



# STRIVE TO ELEVATE LOCAL COMMUNITY STATUS

HIS MAJESTY ENGAGES IN OPEN DIALOGUE WITH SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH SHAIKHS

**MANAH:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday held a meeting at Hisn Al Shumookh in the Wilayat of Manah with Shaikhs of South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The Diwan of Royal Court issued a statement to this effect reading as follows:

“In pursuance of the renewed Royal tradition of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to confer with citizens in all parts of the dear homeland and, following His Majesty’s conviction in the significance of listening in person

to views and proposals serving the interests of the country, His Majesty the Sultan held a meeting on Sunday, January 9, 2022, with Shaikhs of the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate at Hisn Al Shumookh in Manah.”

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the great bounties He has bestowed on Oman and its people, praying that these riches be preserved and eternalised.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed a set of topics of

STRESSES NEED TO ADDRESS DIFFICULTIES THAT MIGHT COME IN THE WAY OF DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENT MARCH

DIRECTS AUTHORITIES TO FUND INITIATIVES TO BOOST THE POTENTIAL OF SMES, ENTREPRENEURS AND TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT

GOVERNMENT PRESSING AHEAD WITH DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND PROGRAMMES IN ALL FIELDS, DESPITE CHALLENGES

concern to the domestic front. He said, “Oman is pressing ahead with its development plans and programmes in all fields, despite the challenges, with the prime objectives of realizing sustainable growth and furnishing a prosperous present and future for all people, wherever they might be on this benign land.”

In his Royal conversation, His Majesty the Sultan observed that the governorates and municipal councils should perform their national roles as precisely as they are expected to do.

He instructed the institutions to double their efforts to elevate the status of the local community.

As part of his attention to boost the potential of entrepreneurs and SMEs owners, to provide employment opportunities in all governorates and, to encourage entrepreneurship, His Majesty the Sultan issued his Royal directives to the departments concerned (Ministry of Finance, Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Oman Development Bank) to fund the respective programmes.



# STRIVE TO ELEVATE LOCAL COMMUNITY STATUS

FROM P1

He noted that the government will offer the incentives necessary for ensuring the success of those initiatives.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan engaged in an open dialogue with the shaikhs, who presented requests for projects and development services needed in their respective wilayats. His Majesty gave directives for endorsing the principle of partnership between the government and citizens when implementing projects that serve the public interest. He stressed the need to address difficulties that might come in the way of the domestic development march.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Bel'arab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamad

GOVERNORATES AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS SHOULD PERFORM THEIR NATIONAL ROLES AS PRECISELY AS THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DO

DIRECTIVES TO ENDORSE THE PRINCIPLE OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS WHEN IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS

bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah and walis of the governorate.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and assist him with power to pursue the path of bounties. May He eternalise Oman's riches and endow the country and its people with further peace and security." — ONA





# Long-term residency status for 26 expatriate investors

KABEER YOUSUF  
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As many as 26 expatriates, mainly corporate personalities, were given long-term residency permits by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) on Sunday.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, distributed the long-term residency permits to them in the presence of representatives of various ministries, officials from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and public authorities.

Investors from more than 12 countries involved in diverse businesses were given long-term residency permits as a mark of the government's initiative to attract new investments and retain businesses that ultimately lead to creating new job opportunities in the country.

"The longer residency visa is part of the national programme



towards attracting more quality investments that contribute to the growth of the domestic products and help us create more job opportunities and to support the national economy in line with the objectives of the Vision 2040," said Khalid bin Saeed al Shuaibi, adviser to the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The programme launched in September 2021 offers long-term residency to investors worth RO 500,000. They are entitled to residency status for up to 10 years if they have investment in a limited liability company,

closed joint-stock company or government bonds, or established or to be established a company that employs at least 50 Omanis without specifying the capital, or intends to buy or already bought a housing unit with a value of no less than RO 500,000 outside the ITC (Integrated Tourism Complex) premises. This carries an option to extend the permit further.

Any investor who is willing to or has already invested in the country a sum of RO 250,000 minimum can avail a residence permit for five years, and an investor with RO 500,000 in his business can hold a residence

permit of 10 years which entails many other benefits.

This is the second time that the Sultanate of Oman is issued long-term residency status. In the first lot, 22 expatriates were given long-term residency permits. Applications for the second set of such visas were accepted from eligible expat investors from October 3 through the online system of the MoCIIP.

"The Investor Residence Programme is an addition to the incentives and advantages that the Sultanate of Oman offers to the investors. During the last period, the country provided incentives and advantages to investors within the foreign capital investment law, including allowing the foreign investor to own 100 per cent, without a minimum capital, and also launched the automatic licensing service through Invest Easy portal for more than 1,500 economic activities to facilitate the start of doing business in the country," Al Shuaibi said.



## Agreement signed with FAO on farming

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed on Sunday an agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to furnish a flexible environment with sustainable agricultural and water resources in the country.

The project will be funded by the UN Green Climate Fund (GCF).

The agreement was signed by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Nora Ourabah Haddad, FAO Representative in Oman.

The project will enable stakeholders in the agriculture and water resources sectors to implement schemes and policies in order to mitigate climate change within the national priorities and the GCF Country Programme.

— ONA

## Training for students with mental disabilities concludes in Bahla

AMAL AL RIYAMI  
NIZWA, JAN 9

A training programme on the role of vocational empowerment programmes in improving the quality of life for persons with mental disabilities project, was concluded recently at Amna Bint Alarqam al Makhzomyah School for Basic Education (5-10) in Bahla.

The training lasted for a whole month. During the training 5 special education teachers from Amna bint Alarqam al Makhzomyah School for Basic Education (5-10), Zainab bint Ali School for Basic Education (1-10), Ahad Al Nahtha School for Basic Education (1-4), targeted a number of 11 students from the mental integration classes. They



are from the schools of Amna bint Alarqam al Makhzomyah School and Zainab bint Ali School. The training also targeted a number of mothers of mental integration students.

The training focused on the use of the loom in weaving and on the manufacture of medals and packaging in its various forms such as notebooks, notes, and bottle.

### ROYAL COURT AFFAIRS RECEIVES NEW RECRUITS



**MUSCAT:** The Royal Court Affairs in coordination with the Ministry of Labour received a new batch of recruits amid precautionary measures against coronavirus, at the premises of the Royal Court Affairs Security Unit in Al Khoudh, on Sunday. The new recruits will undergo military training following which they will join various military units.

# Labour Ministry continues employment efforts

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH  
MUSCAT, JAN 9

The Ministry of Labour continues its efforts that began last year to provide job opportunities for nationals in various economic sectors. This year the ministry plans to provide 32,000 jobs in the public and the private sector. On Sunday, the Ministry of Labour rolled out 402 jobs in the private sector in North Al Batinah Governorate.

