the first two Pakistan wickets, on the opening day, before rain interrupted the game.

Pakistan lead the two-Test series 1-0 after an eight-wicket win in Chittagong.

— AFP

DOUBLES CROWN GOES TO SIVAN AND SUHAIL



MUSCAT: Top seeded Sivan G and Suhail Khan beat Mohan Kannan and Girish KK to lift ISC Veteran's doubles title in the annual tennis tournament organised by Indian Social Club

Mohan and Girish started the game with full energy and power but unfortunate to turn the score in their favour. There were neck-to-neck instances and advantages in the first set but the luck favoured Sivan and Suhail whereas the second set not seen any resistance from Mohan and Girish. Sivan

had won many medals in India and abroad before he became a professional tennis coach.

Suhail played well in the tournament so far and showed real mettle against the defending pair to secure his 3rd title pairing with Sivan.

In other matches of Veterans doubles, Harish M and Idris beat Junaith and Nibu; Moha and Girish beat Hemachandran and Ganesh; Sivan and Suhail beat Harish and Idris scoring 6-1 and 6-1 in the semifinals.



Embiid guides 76ers to win over Hornets, Giannis shines in return

LOS ANGELES: Four-time NBA all-star Joel Embiid scored 43 points and grabbed 15 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers slipped past the Charlotte Hornets 127-124 in overtime on Monday.

Embiid shot 15-of-20 from the field, sank 12-of-14 free throws and scored six points in the extra session in front of a crowd of 14,400 in North Carolina.

Embiid contributed on each of the eight points the Sixers scored in overtime, scoring all but one basket and assisting on another.

“It’s what I have to do,” Embiid said. “Coaches trust me to put me in those situations. Sometimes I make mistakes, but I feel like I’m getting better and better in those situations. I just made the right plays and made some shots.”

Tobias Harris added 21 points and Shake Milton had 16 points in the win.

“He’s so dominant out there, especially when he is able to get his position on the floor,” Harris said of Embiid. “He’s able to punish a team. They threw different guys at him, but he’s so much bigger and stronger.”

Kelly Oubre delivered 35

points, shooting 13-of-24 shots from the field, including six threes for the Hornets.

P J Washington and Miles Bridges both had 16 points and Cody Martin scored 14 points in the loss.

Charlotte played short-handed for the second night in a row. LaMelo Ball, Terry Rozier, Jalen McDaniels, and Mason Plumlee are in Covid-19 protocol.

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo, who turned 27 on Monday, finished with 27 points and 12 rebounds as the Bucks held on to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 112-104.

Antetokounmpo returned after missing two games with a right calf injury. He played 27 minutes overall and scored 15 points in the final quarter for the Bucks, who have won 10 of their past 11.

Jarrett Allen had 25 points and nine rebounds to lead Cleveland.

Elsewhere, Zach LaVine scored a team-high 32 points to lead five players in double figures as the Chicago Bulls beat the Denver Nuggets 109-97 for their fourth victory in the past five contests. — **AFP**

Late Gray show gives Everton 2-1 win over Arsenal



LIVERPOOL: Everton eased some of the pressure on manager Rafa Benitez as they ground out a comeback 2-1 home win over Arsenal in the Premier League on Monday, with Demarai Gray netting a stunning stoppage-time winner after setting up the equaliser.

Brazilian forward Richarlison, who had two goals scrapped for marginal offside after VAR checks, had levelled in the 79th minute after Gray hit the crossbar, cancelling out Martin Odegaard’s first-half opener for the visitors.

The outcome left Arsenal seventh on 23 points from 15 games, four points outside the

top four, while Everton, who announced on Sunday had left his position, climbed to 12th on 18 points.

Everton captain Seamus Coleman praised the home fans who lifted the Toffees in the face of adversity after they fell behind, having also singled out Gray’s fine performance.

“We knew whatever goes on behind the scenes, the fans always come here to support us,” Coleman told Sky Sports. “They got behind us from minute one to minute 90 and got us over the line.”

“I tell him (Gray) everyday. Sometimes these players don’t realise how good they can be. He has bundles of ability. He needs to

work hard everyday as that is what the top players do. He has done that this week.”

Everton dominated the first half and created several half-chances before Richarlison headed in a 44th-minute free kick from Andros Townsend, only for his effort to be chalked off.

Norwegian Odegaard then scored on the stroke of halftime from Arsenal’s first purposeful move, steering the ball superbly past goalkeeper Jordan Pickford as he got on the end of Kieran Tierney’s cross from the left.

Richarlison thought he had equalised in the 57th minute when he drove the ball inside the near

post from close range, but Everton were again denied by VAR leaving the Brazilian shaking his head in disbelief.

But it was third time lucky for Richarlison as he beat Arsenal keeper Aaron Ramsdale with a looping header from a rebound after Gray’s long-range shot cannoned off the woodwork, setting up a frantic climax.

With a share of the spoils looming, Gray sent the home fans into raptures when he cut inside two players and beat Ramsdale with a thunderbolt from 25 metres which went in off the post, giving Everton their first league win in nine games. — **Reuters**

Djokovic slated to play in ATP Cup ahead of Open

SYDNEY: After months of speculation that Novak Djokovic may miss the Australian Open over tough Covid vaccination requirements, the world number one was on Tuesday named to play in a Sydney tournament weeks before.

The 20-time Grand Slam champion had cast doubt on whether he would defend his title at Melbourne Park next month, refusing to reveal whether he was inoculated against coronavirus.

However, he was listed as part of the five-man Serbia team when the draw was made for the ATP Cup in Sydney that will precede the opening major of the year.