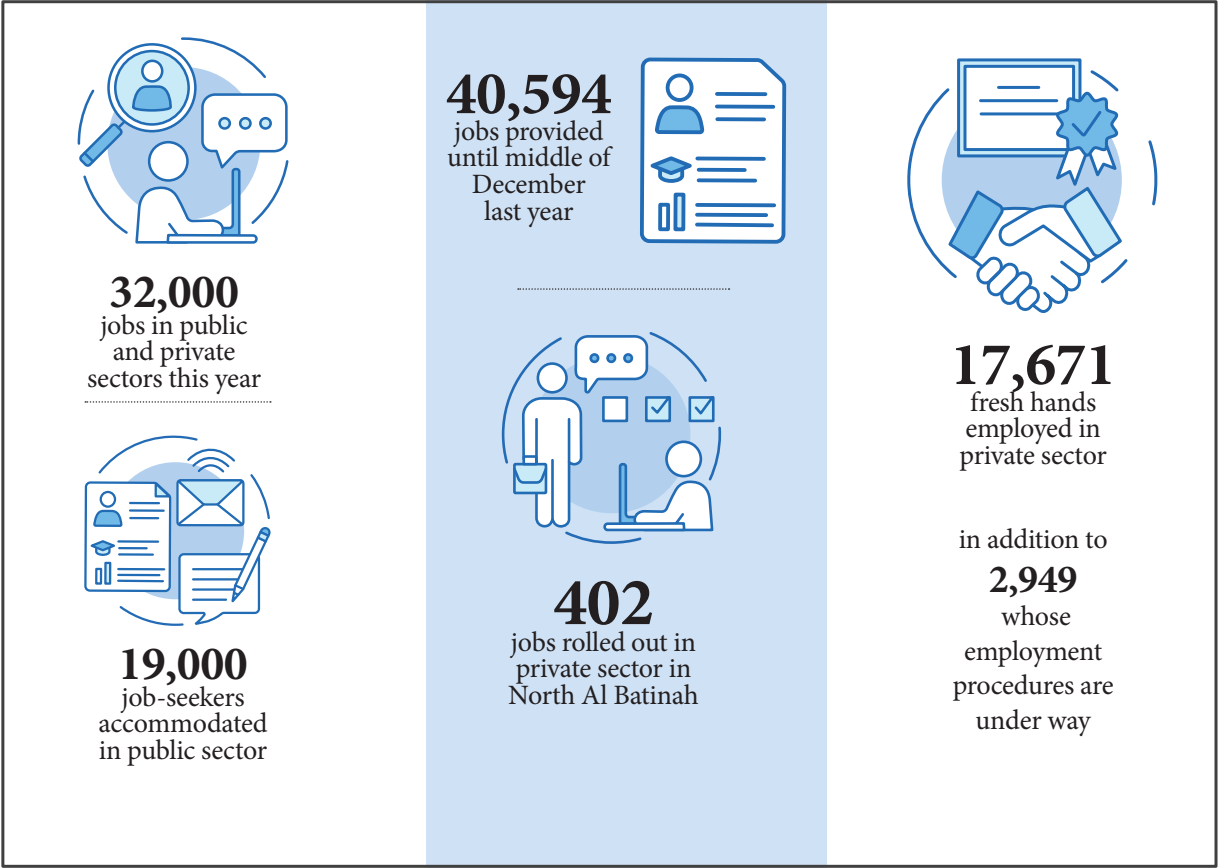
The Ministry of Labour managed to provide 40,594 jobs until the middle of December last year. As many as 17,671 fresh job-seekers were employed in the private sector in addition to 2,949 whose employment procedures are under way.

The public sector employed more than 19,000 job-seekers including 17,013 on the job and 2,961 awaiting employment.

The past year witnessed the launch of several employment initiatives ordered by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. These include providing 2,000 job opportunities in the public sector under a temporary contract basis and in line with the actual needs of government institutions.

Besides, a total of 1 million hours of part-time work was made available in government establishments in various governorates. This is in addition to an initiative to support the wages of Omanis in the private sector with the aim of supporting private sector establishments to employ citizens, especially in light of the financial conditions facing the private sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The initiative supports the wages of Omani new entrants to the labour market in the private



sector by an amount of RO 200 provided that the employer bears the difference in the salary agreed upon, for 15,000 job opportunities for a period of two years.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan took into account the drastic changes in the labour market by devising trends and programmes for digital transformation of all government services and the training of national cadres. This is in addition to developing the necessary legislation to match the new changes. The Five-Year Plan includes preparing an integrated strategy for employment based on a database and studies that foresee employment perspectives and are compatible with other sectoral strategies in addition to elaborate educational and training programmes and policies that are compatible with the labour market outlook and requirements.



# Being digitally smart

**SAMUEL KUTTY**  
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In line with Oman Vision 2040, digital transformation plays a key role as it supports the strategic and vital sectors of the national economy including payment systems in the Sultanate of Oman.

Digitalisation of payment systems will help provide affordable and accessible services that pave the way to achieve an inclusive financial system in the country.

A national programme for the country's digital economy, which has already received the nod from the Council of Ministers, is expected to contribute to building and developing a prosperous digital economy that responds to the requirements of the future.

To take further the digitalisation of payment and settlement systems in the country, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is working on several payment systems-related initiatives.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has curtailed the physical contact between payer and payee, which has increased the adoption of digital payments by the public", states the apex bank in its annual report.

It has issued various guidelines simplifying know your customer (KYC) norms and introducing e-KYC to encourage the adoption of electronic payments, and as a result, it recently issued a framework for small businesses use e-payment services.

"This is in addition to taking all necessary measures to facilitate the use of electronic transactions, like reducing or freeing the charges, increasing the limits etc during the pandemic period", the report says.

Banks and payment service providers have also taken initiatives in line with the CBO's efforts towards a less-cash dependent society.

The introduction of the direct debit instrument is being considered as an alternative secure payment option that

will help in replacing the majority of the remaining cheque payments for loan EMI, bills and rent etc.

Banknet is an initiative that connects banks and other financial institutions to the national payment systems infrastructure and introduces a real-time gross settlement (RTGS) system in the country.

The apex bank also launched automated clearing house (ACH) in addition to introduction of electronic cheque clearing (ECC) system to do away with the need for physical cheque for settlement, implementation of national switch — OmanNet Switch — for ATM, POS and e-commerce payments, and creation of national payment gateway.

"CBO is in the midst of enhancing the RTGS system to operate 24X7, along with many other features like enhanced liquidity management and better gridlock resolution", reveals the report, adding, "it will be connected for cross-border payments to GCC countries".

To facilitate the affordable fund transfer round the clock between person-to-person or person-to-business, the ACH system (instant credit service) will be made operational 24X7.

The CBO is working on the introduction of International Bank Account No (IBAN) in the country during 2021 and 2022, to speed up electronic verification of bank accounts when making electronic payments and reduce the risk of errors in bank account numbers.

Some other initiatives being contemplated are the introduction of countrywide electronic bill presentment and payment platform; exploring the feasibility of hiving off the Finance and Leasing Companies Retail Payment Systems in 2020 operations of retail payment systems to a separate entity; and to interconnect various payment systems globally, to facilitate the cross-border remittances.

**Banks and payment service providers have taken initiatives in line with the CBO's efforts towards a less-cash dependent society**





# Over 21,000 intl flights through country’s airports



**MUSCAT:** The total number of passengers travelling through airports in the Sultanate of Oman (Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Al Duqm) till the end of October 2021 reached 3,349,503, compared to 4,107,142 passengers at the end of October 2020, comprising a decline by 18.4 per cent, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total number of flights at the airports of the Sultanate of

Oman reached 30,375, including 21,466 international flights through Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and Sohar Airport.

The number of domestic flights reached 8,909 at Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport, Sohar Airport and Duqm Airport, compared to 34,873 flights in October 2020, including 29,999 international flights at Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport and Sohar Airport and 4,874 domestic

flights at Muscat International Airport, Salalah Airport, Sohar Airport and Duqm Airport by the end of October 2021.

Nationalities of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan topped the total number of passengers in the Sultanate of Oman's airports till the end of October 2021. The number of Indian passengers stood at 98,556 and the Bangladeshi passengers stood at 36,849. Meanwhile, the number of Pakistani passengers stood at 29,523. — ONA

# Hotels told not to manipulate star ratings

VINOD NAIR  
@vinot\_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has asked all licensed hotel establishments to adhere to the star ratings while marketing, promoting, and advertising the hotel facility and its services, especially in international hotel reservations sites.

The ministry circular is significant as both small and big hotels and tourist establishments worldwide resort to listings on popular travel portals and customer reviews to attract guests.

“If hotel establishments put a star rating contrary to the classification approved by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, it will be considered violation of the Tourism Law and its implementing regulations.”

As per MoHT, one-star properties appeal to a budget traveller's basic needs for comfort and convenience. They meet the basic requirements relative to cleanliness and hospitality. Many properties do not have a



restaurant on site but are often located in the proximity of dining establishments.

Two-stars offer moderate aesthetic enhancements in terms of room décor, design elements, and amenities. Some may offer limited food and beverage services.

Three-stars offer a higher level of service that appeals to the traveller with comprehensive needs. The property grounds, décor, design elements, and amenities are noticeable, upgrade in terms of style and quality. Most properties in this category feature food and beverage facilities offering breakfast, lunch, and dinner services.

Room service availability may vary. Pools and fitness facilities are often provided.

Four-stars are upscale in all areas, distinguishing themselves with an extensive array of amenities combined with a high degree of hospitality, service, and attention to detail. They offer excellent restaurant facilities, and landscaped grounds are visible throughout the property.

Five-Stars exhibit an exceptionally high degree of service and hospitality. The physical attributes display an original design, elegant room décor, exceptional dining and meticulously maintained grounds.



**CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY**

**Announcement:**  
Submitting performance reports on climate affairs

Concerning the implementation of Climate Affairs regulations issued by the Ministerial Decision No. (20/2016) dated 29 March 2016, the Civil Aviation Authority would like to draw the attention of the owner of any project, establishment, or area of work classified to the procedures for Obtaining a License, shall submit their performance reports on climate affairs according to the approved form to the Directorate General of Meteorology in this authority no later than 28th February 2022 through this email: [climate\\_reports@met.gov.om](mailto:climate_reports@met.gov.om)

In case of violation of the provisions of the regulation or delay in submitting of the above mentioned reports, legal actions will be taken.

For further inquiries, please contact the following telephone numbers: (24354681) or (24354679) or (24354670)

**■ YOUTH DONATE BLOOD**



A group of young people, Team CMYF, set an example for others to emulate by donating blood on the eve of Christmas and 2021 year-end. More than 100 volunteers from different parts of the country participated in the blood donation drive held at the Bausher blood bank.



**Sultanate of Oman**  
**The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary**

**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 |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 02/2022   | Manufacture, Supply and Installation of Furniture for the Primary Court in Saham | 17/1/2022                      | 3/02/2022              | 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](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)

## New abattoir opens in Adam

**ADAM:** The Adam Municipality has opened a new slaughterhouse equipped with state-of-the-art facilities of the municipal slaughterhouse sector to raise the level of safety and health standards of livestock slaughtering operations.

Situated near the industrial area on the road linking the Wilayat of Adam and the Niyabat of Sinaw, the new abattoir consists of a customer reception, a hall for cutting carcasses, a hall for the skinning of carcasses equipped with automatic cranes, multi-path hanging system, a veterinary room and a guard room.





**MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY**  
**Advertisement No. (2/2022)**

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

| Tender No. | E- Tender No.            | Description of Tender                                                                               | Tender Fee | Last Date to Collect the Tender | Tender Return Date | Grade |
|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------|
| PRE/21/088 | 2021/MM/ QS-41 (Re-Call) | Construction of Box Culverts in Al Udhayba (Wadi Al Khali) (Re-Call) (E- Tender)                    | Rial 25    | 23/01/2022                      | 08/02/2022         | First |
| PRE/21/098 | 2021/MM/ QS-36 (Re-Call) | Construction of Sub-base Layer for Internal Roads in Wilayat Muscat, Al Sifah (Re-Call) (E- Tender) | Rial 25    | 24/01/2022                      | 20/02/2022         | First |

**Tender Conditions :-**

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be ( 1% ) of the tender value valid for ninety ( 90 ) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to ([etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om)) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to ([esnad@gstb.gov.om](mailto:esnad@gstb.gov.om)) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



# THOUSANDS PROTEST COUP IN SUDAN

**KHARTOUM:** Security forces fired tear gas on Sunday as thousands rallied in Sudan's capital Khartoum and other cities, witnesses said, keeping up pressure on the military following a coup 11 weeks ago.

The coup, led by army chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan on October 25, derailed a power-sharing transition between the military and civilians that had been painstakingly established in the wake of longtime ruler Omar al Bashir's ouster in 2019.

Security forces fired tear gas as pro-democracy protesters headed towards the presidential palace in central Khartoum as well as in North Khartoum, witnesses said.

Main streets around the capital have been sealed off to prevent people converging there and at army headquarters — the epicentre of mass demonstrations that forced Bashir out.

Protesters also rallied in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city across the Nile, and Wad Madani to the south, witnesses said.

"No, no to military rule," the demonstrators chanted as they waved the national flag.

"We will not take less than a full civilian government," said



Sudanese protesters rally near a road block during a protest against the October 2021 military coup in Khartoum. — AFP

27-year-old protester Ammar Hamed in Khartoum.

The protests since the coup — one of several power grabs in Sudan's post-independence history — has been met with a crackdown that has killed at least

60 people, according to medics.

Authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition in confronting protesters and insist scores of security forces have been wounded during demonstrations that have often "deviated from

peacefulness".

Medics in white coats were seen joining Sunday's rallies to protest the security forces' storming of hospitals and medical facilities during previous demonstrations.

The Central Committee of

Sudanese Doctors, affiliated with the protest movement, said on Saturday that medics will deliver a memorandum to UN officials listing and complaining about "assaults" against such facilities.

Last week, Sudan's civilian

Main streets around the capital have been sealed off to prevent people converging there and at army headquarters

prime minister Abdalla Hamdok resigned saying the country was at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival".

He had only taken his position back up on November 21, having originally been ousted along with his government in the October coup.

On Saturday, the United Nations said it would facilitate talks between key Sudanese stakeholders in a bid to resolve the crisis.

But the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the civilian alliance which spearheaded the protests against Bashir and became integral to the transition government, said it had not received "any details" about the UN initiative.

On Sunday, the Sudanese Professionals Association — similarly instrumental in the anti-Bashir protests — said it completely "rejected" the UN-facilitated talks. — AFP



Iraqi lawmakers attend the first session of the Iraqi parliament in Baghdad. — AFP

## Iraq's new parliament holds maiden session

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq's recently elected parliament met on Sunday for its first session, about three months after early elections in which pro-Iranian groups suffered significant losses.

The results sparked street protests from supporters of the political parties which fared poorly in the parliamentary polls, brought forward in response to months-long street protests in favour of reform.

Last month, the Iraqi federal court approved the results of the October election, and confirmed the victory of the influential Moqtada al Sadr.

AlSadr's bloc secured 73 seats in the 329-strong parliament, according to the final results.

That was well ahead of the second-placed Al Aqdam (Progress) coalition, which got 37 seats, meaning Al Sadr is likely to form the next government.

Parliamentarians from Al Sadr's bloc on Sunday walked into the assembly in the capital Baghdad wearing white sashes symbolising death shrouds, following the tradition of Mohammed al Sadr, the late father of Moqtada, witnesses said.

Some independent lawmakers, meanwhile, reached the assembly riding tuk-tuks, or motorised rickshaws, from Baghdad's Tahrir Square, the epicentre of anti-government protests that erupted in October 2019, the witnesses added. — dpa

## Concern grows for Palestinian teen

**AL JALAZUN REFUGEE CAMP:** Palestinian teenager Amal Nakhleh's first name means "hope" in Arabic, but his parents are in despair because he is chronically ill and one of the few minors held without charge by Israel.