Rafael Nadal was missing, with the Spanish fellow 20-time Grand Slam winner last month suggesting he would play an exhibition in Abu Dhabi this month, then another tournament before arriving in Melbourne for the Australian Open.

The only other absent top 20 player for the 16-team ATP Cup was injured Swiss great Roger Federer.

“The playing group enjoy representing their countries and to see 18 of the world’s top 20 players commit to the event is testament to that,” said tournament director Tom Lerner. “The event shows off the passion the playing group have for this format.”

An ATP statement accompanying the draw noted that top seed Serbia was “headlined by world number Novak Djokovic”, who won three of the season’s four Grand Slams.

The 34-year-old ended his rollercoaster season with a Davis Cup defeat last week and then promised to make a decision on his Australian Open participation “very soon.”

Organisers of the Australian Open have insisted only fully-vaccinated players will be allowed



into the country, which saw Djokovic’s father Srdjan last month suggest his son “probably won’t” play.

“Of course he would want to go with all his heart,” he told Serbian television.

“But I really don’t know if that will happen. Probably not under these conditions, with this blackmail and when it’s done that way.”

Djokovic contracted Covid-19 during the ill-fated Adria Tour event he organised in the Balkans in June 2020, but said he did not suffer from any symptoms.

Russia are the defending ATP Cup champions after their team spearheaded by Daniil Medvedev and Andrey Rublev swept past a Matteo Berrettini-led Italy in the final.

Djokovic’s Serbia won the inaugural event in 2020, overpowering the Nadal-led Spain.

The teams in next year’s US\$10 million event, from January 1-9, are divided into four groups of four, playing across two Sydney venues — the Ken Rosewall Arena and Qudos Bank Arena — with each tie comprising two singles matches and one doubles.

Top seeds Serbia were grouped with Spain, Norway and Chile, while Russia will face Italy, Austria and home nation Australia.

Germany, led by reigning ATP Finals champion Alexander Zverev, headline Group C against Canada, Great Britain and the United States, while Greece, featuring world number four Stefanos Tsitsipas, are in Group D with Poland, Argentina and Georgia.

It kicks off a bumper series of ATP and WTA tournaments in the lead-up to the Australian Open, beginning on January 17, with events across Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. — **AFP**

business

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OQ, SABIC plan petrochemical project in Duqm

GROWING CLUSTER: Project involves a world-scale steam cracker unit (SCU) and derivatives units producing olefins derivatives (ethylene and propylene) and are expected to utilise feedstock by-products from the SCU

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 7

OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with petrochemicals giant Saudi Basic Industries Corp (SABIC) to study the development of a petrochemical project in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZAD).

The MoU was inked in the framework of the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Sultanate of Oman.

The project involves a world-scale steam cracker unit (SCU) and derivatives units producing olefins derivatives (ethylene and propylene) are expected to utilise the feedstock by-products from the SCU.



The agreement was signed by Talal bin Hamed al Awfi, CEO of OQ Group, and Abdulrahman al Fageeh, Executive Vice-President for Petrochemicals, who signed the MoU on behalf of SABIC.

Commenting on the MoU, Al

Awfi welcomed the agreement and said: “This agreement focuses on the development of a new petrochemical project in the Duqm Special Economic Zone.

“OQ aims to enhance the integration of the refinery and

petrochemical industries with other downstream industries as part of its vision to maximise the added value and contribute to the development of downstream industries. We look forward to enhancing our strategic

partnership with SABIC and benefiting from its expertise to carry out this project.”

For his part, Al Fageeh stated: “We are honoured to sign this MoU with OQ as our focus has always been on key collaborations and on

OQ aims to enhance the integration of the refinery and petrochemical industries with other downstream industries as part of its vision to maximise the added value and contribute to the development of downstream industries

TALAL BIN HAMED AL AWFI
CEO, OQ Group

building fruitful relationships for sustainable growth, regionally and globally.

“With our diverse global portfolio, along with our manufacturing competencies, we are confident of helping to drive the development of downstream industries in the Sultanate of Oman, just as we are currently a key enabler in the achievement of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 objectives.”

Saudi firm to set up integrated logistics complex in Khazaen

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Khazaen, the first integrated economic city of the Sultanate of Oman, announced on Tuesday that it has signed an agreement with Naqel Express of Saudi Arabia for the establishment of an integrated logistics complex at the Barka.

“Naqel has made Khazaen a centre for its business due to the competitive advantages, such



as its geographical location and integrated logistics infrastructure,” said Khazaen in a post.

Established in 1993, Naqel Express has become one of the leading logistics companies in the Middle East, offering complete end-to-end logistics and supply chain solutions to both businesses and individual shoppers. In order to offer an enhanced service to its online shoppers, the Saudi firm has extended its footprint into Europe, Africa and Asia.

Sultanate of Oman
crude price up \$3/barrel

MUSCAT: Omani crude (for delivery in February 2022) gained \$3.06 a barrel to settle at \$73.20 on Tuesday, tracking increases by global benchmarks that have been rebounding as concerns about the likely impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant ease.

The average price of Omani crude (December 2021 delivery) stabilised at \$81.58 per barrel, representing an increase of \$8.81 per barrel over the previous month’s average.

Reuters reported that international oil prices were pumelled last week by concerns that vaccines might be less effective against the Omicron variant, sparking fears that governments could impose fresh restrictions to curb its spread and hit global growth and oil demand.

Pact signed to explore energy business opportunities

PROMISING COOPERATION:
OQ, Aramco Trading Company sign MoU to explore joint commercial opportunities across energy value chain

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 7

Coinciding with the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince to the Sultanate of Oman, OQ signed on Monday a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Aramco Trading



Company (ATC) of Saudi Arabia to explore joint commercial opportunities in the energy sector between the two companies.