"Since his arrest last year I have only seen him twice, including last week when he told me he wanted to go on hunger strike," journalist Moammar Nakhleh said of his 17-year-old son.

"This scares me because he is already very weak," from myasthenia, a rare neuromuscular disease, and underwent surgery in 2020 to have a tumour removed from his rib cage, Nakhleh said.

Israeli authorities accuse Amal of throwing stones at soldiers and have held him for a year in administrative detention. The practice allows for suspects to be detained without charge for renewable six-month terms while investigations are ongoing.

Amal faces a new hearing on Monday, and his father is worried that his detention could be renewed.

Administrative detention has been criticised by the Palestinians, human rights groups and foreign governments, who charge that Is-



Moammar Nakhleh, the father of Palestinian prisoner Amal, shows a photograph of his son on his telephone, in Jalazun refugee camp, near the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah. — AFP

rael abuses it.

Israel defends the practice, saying that "due to the complex and volatile security situation in the West Bank, detention orders are issued against those who plan attacks, or those who orchestrate, facilitate or otherwise actively assist in the commission of such acts".

"The use of administrative

detentions, which allow for the deprivation of a person's liberty for a limited time only, is an effective and lawful security measure against such continuous terrorist attacks," Israel argues in a foreign ministry statement.

Leading Israeli newspaper Haaretz joined the fray days ago with an editorial entitled "Enough with administrative detentions".

"It's time for Israel to learn to forgo this undemocratic, corrupt practice of unlimited administrative detention, without evidence or charges that can be refuted," Haaretz said.

The editorial highlighted the case of Hisham Abu Hawash, one of more than 450 Palestinians held for more than a year in administrative detention by Israel.

Six teenagers are among these prisoners, according to the Israeli human rights group Hamoked.

Tuesday's editorial came as Abu Hawash, a 40-year-old member of the movement, ended a 141-day hunger strike after Israel agreed to his eventual release. The deal proposed to Abu Hawash, a father of five, stipulates that his detention will not be extended beyond February 26, in return for his ending his fast.

"If the state had evidence against Abu Hawash, it should have charged him. If not, it had to release him immediately," Haaretz said.

According to the paper, military prosecutors "had no unclassified evidence on which to draft an indictment to present to a military court" in the Abu Hawash case. — AFP

### ANKARA

#### Three Turkish soldiers killed on Syria border

Three Turkish soldiers were killed in southeastern Turkey when a bomb exploded on the border with Syria, the Turkish defence ministry said. The ministry said they died in the town of Akcakale in Sanliurfa province after a handmade bomb detonated 'put there by terrorists' but did not provide more details.

On the other side of the Turkish border is the Syrian town of Tal Abyad, held by Turkish forces and Syrian proxies after Ankara launched a military operation



against a Kurdish in October 2019.

The ministry was likely referring to Kurdish fighters. Ankara has launched multiple operations inside Turkey, in Iraq and in Syria.

### TEHRAN

#### Iran justice workers hold protests for wage hike

Civil servants in one of Iran's most powerful sectors, the judiciary, held rare demonstrations against the government's refusal to increase their pay. President Ebrahim Raisi, who assumed his post in August, had proposed a salary hike in the last weeks of his previous job as judicial chief.

But the new government which he leads changed its mind. Hit by severe economic sanctions imposed since 2018 by the US, Iran has seen its inflation rate surge to close to 60 per cent.



Shargh, on Sunday published video of a protest by hundreds of men and women in front of parliament in Tehran. "If our problem is not resolved, we will shut down the justice system!" they chanted.

### CAIRO

#### Egypt frees activist after he renounces nationality

Egyptian authorities have freed Egyptian-Palestinian rights activist Ramy Shaath from more than 900 days of detention after forcing him to renounce his Egyptian nationality, his family said in a statement.

The statement said Shaath, who was a member of several secular political groups in Egypt and a co-founder of Egypt's pro-Palestinian BDS movement, was released on the evening of January 6 and handed to a representative of the Palestinian



Authority in Cairo before being flown to Jordan.

Shaath flew from Jordan to France. Shaath's French wife Celine Lebrun Shaath had lobbied the French government to pressure Egypt to release him.



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## In brief

■ MANILA



### PHILIPPINES REPORTS RECORD DAILY CORONAVIRUS CASES

The Philippines reported a record number of Covid-19 cases on Sunday, registering 28,707 new infections, the health ministry said.

Another 15 people died from Covid-19, the health ministry said in a bulletin, bringing the total death toll to 52,150.

The country has reported a total of more than 2.96 million cases since the pandemic started.

Presidential spokesman Karlo Nograles said the national task force on Covid-19 has ordered an increase in hospital bed capacity and medical resources in the capital region of Metro Manila and surrounding areas amid the surge in cases.

■ COLOMBO



### LANKA SEEKS CHINESE DEBT RESCHEDULE

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka sought to reschedule its huge Chinese debt burden in Sunday talks with visiting Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the president's office said. The island's tourism-dependent economy has been hammered by the pandemic and its depleted foreign exchange reserves have led to food rationing at supermarkets and shortages of essential goods.

Key ally China is Sri Lanka's biggest bilateral lender and Wang's visit comes after a warning from international ratings agencies that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government could be on the brink of default.

■ LAGOS



### 200 PEOPLE KILLED IN ATTACKS ON VILLAGES IN NIGERIA

Gunmen have killed over 200 people in a series of attacks in northern Nigeria, a government ministry said. The attackers targeted a total of eight villages in the state of Zamfara between Tuesday and Thursday. More than 10,000 people had been left homeless by the violence, while scores are still missing, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development said.

The head of the ministry, Sadiya Umar Farouq, described the attacks as 'horrific and tragic.'

They were carried out by more than 500 'bandits' who rode on motorcycles, razing homes and killing people as they went, she said.

# US warns Russia of risk of 'confrontation'

## UKRAINE TALKS

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday said Russia had to choose between dialogue and confrontation, ahead of talks in Geneva on soaring tensions over Ukraine.

"There's a path of dialogue and diplomacy to try to resolve some of these differences and avoid a confrontation", Blinken told CNN's 'State of the Union' show.

"The other path is confrontation and massive consequences for Russia if it renews its aggression on Ukraine. We are about to test the proposition about which path President (Vladimir) Putin is prepared to take."

Blinken said on Sunday he does not expect breakthroughs in US-Russia security talks this week but hopes to find some common ground amid a crisis in Ukraine. "I don't think we're going to see any breakthroughs in the coming week", Blinken said on CNN's "State of the Union."

"We're going to be able to put things on the table. Russians will do the same... and we'll see if there are grounds for moving forward", he said. He said any progress would depend on actions from both sides in negotiations that Washington hopes will avert prospects for a new Russian invasion of Ukraine.

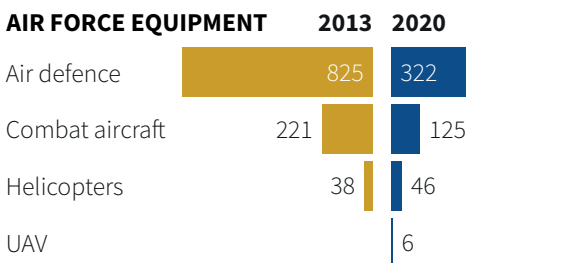
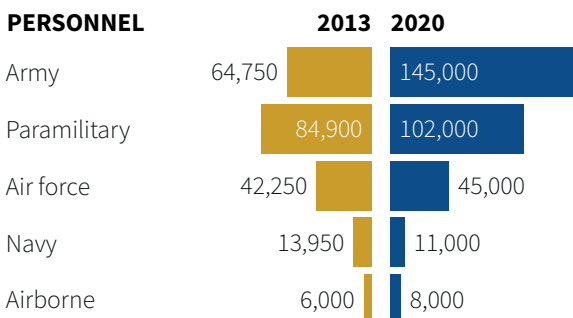
Any movement to resolve the issues, he said, will have to happen on a reciprocal basis.