The MoU was signed by OQ Group CEO Talal Hamed al Awfi and ATC CEO Ibrahim al Buainain. The two parties intend to collaborate directly or through



their affiliates on exploring business prospects in the Omani port of Duqm and nearby crude oil storage terminal of Ras Markaz.

Under the MoU, the parties will undertake a joint review of ATC supplying feedstock to Duqm Refinery & Petrochemicals Industries Company LLC (OQ8),

as well as possible offtake of oil products by ATC from OQ8. ATC and OQ may expand the scope of the MOU to include renewables, waste stream, green ammonia as well as green hydrogen.

Aramco Trading Company (ATC) is the trading arm of Saudi Aramco that trades crude oil, refined products, LNG and LPG, blending components, bulk petrochemicals and polyolefins.

Aramco Trading strategically maintains storage and blending facilities in major trading hubs, customising product specs to

meet customer demand.

The company is recognised globally as a critical trading partner for refiners, shipping companies, financial institutions, end-users, and other product-trading companies.

OQ, the global integrated energy company of the Sultanate of Oman, has operations across 17 countries, covering the entire value chain from exploration and production of oil and gas, refineries and petrochemicals to marketing and distribution of end-user products reaching more than 60 countries worldwide.

ahli islamic announces
51 winners of special
National Day draws



MUSCAT: Celebrating the glorious month of November, and rewarding the loyalty of its customers, ahli islamic announced the winners of its special draws on the occasion of the Sultanate of Oman's 51st National Day, along with the scheme's monthly prize draw.

The draws are a part of the bank's popular Qitaf prize scheme, which seeks to establish a culture of saving among customers and helps them achieve their goals.

The event was streamed live on the Bank's social media platforms. The value of the prizes reached RO 102,000, with RO 2,000 each awarded to a total of 51 winners as part of the celebratory occasion.

Along with one lucky winner rewarded with RO 20,000 as part

of the monthly draw scheme for the month of November.

Making the announcement of the winners of Qitaf draws, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic, said, "Ever since its launch, Qitaf prize scheme has changed lives of several of our customers. It has helped change their lifestyles by inculcating wise saving methods in their lives.

We are confident that continuing to reward our customers inspires them to secure a better future by adopting savings as a life approach. Aligning to the spirit of the 51st National Day, we were keen to hold a special draw during which prize money will be presented to a wider base of winners."

Bank Nizwa wins two prestigious
titles at AIWA Awards 2021

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa has earned a commendable reputation as the leading Sharia-compliant bank in the Sultanate which has resulted into winning 'Best Performing Company (Large Cap)' award.

While playing a pivotal role in steering the bank to greater heights, its CEO, Khalid al Kayed, has also received the much-coveted title of 'CEO of the Year – Islamic Banking' at the Alam Al Iktisaad Awards 2021.

The award ceremony witnessed as its Chief Guest Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism. Also in attendance were other distinguished guests and prominent figures from the Sultanate of Oman's corporate world.

Bank Nizwa's 5-year strategic roadmap, that was rolled out in 2020, focuses on the five pillars of development which include financial performance, technological advancement, market share, team & culture, and being a progressive organisation.

Being on this journey, the Bank has been successfully able to expand its operations and record a stellar growth in overall



performance.

As the largest and faster-growing full-fledged Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa has been leading the way for change with innovative Islamic financing products, focus on customer service and supporting the growth of local businesses.

"These awards are a testament to the successful contribution of the entire Bank Nizwa team. While I am truly honoured to have received these awards, I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the entire

team at Bank Nizwa who has been relentless in ensuring that we continue to deliver excellence in all operations," said Al Kayed on receiving the award.

"At Bank Nizwa, our focus has been on sustainable development while providing long-term benefits to our customers. With a strong market position, attested by our financial performance, Bank Nizwa is ahead of the curve in offering Shari'a-compliant banking solutions and products for customers and shareholders.

This has also added several awards to our credit. As a pioneer

in the Islamic banking sector, we will continue to advocate the benefits of Sharia-compliant financing in the region."

The Sultanate of Oman's most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has been honoured with a series of coveted awards, conferred upon it ever since its inception. In 2020, Bank Nizwa was named the 'Most Innovative Islamic Bank' at the International Finance Magazine Awards for its focus on digitalisation and introduction of innovative Shari'a-compliant products and services.

FIRST EVER ALL-NEW TOYOTA RAIZE TURBO SUV
LAUNCHED IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

MUSCAT: At a launch event held online on Toyota Oman's social media channels on Facebook and YouTube, Saud Bahwan Automotive unveiled the first-ever, Toyota Raize Turbo compact SUV. The online event gave social media users an opportunity to catch all the happenings surrounding the most awaited model at Toyota.

Pairing outstanding fuel efficiency and manoeuvrability with distinctive design and ample interior space, the all-new Raize SUV highlights Toyota's focus on catering to the needs of the brand's most discerning customers and comes equipped with a host of convenient features.

Yuichi Imamura, Chief Engineer in charge of development, said: "With the new Toyota Raize, our vision was to differentiate the vehicle from every other SUV on the market by combining an amazingly spacious interior and distinctive styling with a confidence-inspiring balance of manoeuvrability, safety, and stability. Raize's new platform ensures world-class handling, stability, and ride comfort together with a host of carefully considered features to meet the needs of our discerning customers in the region."