Blinken's comments lowering expectations for the upcoming talks echoed Russia's hard line on Sunday that it would not make any concessions under pressure at talks this week on the Ukraine crisis.

He stressed that progress would

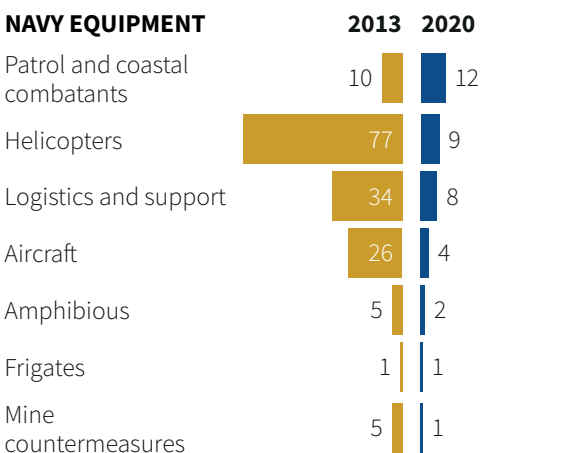
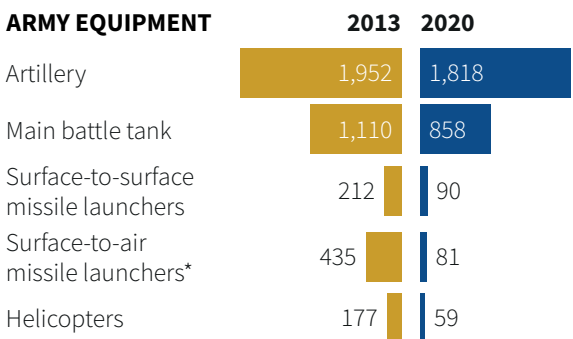
## Ukraine's military strength

Western military analysts say Ukraine's army is better trained and equipped than in 2014, when Russia captured the Crimean peninsula without a fight, and highly motivated to defend the country's heartland.



Note: \*Surface-to-air missile launchers include 75+ for point defence, 6 long range Tor-M and some S-300V.

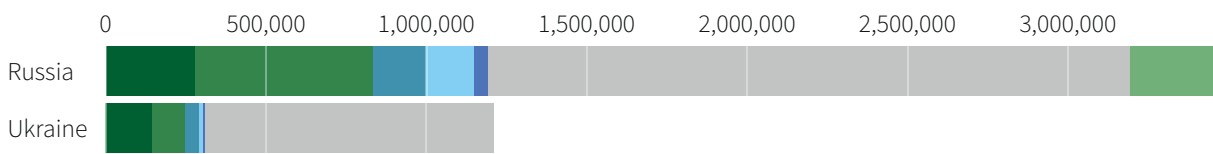
Reserve personnel for military service are down from 1 million in 2013 to 900,000 in 2020.



However, Ukraine's armed forces are heavily outnumbered by Russia's.

### MILITARY SIZE IN 2020

● Army ● Paramilitary ● Air force ● Navy ● Airborne ● Others\* ● Reserve



Note: \*Includes 50,000 in Strategic Rocket Force, 1,000 Special Operations Forces, 29,000 Railway Forces and 180,000 Command and Support forces in Russia. The size of Special Operations Forces in Ukraine is not known.

Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies  
P. K. Dutta, 07/01/2022 | REUTERS

be difficult, if not impossible, amid Moscow's large military buildup at its border with Ukraine.

"To make actual progress, it's very hard to see that happening

when there's an ongoing escalation, when Russia has a gun to the head of Ukraine with 100,000 troops near its borders", Blinken said on ABC's "This Week."

Meanwhile, Representatives of Russia have arrived in Geneva ahead of negotiations with the United States against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis.

— AFP/Reuters

# 164 dead, nearly 6,000 held in Kazakhstan unrest

ALMATY: More than 150 people have died and almost 6,000 have been arrested in Kazakhstan following violent riots in Central Asia's largest country this week, media reported on Sunday citing the health ministry.

The energy-rich nation of 19 million people has been rocked by a week of upheaval, with a number of foreigners detained over the unrest. At least 164 people were killed in the riots, including 103 in the largest city Almaty, which saw some of the fiercest clashes between protesters and security forces.

The new figures — which have not been independently verified — mark a drastic increase in the death toll.

Officials previously said 26 "armed criminals" had been killed and that 16 security officers had died.

In total, 5,800 people have been detained for questioning, the presidency said in a statement on Sunday.

The figures included "a substantial number of foreign nationals", it said without elaborating.

"The situation has stabilised in all regions of the country", even if security forces were continuing "clean-up" operations, the statement added after President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev held a



An interior view shows an electronics store that was looted during mass protests triggered by fuel price increase in Almaty. — Reuters

crisis meeting.

Fuel price rises sparked the unrest that broke out a week ago in the country's west but quickly spread to large cities, including the economic hub Almaty, where riots erupted and police opened fire using live rounds. The interior ministry, quoted Sunday by local media, put property damage at around \$199 million.

More than 100 businesses and banks were attacked and looted and more than 400 vehicles destroyed, the ministry reportedly said.

A relative calm appeared to have returned to Almaty, with police sometimes firing shots into the air to stop people approaching

the city's central square, an AFP correspondent said. Supermarkets were reopening on Sunday, media reported, amid fears of food shortages.

Kazakhstan said on Saturday its former security chief had been arrested for suspected treason.

News of the detention of Karim Masimov, a former prime minister and longtime ally of Kazakhstan's ex-leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, came amid speculation of a power struggle in the ex-Soviet nation.

The domestic intelligence agency, the National Security Committee (KNB), announced Masimov had been detained on Thursday on suspicion of high treason. — AFP

## Army clears roads around snow-bound Pakistan town

KULDANA: Army rescuers on Sunday cleared routes around a Pakistan hill town sheltering thousands of tourists after 22 people died in vehicles trapped by heavy snow.

The resort town of Murree, around 70 kilometres northeast of Islamabad, was inundated with tourists and daytrippers last week after unusually heavy snow turned it into a winter wonderland.

But a blizzard from Friday onwards felled trees and blocked narrow roads leading in and out of the town, which clings to steep hills and valleys at an altitude of 2,300 metres.

"It was not snow, and not even heavy snow, it was unprecedented... with four to

five feet in few hours", Tariq Ullah, an administrative official in nearby Nathia Gali, said Sunday.

"(I) never saw such a huge snowstorm in my life. There were strong winds, uprooted trees, avalanches. People around were terrified, each having his or her own account of suffering." Officials said nearly 100,000 visitors in thousands of vehicles had thronged the town by Friday, causing an enormous traffic jam even before the blizzard.

They said 22 people died in vehicles trapped in the snow overnight Friday — either from cold, or carbon monoxide poisoning from exhaust fumes generated by drivers running engines to keep warm. — AFP



People walk past a vehicle stuck on a road after a blizzard led to visitors being trapped in vehicles along the roads to the resort hill town of Murree, some 70 kms northeast of Islamabad. — AFP

# Will we go from pandemic to recession?



Bret L. Stephens

The writer is an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times

The scariest story I read over the holidays had nothing to do with winter wildfires, the Covid-flu combo or the threat of Russia invading Ukraine. It was Christopher Leonard’s superb profile in Politico of Thomas Hoenig, a retired central banker. Hoenig made a name for himself after the financial crisis of 2008, as one of the top members of the Federal Reserve who wouldn’t go along with then-Chairman Ben Bernanke’s efforts to float the economy on an ocean of money.