Commenting on the vehicle's launch, Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said, "We are excited to introduce the new



Toyota Raize in the Sultanate of Oman. This vehicle opens a totally new genre in the compact SUV market, and we are confident that our customers will enjoy time spent within its surprisingly spacious cabin, whether they are travelling on their daily commute or a weekend adventure."

"The new Raize reflects Toyota's commitment to developing diverse mobility solutions and offers the space, practicality, and comfort demanded by today's active lifestyle. I would like to extend our gratitude to our customers for their constant support and inspiration, which continue to motivate us to create 'ever-better' cars that exceed their



expectations," Fujita added.

The brand-new Raize is available with a 1-litre turbocharged engine providing smooth and responsive acceleration and producing 97 hp and 14.2 Kg.m of torque. Paired with Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT),

and suspension contribute to outstanding handling, stability, and ride comfort. The vehicle also boasts excellent manoeuvrability, with a 5.1-metre turning radius.

The vehicle's front end features a robust and smart look, with angular bumper corners and a trapezoid lower grille, creating a powerful, wide appearance.

Muscular wheel arches contribute to the vehicle's assertive stance, while the use of sleek LED headlights reflect the advanced technologies within.

The new Raize's interior offers comfort and convenience, with an instrument panel has been designed to ensure an outstanding field of view from

the driver's seat.

Steering wheel switches are also optimally positioned to give the driver intuitive control over multimedia and vehicle functions, and an illuminated centre console makes it easier to locate items placed in the tray.

The vehicle's spacious cabin hosts a range of practical features, including an 8-inch multimedia screen that comes integrated with USB port on the head unit that allows passengers to connect external media devices, a four-speaker sound system, a powerful air conditioning system, and 60/40 split and foldable rear seats.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Raize, which comes with a comprehensive array of safety features, including dual front SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Rear fog lamp, and Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others. The all-new Raize Turbo SUV is now on display at the Toyota showrooms.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



Marine bunker terminal launched at Duqm Port

NEW ATTRACTION: OOMCO's fully-equipped facility, offering several grades of bunker fuel, set to enhance Duqm's appeal to international shipping

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A modern marine bunker terminal has commenced operations at Port of Duqm, significantly enhancing the appeal of the maritime gateway to regional and international shipping.

Set up by Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) — a subsidiary of OQ (the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman) — the facility is also designed to support the bunkering requirements of vessels calling at the nearby ship repair yard of Asyad Drydock, the giant crude oil terminal at Ras Markaz just south of Duqm, the Fisheries Port, and ships waiting at anchorage.

"The bunker terminal has been completed and commissioned and is currently active on a soft opening basis," said Hussain Jamaa Bait Ishaq, Acting CEO of OOMCO.

"Strategically located on the Sultanate of Oman's south-east coast, the new marine fuel terminal will serve the international



Strategically located on the Sultanate of Oman's south-east coast, the new marine fuel terminal will serve the international shipping market given its close proximity to significant shipping traffic accessing the Suez Canal, Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean

**HUSSAIN JAMAA
BAIT ISHAQ**

Acting CEO, OOMCO

shipping market given its close proximity to significant shipping traffic accessing the Suez Canal, Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean."

In comments to the *Observer*, Hussain said the facility, constructed with an investment of over RO 10 million, has been built



close to the main cargo quays and finger pier of the Port of Duqm — a location that allows for "highly efficient bunker operations and high standards of customer service".

The terminal's 30,000 cubic-metre capacity enables the supply of various bunker fuel grades, including very low sulphur fuel oil (VLSFO), marine gasoil (MGO) and higher sulphur fuel oil (HFO).

Its flexible design allows for the facility to cater to the low sulphur fuel requirements of ships in line with standards newly mandated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), he noted.

Additionally, a 50,000-litre

capacity fuel tank container unit positioned at the end of the finger pier is available for vessels that require smaller quantities of diesel and lower flow rate supply, Hussain stated.

Giving details about the modes of bunkering introduced by the new terminal, the Acting CEO said: "The primary mode of supply to ships will be by bunker barge. The terminal's delivery system design allows for bunker fuel delivery via ex-pipe (single point) alongside at multi-purpose cargo/project quay, as well as delivery of smaller quantity MGO by road truck, ex-truck directly alongside quay to customer vessels."

He further added: "Vessels at anchorage can take advantage of a range of high-quality and diverse services, including pilotage, freshwater supply, waste collection, tug services, crew change, de-slopping services, and ship handling, plus ship spares and dry dock services, and, of course, bunker fuel delivery of all grades by bunker barge (ship to ship) alongside the customer vessel at anchorage."

Bunker fuel products are currently sourced from suppliers in the region, said Hussain, stressing OOMCO's commitment to localising its procurements in the future.

"We look forward to add Duqm refinery as a valued supplier of high-quality diesel, as soon as the product is available after the completion and commissioning of the refinery," he stated. Given its large footprint, ships in the vicinity of Duqm will be able to receive their bunker needs from the terminal, said Hussain.

"The bunker service is offered to all calling and passing ships, in-port vessels as well as ships coming to the dry dock and Ras Markaz terminal.

"Ships can get their fuels according to their requirements and preferred delivery method.

"The full portfolio of the terminal's services will benefit vessels by increasing their shipping efficiency and reducing the amount of time lost."

Included in the terminal's coverage will be developments across the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

"The project will offer the benefits of a fishing port, a regional airport, industrial and logistical areas, which is expected to increase international trade and tourism in the future. This development will position the bunker business development at the port in good stead and we are ready to support SEZAD and the Port of Duqm in all their development endeavours," he added.

Oil prices climb on easing Omicron fears



A pump attendant wears a mask as he refuels a car at a Sinopec gas station in Beijing, China. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices extended gains on Tuesday from a near 5 per cent rebound the day before

as concerns about the impact of the Omicron coronavirus variant on global fuel demand eased and

Iran nuclear talks stalled, delaying the return of Iranian crude.

Brent crude futures were up \$1.66, or 2.3 per cent, at \$74.87 a barrel, after settling 4.6 per cent higher on Monday. US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$71.48 a barrel, up \$1.81, or 2.6 per cent, building on a 4.9-per cent gain in the previous session.

Oil prices were pummelled last week by concerns that vaccines might be less effective against Omicron, sparking fears that governments may re-impose restrictions to curb its spread and hit global growth and oil demand.

However, a South African health official reported over the weekend that Omicron cases there had only shown mild symptoms.

Also, the top US infectious

disease official, Anthony Fauci, has told CNN "it does not look like there's a great degree of severity" so far.

"The Fauci comments overnight saw more fast money returning to the long oil trade as markets started pricing a resumption of the global recovery and higher oil consumption," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA. In another sign of confidence in oil demand, the world's top exporter Saudi Arabia raised monthly crude prices on Sunday.

Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies, a group known as Opec+, agreed to continue raising output by 400,000 barrels per day in January despite the release of US strategic petroleum reserves. — Reuters

World Bank raises Philippine growth forecast for 2021



A worker installs steel rods at a construction site in Paranaque city, Metro Manila, Philippines. — Reuters

MANILA: The World Bank on Tuesday raised its forecast for Philippine economic growth in 2021, to 5.3 per cent, despite lingering global uncertainty about new variants of Covid-19.

The updated growth projection marks a significant increase on the 4.7 per cent growth predicted by the World Bank in its June assessment.

In 2022, gross domestic product was expected to rise to 5.8 per cent, down from the initial forecast of 5.9 per cent in June, the World Bank said.

Government spending on infrastructure was expected to keep the economy afloat, boosted by growing vaccine uptake, which analysts believe will lead to greater personal mobility and will lead to a recovery for business.

Household consumption was also expected to recover, barring a new surge in

Covid-19 cases, the bank added.

"The new variant has added a layer of uncertainty, but economic reopening, along with progress in vaccination, is clearly strengthening domestic dynamism and market confidence," said Ndiame Diop, World Bank country director.

"As the recovery gains traction, it will be important to enhance private sector participation in the recovery by deepening current efforts to make the country's business environment favourable to job creation," he added.

Diop called for reforms that would boost private sector growth, create jobs and strengthen recovery, such as opening more sectors to foreign investment, facilitating market entry and encouraging firms to adopt new technology. — Reuters

National Finance, Injaz Oman ink strategic pact to train 1,000 Omanis

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 7

National Finance, through its Imtidad sustainable initiatives programme, is collaborating with Injaz Oman to support the training of around 1,000 Omani students in entrepreneurial and employability skills.

An agreement to this effect was signed by Tariq al Farsi, CEO of National Finance, and Khaula al Harthi, CEO of Injaz Oman. The six-month-long programme, targeting students of higher education institutions, seeks to enable university and private college students to establish real projects after gaining the



necessary skills from the training.

Tariq al Farsi said: "We are pleased to sign this agreement with Injaz Oman. Through Imtidad,

we constantly seek to partner with such organisations and support their impactful initiatives as we believe that this will add great

value to the community as well as the country."

Khaula al Harthi of Injaz Oman stated, "At Injaz, we inspire the youth to be future entrepreneurs by training, encouragement and sharing entrepreneurship knowledge.

"We express our gratitude to National Finance Imtidad for lending support to one of our key programmes that drives this objective. As an organisation that aims to fulfil national priorities with regards to learning, development and employment, Injaz believes in the strength of such strategic collaborations that help drive national goals of Vision 2040."

China property debt crisis puts founders on spot

China's property magnates face a choice between giving up control or risking insolvency as the industry's liquidity crisis deepens. It's a marked contrast to previous crunches, when founder-chairs mostly came up with ways to cling to their controlling stakes. Developer Agile highlighted the issue last month when it sold bonds that on maturity turn into shares in its property-management unit, A-Living Smarty City Services. Now bondholders are trying to push Kaisa Group, one of the biggest offshore borrowers, to consider a similar deal as part of a broader package of funding suggestions.

There are plenty of potential candidates to tap into the type of convertible debt Agile used, known as exchangeable bonds. In the past four years, some 30 developers listed minority stakes in their managers on the Hong Kong bourse to capitalise on the appeal of asset-light businesses with long-term contracts for taking out trash and mowing the lawns.

Agile's deal allows it to borrow \$310 million for five years at 7 per cent, far lower than the 20 per cent implied by where its equivalent unsecured debt trades. When the bonds fall due, investors will be repaid with 6.2 per cent of A-Living's stock, reducing Agile's stake to 48 per cent.

The structure won't work for everyone. Some groups may not have enough unencumbered equity after pledging chunks as loan collateral, while others structured their managers as sister firms, not subsidiaries. Investors also need to believe their bet will survive the cash crunch.

Kaisa's Prosperity unit is small with a market value of \$258 million. Even together with holdings in a construction-equipment business, a newspaper group and an electronic components maker, boss Kwok Ying-shing wouldn't come close to covering the \$400 million bond due for repayment. Bondholders have formally offered forbearance if Kwok will discuss their other funding suggestions, including exchangeables.

That means such deals are only to be part of a broader package. Founders are already taking the plunge in other ways that reduce their hold: Last month, \$8 billion Sunac China raised \$950 million by selling new shares and a stake in Sunac Services. Founder Sun Hongbin has also loaned the company \$450 million interest-free.