For this he was treated as a scaremonger, even a crank. But what if he was right?

The question is topical again because of the sudden jump in consumer prices — up by a whopping 6.8 per cent for the year ending in November 2021 (or a still-dismaying 4.7 per cent if you count only “core” inflation). Some mainstream economists, like Princeton’s Alan Blinder, still argue that the fundamental cause is “too much demand chasing too little supply” and that inflation will cool once pandemic-induced supply bottlenecks clear up.

Maybe that’s so and we can all rest easy. But the people who have been

telling us the inflation is “transitory” have been wrong so far. If they keep being wrong, the Fed will have little choice but to stop simply signalling its intentions and start sharply raising rates. To tame the last great inflation of the 1970s, the Fed Chair Paul Volcker raised rates to as high as 20 per cent.

And that’s where Hoenig’s fears begin to look downright nightmarish.

That’s because of decisions made by the Fed more than a decade ago. Between 2008 and 2014, the Federal Reserve bought more than \$3.5 trillion in federal securities from major banks to encourage lending and investment. “To put that in perspective,” Leonard writes, “it’s roughly triple the amount of money that the Fed created in its first 95 years of existence.” Even after this flood of money, the Fed kept interest rates low for a decade, and then pumped in \$700 billion in the face of the pandemic.

Plenty of critics warned that all that money was ultimately bound to have inflationary effects. They were right — though, at least until recently, not in the way generally expected. Prices for consumer

‘TOO MUCH DEMAND CHASING TOO LITTLE SUPPLY’ AND THAT INFLATION WILL COOL ONCE PANDEMIC-INDUCED SUPPLY BOTTLENECKS CLEAR UP

goods remained relatively stable.

But prices for assets, real and financial, soared, even after the Fed reversed course and began to reduce its holdings. Between 2011 and 2020, the average value for an acre of farmland rose by 37 per cent, the median sales price for a house by 58 per cent and the Dow Jones industrial average by 147 per cent. This was a bonanza for the savvy investor class, making it difficult for the Fed to ruin the party by raising rates. For others — savings account holders, wage-earners, renters, the young — the effects were less salutary.

Now we have an economy in which asset values keep going up because we expect them to keep going up, and in which easy money is creating speculative bubbles that seem obvious to anyone not living

inside of them. Rivian Automotive, to take an example, is an electric-vehicle maker that has been losing money hand-over-fist while delivering, as of November, a grand total of 156 vehicles. That month, it went public with a market cap just shy of \$100 billion, larger than Ford’s or GM’s.

Hoenig was around the last time something like this happened, in the 1970s, when easy money encouraged bankers to underwrite increasingly risky loans while relying on increasingly inflated assets, like farmland and oil wells, as collateral. That helped lead to 1,600 bank failures when the asset bubble burst after Volcker’s rate increases.

Hoenig’s warning is that we might soon be staring into the teeth of something similar. Or worse. Federal debt held by the public was roughly 24 per cent of gross domestic product when Volcker became chair of the Fed. It was 96 per cent in the third quarter of last year. Corporate debt of non-financial businesses — at around \$11.4 trillion — is nearly twice what it was on the eve of the Great Recession.

If inflation persists, it won’t

take much of a rate increase for the cost of servicing the debt to become ruinous for governments and businesses alike. Like an addict who can’t endure the agony of withdrawal, we could soon arrive at a moment when we will not be able to accept the price of taming inflation, and instead we’ll be tempted to inflate our way out of our debts. That won’t end well.

Even without a sharp rise in the cost of living, low rates didn’t end well politically. “Do you think that we would have had the political, shall we say turmoil, revolution, we had in 2016, had we not had this great divide created?” Hoenig asked Leonard. “Had we not had the effects of the zero interest rates that benefited some far more than others?” Should general inflation come, that 2016 revolution will seem tame. Inflation, unchecked, has a bad way of becoming a father to political instability and extremism. It could all still turn out all right. Inflation could moderate on its own; gentle interventions could do. But to read the profile of Hoenig is to feel the tingle of the hard, bitter, likely truth.

— The New York Times Services

## Kate Middleton marks milestone 40th birthday

PHIL HAZLEWOOD

Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, turned 40 on Sunday, hitting the milestone as her profile soars alongside her husband, Prince William.

Since marrying into Britain’s most famous family in 2011, the former Kate Middleton has emerged to become one of the most popular royals — and a figure central to its future.

Her image as a safe pair of hands, at a tricky time for the monarchy, was boosted at a televised Christmas carol concert in December.

She delighted fans with her musical prowess by accompanying the British singer-songwriter Tom Walker on piano for his poignant song “For Those Who Can’t Be Here”.

Kate rehearsed in secret for the surprise performance at Westminster Abbey, which was dedicated to everyone who served their communities during the coronavirus pandemic.

“She was absolutely fabulous — she smashed it. What a talented, kind, warm-hearted, lovely person,” Walker said, describing her as “very chilled, very nice” to everyone.

Both Kate and William, who turns 40 in June, have been much more visible public figures since the start of the global health crisis.

The couple have held video meetings with frontline healthcare workers battling the outbreak, which has claimed some 150,000 lives in Britain since early 2020.

They have also given insights into life with their three children in lockdown — albeit in a sprawling country pile on a royal estate.

As restrictions lifted, they have been seen at official engagements, from the glitzy world premiere of the new James Bond film to meeting world leaders at the G7 and UN climate change conferences. Kate has also pushed her own initiatives such as championing early years education and, with William, promoting mental health and protecting the environment.

The couple’s former private secretary Jamie Lowther-Pinkerton told *The Times* newspaper that part of Kate’s appeal was her polite, down-to-earth and unflustered nature.

— AFP



DANIEL COHEN

The writer is a President of the Board of Directors of the Paris School of Economics, is the author, most recently, of *The Inglorious Years: The Collapse of the Industrial Order and the Rise of Digital Society*

# The battle for the French right

Just a few weeks ago, the 2022 French presidential election seemed liked it was already a done deal: President Emmanuel Macron would again defeat Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally party. Although Le Pen received one-third of the vote in 2017 — an achievement that would have been unthinkable ten years earlier — no reasonable person would bet on her prevailing over Macron in 2022.

Yet nothing is ever certain in politics. Owing to new developments, the election — to be decided in two rounds on April 10 and April 24 — will be much more open and competitive than initially expected.

One new factor is the candidacy of Éric Zemmour, a French version of Donald Trump who previously gained attention as a TV commentator on the French version of Fox News (CNews). An anti-immigrant nationalist, Zemmour regularly denounces “political correctness” and insists that one should have the right to say that someone is black, by which he really means that one should have the right to be a racist.

Like Trump, but unlike Le Pen, Zemmour aims to unite working-class voters and the conservative establishment behind the promise of lower taxes and civil-service reform. But while his mission is clear, his execution leaves much to be desired. For example, he immediately lost many women voters with statements such as “women are the goal and the booty of every gifted man who aspires to climb into society.”

Then, Zemmour embarrassed the traditional right by suggesting that the World War II-era French collaborationist leader, Marshal Philippe Pétain, had actually sought to save French Jews by sacrificing foreign ones. Zemmour has also argued that the victims of a terrorist attack at a school in Toulouse were not truly French because they were buried in Israel. In response

to the outrage these statements caused, he emphasised his own background as an Algerian Jew whose parents suffered from Pétain’s anti-Jewish law. But the damage was already done. — Project Syndicate Services.

Despite these “mistakes” — or, perhaps, because of them — Zemmour has been polling just below 15 per cent. Although that puts him on par with Le Pen for the first round, it ultimately means that he has lost any chance of being elected. The question, then, is who will win the voters he has managed to attract. Will he cling to his base, or will he direct them to support Le Pen? In the latter scenario, his presidential run could end up fortifying the

THE FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN APRIL WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DECIDED IN A SECOND-ROUND CONTEST BETWEEN THE INCUMBENT, EMMANUEL MACRON, AND ONE OF THE RIGHT-WING CANDIDATES. MUCH THEREFORE WILL DEPEND ON THE PERFORMANCE OF POTENTIAL SPOILERS LIKE ÉRIC ZEMMOUR, THE FRENCH VERSION OF DONALD TRUMP

candidate it has so far damaged the most. But many of his supporters also could find their way to the traditional right, which has been eagerly searching for a figure capable of aligning working-class voters with elite interests.

That points to the second big factor that has complicated the race. Following a well-organised primary, the traditional mainstream conservative party, Les Républicains, recently endorsed the candidacy of Valérie Pécresse, the current president of the Regional Council of Île-de-France and a former minister of education and the budget under President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Pécresse defeated her challenger, Éric Ciotti, by a 20-point margin. Before the primary, Ciotti made clear that he would vote for Zemmour over Macron if that was the choice. But he has since endorsed Pécresse, putting her at the head of a potential alliance between traditional conservatives and the more radical right-wing constituency that Ciotti represents. Polls now show that Pécresse could well be elected if she reaches the second round. Much therefore will depend on whether Zemmour weakens Le Pen enough in the first round to knock her out of the running and send Pécresse through.

The French left, meanwhile, is essentially missing in action. Broken five years ago, when the electorate rallied behind Macron’s centrist programme, the left now seems to represent only around 25 per cent of voters, whose allegiance is divided between three or four candidates who hardly speak to one another. Like the right, the left faces the same challenge of winning back the working and middle classes; but unlike the right, it has not found any credible way to do so.

As in the United States today, identity issues drive political choices in France. As long as this remains the case, the decisive electoral battles will be between the Trumps of this world and whoever proves capable of beating them. Macron’s biggest asset is that he is seen as a shield against the far right — at least until someone else stands up to claim that mantle.

— Project Syndicate Services

Breathtaking not heartbreaking moments



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami  
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

Weather is not always predictable for it could be awfully surprising sometimes. Rain, for instance, is random with its associated impacts, winds, storms, floods or wadies. However, rain is usually a sign of happiness, hope, love and relieve. It falls to refresh both people and land as it revives

life to the land and hope to people. Despite the cheerfulness that rain brings to people, various catastrophic incidents might come out of the blue. Floods, wadies or little snowy rocks could be expected sometimes here and there around the country. Heavy rains with wadies flow over and floods block roads within different cities and neighbourhoods.

This occurs very often when it rains; hence, it stresses people more than pleases them most of the times.

Therefore, rain comes with a sign of tension and frustration as some people get trapped in their homes, especially those living nearby mountains or valleys. They get surrounded by water as if they are staying in an island. Some sacrifice the cheerful moment of enjoying the rain to escape to a safer place. That is the only choice they think of at such moments of panic!

This tragedy takes place every time it rains within the capital and big cities where urban planning and road infrastructures are supposed to be well-structured and planned! The more buildings are built, the more drainage routes of valleys and rainfall floods get narrowed or probably blocked.

Out of such incidents, come hard and tragic experiences, which people are going through and properties are getting severely affected by. People get scared as floods cover their homes; it is very heartbreaking indeed what happens every now and then when it rains. Though it is very rare, when it happens it is very severe.

On the other hand, some people are carelessly putting their and other's life at risk by crossing deep floods and rough flowing wadies. They give a cold shoulder to all the warnings of the weather forecast authorities and Royal Oman Police to stop crossing flooded areas. They give no attention to the potential risks by doing this! Thus, they either struggle to death or make it by being rescued at the last minute.

Many people have lost their life out of irresponsibility to show their muscles during such difficult times. Families have lost their loved ones by taking the risk to challenge the nature with their 4WD vehicles crossing the flowing rainwaters. Moreover, the rescue teams from concerned government bodies have lost their members many times on rescue missions. They also spend days and weeks searching for missing people on wadies.

Lots of sacrifices and rescue endeavours have been made by ROP, civil defence, Royal Air Force and other parties. Different government bodies always accord tremendous efforts during diverse weather conditions. However, similar heartbreaking drown incidents happen, people are missing and others lose their life for a risky moment of fun! What is that worth sacrificing one's life for?!

With all the past hard times and displeasing happenings that Omanis have come across during rains and cyclones, it seems learning the hard way is not even helping! Can someone imagine how big the loss is, every time it rains! Losing someone's life is not only a loss for his family, but to the whole nation. Losing someone's home is a personal loss and a burden on society and nation alike. Therefore, government authorities, society and individuals shall all join forces to save people's life, safeguard personal assets and protect the nation as a whole.

Protecting the country's assets is a shared responsibility to be shouldered by citizens and government officials alike. Sustaining the public properties is everyone's must-to-do; each plays his essential role whenever and wherever is required.

Moments of rain are always wonderful and let's not make them awful, but breathtaking instead of heartbreaking.



EXPOSED TO THE WORLD

An activist holds a placard during a rally outside a government detention centre where Serbia's tennis champion Novak Djokovic is staying in Melbourne on Sunday in support of refugees detained at the centre. – AFP

Jimmy Carter: I fear for our democracy



Jimmy Carter  
was the 39th president of the United States

One year ago on January 6, a violent mob, guided by unscrupulous politicians, stormed the Capitol and almost succeeded in preventing the democratic transfer of power. All four of us former presidents condemned their actions and affirmed the legitimacy of the 2020 election. There followed a brief hope that the insurrection would shock the nation into addressing the toxic polarisation that threatens our democracy.

However, one year on, promoters of the lie that the election was stolen have taken over one political party and stoked distrust in our electoral systems. These forces exert power and influence through relentless disinformation, which continues to turn Americans against Americans.

According to the Survey Center on American Life, 36 per cent of Americans — almost 100 million adults across the political spectrum — agree that “the traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it.” *The Washington Post* recently reported that roughly 40 per cent of Republicans believe that violent action against the government is sometimes justified.

Politicians in my home state of Georgia, as well as in others, such as Texas and Florida, have leveraged the distrust they have created to enact laws that empower partisan legislatures to intervene in election processes. They seek to win by any means, and many Americans are being persuaded to think and act likewise, threatening to collapse the foundations of our security and democracy with breathtaking speed. I now fear that what we have fought so hard to achieve globally — the right to free, fair elections, unhindered by strongman politicians who seek nothing more than to grow their own power — has become dangerously fragile at home.

I personally encountered this threat in my own backyard in 1962, when a ballot-stuffing county boss tried to steal my election to the Georgia State Senate. This was in the primary, and I challenged the fraud in court. Ultimately, a judge invalidated the results, and I won the general election. Afterward, the protection and advancement of democracy became a priority for me. As president, a major goal was to institute majority rule in southern Africa and elsewhere.

After I left the White House and founded the Carter Center, we worked to promote free, fair and orderly elections across the globe. I led dozens of election observation missions in Africa, Latin

America and Asia, starting with Panama in 1989, where I put a simple question to administrators: “Are you honest officials or thieves?”

At each election, my wife, Rosalynn, and I were moved by the courage and commitment of thousands of citizens walking miles and waiting in line from dusk to dawn to cast their first ballots in free elections, renewing hope for themselves and their nations and taking their first steps to self-governance. But I have also seen how new democratic systems — and sometimes even established ones — can fall to military juntas or power-hungry despots. Sudan and Myanmar are two recent examples.