Magnates' newfound flexibility on ownership underlines how the current crisis has put them all on the spot. — Reuters

Magnates' newfound flexibility on ownership underlines how the current crisis has put them all on the spot



ORANGE ECONOMY

A worker sorts out oranges for packaging at a fruit market in Siliguri. Indian economy is showing strong signs of recovery from the devastation caused by the pandemic, with an upswing being reported in 19 out of the 22 economic indicators as compared to the pre-Covid levels. High-frequency indicators (HFI) are being monitored to track the progress of economic recovery in India since the first Covid-19 case was reported in the country in January 2020. — AFP

Discrimination rife in finance sector



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

WORKERS FROM ETHNIC MINORITY BACKGROUNDS REMAIN SCEPTICAL THAT THEIR ORGANISATIONS ARE COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Despite all the talk of encouraging diversity, two thirds of ethnic minorities working in UK financial services have experienced discrimination in the workplace, according to a sweeping survey highlighting how far the sector still has to go on racial diversity.

Workers from ethnic minority backgrounds remain sceptical that their organisations are committed to diversity and inclusion, while nearly half the 800 respondents surveyed by Reboot, a network of senior financial services professionals, believe that their career progression has been slower than that of their white colleagues.

Reboot, a group aiming to increase conversations around race in the workplace, surveyed eight hundred financial services professionals from 440 firms for its Race to Equality report. It found that 66 per cent of respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds said they had experienced discrimination in their careers.

"The figures in this report are sobering," said a senior non-white financial services professional working in financial regulation.

They added: "They indicate that we're still only just starting down a very long road and that much has to be done by senior leaders — and I include myself in that — to build trust and define what a healthy, inclusive culture truly looks like."

Many financial services organisations have been more vocal about their commitment to racial diversity in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, revived by the killing of George Floyd by police in US last year, and have pledged to increase Black representation.

However, the survey shows that financial services professionals from ethnic minority backgrounds remain unconvinced that senior leaders within the companies they work for are really pushing for change.

Just 36 per cent of respondents said they believed their organisations were "fully committed" to diversity and inclusion, while 51 per cent thought their senior leadership believed diversity was critical to the future of their organisation. Meanwhile, 48 per cent said that their career progression was slower than that of their white peers.

A former HSBC banker, Ian Clarke, who produced a 48-page report into race at the UK lender and now runs diversity group Dellight consulting, said ethnic minorities are excluded from the helping hands often given to their white colleagues that help career progression.

"The managing director who takes a white analyst under his wing because 'that was me when I was young'; the CEO who offers a white associate a leadership position after playing golf with her parents — these systems don't exist for ethnic minorities because glass

ceilings block the path to MD and they aren't welcomed at the golf club," he said.

Reboot has called for a five-step process to become more inclusive employers, which includes shaking up recruitment processes, listening to employees, updating training and development programmes, and having visible senior sponsors throughout the firm.

"What we need to see is clear direction and action from senior leadership, coupled with a culture shift that empowers middle management, introduces accountability within companies themselves, and ultimately encourages people in the industry to acknowledge there's an issue and embrace the benefits that racial and ethnic diversity can bring," said Sachin Bhatia, head of core institutional and consultants at Invesco.

"Business leaders need to listen more closely to their employees and pay particular attention to the individual needs of each, not applying a one-size-fits-all approach," said Justin Onuekwusi, head of retail multi-asset funds at Legal & General Investment Management.

"Organisations must enact effective targeted policies, procedures and initiatives that can mitigate the systems of discrimination, otherwise they face deteriorating productivity and mounting systemic risk alongside an exodus of minority talent," said Clarke. (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

The great labour market shake up



J. BRADFORD DELONG

The author is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley and a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Approximately 13 per cent of low-wage jobs in Germany would not be viable if workers understood just how good their outside options truly are. That is the conclusion of a recent paper by Benjamin Schoefer, my colleague here at the University of California, Berkeley, and his co-authors, Simon Jäger, Christopher Roth, and Nina Roussille.

"When comparing workers' subjective outside options against objective measures of pay premia from matched employer-employee data," they note, "many workers mistakenly believe their current wage is representative of the external labour market — objectively low-paid (high-paid) workers are overpessimistic

(overoptimistic) about their outside options."

In plain English, the implication is that if something was to shake up low-wage workers' false beliefs about how poor their outside options are, occupational and labour-market conditions would fundamentally change.

The same basic insight surely also applies to the United States, only more so, because the US federal minimum wage is much lower, relative to average productivity, than Germany's.

Recent data show that 3 per cent of US workers — 4.4 million people — quit their jobs in September.

That monthly quit rate is not only remarkably high; it is unheard of, especially given that the US employment-to-population ratio is still only 59.2 per cent, almost

two points below its February 2020 peak. What is going on in the US labour market?

In normal times, the current figures would suggest that America is dealing with a great shortage of jobs. And yet, workers' outsized willingness to quit their jobs and look for something better indicates that these are not normal times.

There is a standard list of explanations for this so-called Great Resignation. One obvious factor is fear of Covid-19, especially among those who live with elderly or immunocompromised relatives. Low-wage workers do not want to log long hours in service-industry settings that require them to come into close contact with other people, not least the sizable share of the population that remains

unvaccinated.

A related issue is disrupted childcare, which often forces at least one parent to remain at home.

Many observers also argue that workers feel empowered because they are still flush with cash from the pandemic-relief programmes.

And others contend that the past two years have prompted more people to stop and smell the roses, rather than work too hard at an unpleasant, low-paying job.

(The problem with that explanation is that Western Europe, which had a similar pandemic experience overall, is not experiencing a Great Resignation or depression in the share of adults who are employed.)

One notable effect of the pandemic is that it has fuelled a

transformation of work and the workplace that either would have taken decades in the absence of the virus, or would never have happened at all.

Consider, for example, the widespread shift to remote white-collar work; the rapid automation of substantial components of service work; or the transformation of retail — requiring many more delivery drivers and many fewer in-store sales workers.

These changes have brought a great deal of convenience to many consumers and employees.

Suddenly, online tools are good enough that one need not shop in person to get a sense of a product's quality. The sectors affected by these changes will not be returning to the pre-pandemic status quo.

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Anyone can go fishing in the Sultanate of Oman and what fun it is. You don't need a boat, or a great deal of sophisticated fishing equipment and best of all, it is something the entire family can do together... **P20**

WANNA GO FISHING?

YOU DON'T NEED A BOAT!

CULTURE

READ

The book cover for 'ON FLOWERS' by Amy Merrick features a vibrant floral design with various flowers in shades of red, orange, and yellow. The title 'ON FLOWERS' is at the top, and the author's name 'AMY MERRICK' is at the bottom.

ON FLOWERS LESSONS FROM AN ACCIDENTAL FLORIST
BY AMY MERRICK

We learn how to send flowers like a florist and how to arrange them like a farm girl. We discover the poignancy in humble wildflowers, and also celebrate the luxury of fragrant blousy blooms.

Ancient Gilgamesh tablet back after three decades

A 3,500-year-old tablet featuring the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh has been returned to Iraq three decades after it was stolen and illegally imported to the US. The tablet was exhibited to the media in Iraq on Tuesday by the authorities who welcomed its return as a 'victory' over those who stole the country's "history".

The clay tablet features characters in cuneiform and is believed to have been stolen

from an Iraqi museum in 1991. The Epic of Gilgamesh is considered one of the oldest pieces of literature in the world, telling the story of a Mesopotamian king on a quest for immortality.

In a press conference in Baghdad, the Iraqi foreign minister delivered to the culture minister three artefacts recovered from the US and the UK: the tablet of Gilgamesh, a Sumerian ram's head and a Sumerian tablet.

The tablet of Gilgamesh "is of great importance, it is one of the oldest literary texts of Iraq's history," Minister of Culture and Antiquities Hassan Nazim said.

During the press conference, he stressed the "message sent to all those who smuggle our antiquities and have sold them at international auctions: ultimately, the fate of such operations is restitution".

— AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

TALENT

In limelight after greeting in 70 languages



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman is undoubtedly a place that welcomes guests with unique hospitality and time-tested etiquettes.

Citizens greet their guests with a lot of love and affection and perhaps this might have inspired this 5 year-old-expatriate girl to greet people in nearly 70 languages.

Naiza Mehrin Mohammad Niyaz, KG student, has mastered greetings in all the 70 languages and they are, besides Arabic, French, Hebrew, Chinese, Korean, Marathi, Bengali, and so on.

All her efforts didn't go in vain. Limca Book of World Records has spotted this prodigy.

"I was so excited to have been chosen for the title and I know it adds more responsibility on me to learn more and excel in life," a triumphant Naina told the Observer.

She attributes the title to her parents, Mohammad Niyaz and Fareena Kareem, who used to encourage her to do something different and stand out from the rest.

"It was during the lockdown that she started watching videos at home and was stuck upon the concept of learning greetings in different languages and she excelled in it," adds Mohammad Niyaz.

Naiza shot a video of her newly-gained skill and sent it to the authorities at the INTERNATIONAL BOOK OF RECORDS who acknowledged that she is the 1st YOUNGEST TITLE HOLDER TO RECITE "HELLO" IN MAXIMUM LANGUAGES in the 'Solo Activity' on September 23, 2021.

Her two siblings, Raiq Mirzan and Raziq Mirzan, too are keen on learning and they find it interesting to learn new skills including memorising names and countries and their capitals on a daily basis.

COMMERCE



Asia's biggest flower market makes stars out of influencers

Boxes of roses, lilies and carnations pile up as influencer Caicai speaks into her smartphone from a small studio at Asia's biggest flower market — with thousands of customers eagerly awaiting her view on the best deals.

E-commerce is big business in China and influencers and livestreamers have made their fortunes showcasing products for luxury brands and cosmetics firms.

Now the nation's horticulture industry, worth an estimated 160 billion yuan (\$25.1 billion), is getting in on the action. And where once people visited markets and florists themselves, they are increasingly shopping for blooms via their smartphones.

Online retail now represents more than half the sector's turnover.

"Five bouquets, only 39.8 yuan (\$6.25) for those that order right away," the 23-year-old says — a sales pitch she hones for eight hours a day delivered at lightning speed.

"When you sell something for a long time, the words come naturally," she says.

Earnings can be unreliable, however.



"Flower sales vary in busy and slack seasons, so a livestreamers' daily income is very variable. All I can say is that the more you work, the luckier you will be," she explains, as colleagues next to her put the bouquets in cardboard boxes ready to be shipped. 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.

Provincial capital Kunming boasts the biggest flower market in Asia — the second biggest in the world after Aalsmeer in the Netherlands. Flowers are vital

Everyday at 3 pm, a rose auction starts in a huge room where over 600 buyers share

the day's supply behind their screens.

"Yunnan represents around 80 per cent of flower production in China and 70-80 per cent of the flowers on sale pass through our auction room," says Zhang Tao, responsible for the market's logistics — a crucial role when the goods are so perishable.

"That represents on average more than four million flowers sold every day. For Chinese Valentine's day, we sold 9.3 million in a day."

They are shipped across China within 48 hours.

On the retail side of the market, another influencer, Bi Xixi, showcases flowers and bouquets from stalls to sell on to her own online subscribers. — **AFP**

COLUMN



Dr. Zainab Al-Ajmi
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The Keys of Knowledge in the Artificial Intelligence Era

What students learned in school ought to be useful to them after they finish school grades. Approaching any new conditions require using one's knowledge, as students are better equipped to cope with multifaceted problems and have a more diverse set of tools with which to interpret the world. For many educators, having their students hold the keys of knowledge is essential to success in their new world, thus teachers can choose a specific tools for well situations (Bialik, 2018,p.3).

Essentially, the keys of knowledge, is a strategic process that involves a set of keys, such as: 'What do you know?' 'What don't You know?' 'What do you want to know?' 'What should you know?' and most of all: 'What do you do with what you know?' The sequence of questions seems to make practical sense in Artificial Intelligence (AI). Researchers point to vast opportunities presented by artificial intelligence tools, since it is increasingly being utilised in various fields, whilst educators are looking forward to a paradigm shift in education.

According to Bialik (2018,p.8): "If you can search for anything, why learn anything? Learning takes place in context, and over time it is generalised and extracted, but isolated information found on the Internet

cannot fully capture the context in many cases". Undoubtedly, technological tools provide the opportunity for students to spend more time focusing on the transfer and practicing each concept. To elucidate, Bialik asserts that calculators didn't replace mathematicians, but rather boosted their abilities. Word processors did not replace writers, but rather gave them more power. Despite the massive potential offered by AI tools, AI will be used as a perfect tool in education, if the next generation is trained to take the usefulness of it.

Moreover, AI will affect the constructivist theory on which curriculum design, as replaced by integrative theory in the following fields: Technology: Smart machines and system, massive data and gene editing.

To sum up, as future movement towards AI, and building information organisations, AI will be the key factor in shaping the future of education. The progression of AI in education field has been astonishing to many educators, hence students in order to be able to transfer expert rather than learning content that is easily accessed by clicking button, they ought to possess the keys of knowledge to understand meaning of learning in the AI revolution.



Wanna Go Fishing?

You don't need a boat!



BY RAY PETERSEN

Anyone can go fishing in the Sultanate of Oman, and what fun it is. You don't need a boat, or a great deal of sophisticated fishing equipment, and best of all, it is something the entire family can do together.

Certainly, my initial fishing experiences in the Sultanate of Oman were on the sea, firstly with Sulieman al Hajri, a PDO engineer, as he would take me out on his 20 foot, outboard powered, purpose-fitted, recreational fishing boat based out of Ras Al Hamra. Sulieman loved bottom-fishing at depth, anywhere between 100 and 250 metres of deep sea, where the big Hamour and Andag lurk, and he is not only enthusiastic about it, but very good at 'finding' big fish. Reeling up these big fish can be demanding, but the end result can be very gratifying.

Later, I spent a lot of time on Franz Kohler's neat little 14 foot, distinctively red, walkaround fishing craft, and doing a style of fishing known as 'trolling,' when lures are dragged through the



water, mimicking the behaviour of small, frightened fish, and tempting the aggressive predator fish, such as tuna, mahi mahi, and kingfish to strike. It's more of a, I think, contest, in every aspect, physical and mental, and Franz, now based in Jebel Sifah Marina, is a real expert.

Going out with either Sulieman or Franz was a privilege and a pleasure, but I always felt bad about not being able to return the favour. After all, Nizwa has 'mafi bahar' as a knowledgeable



gentleman once told me... so I decided on a change of approach, and to make my fishing something Lena, a photographer, and myself could do together. So, swapping my expensive deep-sea fishing equipment for some



much more modest beach fishing gear, Lena and I took up shore fishing.

We did try fishing off the cliffs and rocks of the Sharqiyah coastline, but we lost a lot of gear to the rocky bottoms, and also hooked a lot of sea snakes, especially near Qurayat, which appears to be a nursery for these unsafe, complex, twisty, winding creatures



that can tie your equipment up in no time, making it irretrievable. Then we opted for the fishermen's beach at Shiyah, south of Sur, and there we learned from the locals how to fish the shallows, and began to enjoy ourselves. We even took our friends Vishal, and Yesha Srivastava, and taught them to fish.

Going further South, we found a wonderful beach at Al Asalah, and during the next three years we made some amazing catches of Sea Bass, Tiger Perch, Flounder, Sole, and even Sea Trout, all dependent upon the temperature and sea conditions. We also caught and released

sharks, stingrays, and the poisonous puffer fish at the same beach to add a little more 'spice' to our exploits.

The best times though were when we went to Masirah Island, which we did three times, staying at the Masirah Island Resort, where a local bird photographer Darrell Pinto was on the staff, and he directed us to where we would most likely catch fish. The highlight was Lena catching three 4kg Dart fish within 15 minutes one morning on a very basic fiberglass rod and baitcaster reel that cost all of RO 30, and using shrimps as bait, proving that fishing need not be an expensive pastime.

If you are looking for some inexpensive family fun, try it someday... Go to one of the many Muttrah fishing tackle shops and let them recommend some budget priced equipment, and see if you like it... I'm sure you will... as, even now, just writing this, I can recall the looks on the faces of Vishal and Yesha when they hooked and landed their very first catch. Don't let you be the one that got away. Try fishing... it's cheap, easy, for all ages, and fun!

PHOTOS BY LENA PETERSEN