36 PER CENT OF AMERICANS — ALMOST 100 MILLION ADULTS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM — AGREE THAT “THE TRADITIONAL AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE IS DISAPPEARING SO FAST THAT WE MAY HAVE TO USE FORCE TO SAVE IT”

For American democracy to endure, we must demand that our leaders and candidates uphold the ideals of freedom and adhere to high standards of conduct.

First, while citizens can disagree on policies, people of all political stripes must agree on fundamental constitutional principles and norms of fairness, civility and respect for the rule of law. Citizens should be able to participate easily in transparent, safe and secure electoral processes. Claims of election irregularities should be submitted in good faith for adjudication by the courts, with all participants agreeing to accept the findings. And the election process should be conducted peacefully, free of

intimidation and violence.

Second, we must push for reforms that ensure the security and accessibility of our elections and ensure public confidence in the accuracy of results. Phony claims of illegal voting and pointless multiple audits only detract from democratic ideals.

Third, we must resist the polarisation that is reshaping our identities around politics, and we must act urgently to pass or strengthen laws to reverse the trends of character assassination, intimidation and the presence of armed militias at events. We must protect our election officials — who are trusted friends and neighbours of many of us — from threats to their safety. Law enforcement must have the power to address these issues and engage in a national effort to come to terms with the past and present of racial injustice.

Fourth, violence has no place in our politics, and we must act urgently to pass or strengthen laws to reverse the trends of character assassination, intimidation and the presence of armed militias at events. We must protect our election officials — who are trusted friends and neighbours of many of us — from threats to their safety. Law enforcement must have the power to address these issues and engage in a national effort to come to terms with the past and present of racial injustice.

Lastly, the spread of disinformation, especially on social media, must be addressed. We must reform these platforms and get in the habit of seeking out accurate information. Corporate America and religious communities should encourage respect for democratic norms, participation in elections and efforts to counter disinformation.

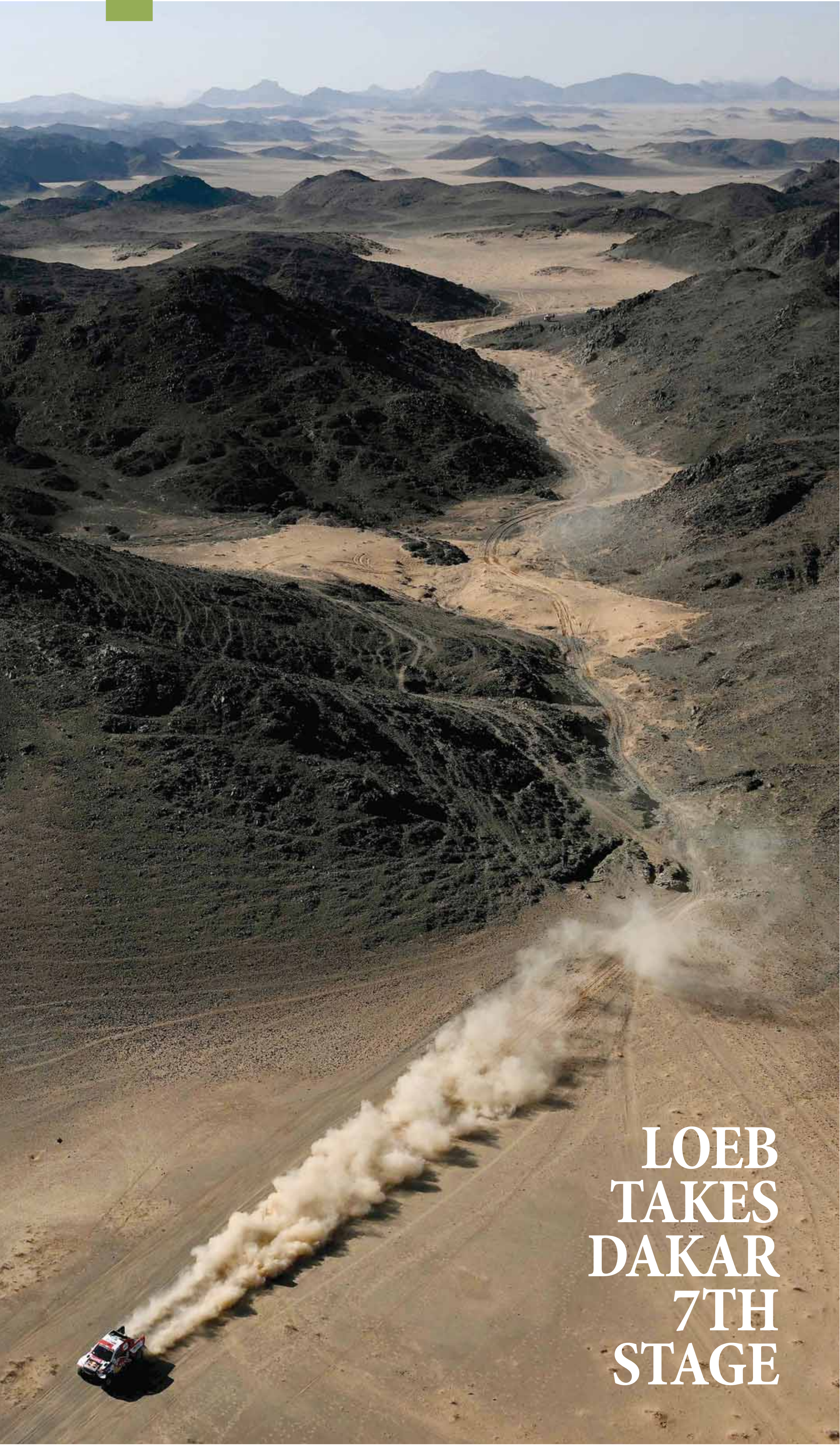
Our great nation now teeters on the brink of a widening abyss. Without immediate action, we are at genuine risk of civil conflict and losing our precious democracy. Americans must set aside differences and work together before it is too late.

The New York Times Services



# sport

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## AL ATTIAH RETAINS RUNAWAY LEAD

**RIYADH:** Sebastien Loeb annexed the Dakar Rally seventh stage to move to the top of the chasing group behind runaway leader Nasser al Attiyah on Sunday.

Loeb, France's nine-time world rally champion, was landing his second win of 2022 as the gruelling roadtrip across the Saudi Arabian desert resumed after Saturday's rest day.

He crossed the finish line at the end of the 402 kilometre drive from Riyadh to Al Dawadimi almost five and a half minutes clear of Al Attiyah.

But it was not all plain sailing for the 47-year-old whose best result from five Dakar attempts was second in 2017.

"We had pressure problems over the last 50km, the car wasn't accelerating, we thought it might pack up three kilometres from the finish," he reported.

Qatari Al Attiyah steers his Toyota into the second and final week with a huge 44min 59sec lead from Loeb, his fourth Dakar title seemingly his to lose.

France's Adrien Van Beveren is the new leader of the bike standings after a stage won by Chile's Jose Cornejo Florimo and which proved costly to Sam Sunderland.

The Briton lined up at the start leading the two-wheeled hunt for the 2022 title but ended it down in fourth after losing 20 minutes.

Beveren, who arrived at the finish in 11th, is for once enjoying some luck after failing to finish the last four editions.

And after all the blood, sweat and tears for little or no reward, he was understandably moved at his change of fortune.

"After all that's gone before this is such a pleasurable feeling," said the Yamaha rider, fighting back tears.

But while Beveren rides on, for Australian Daniel Sanders, who was lying third overall, this Dakar is over.

The KTM rider crashed on the way to the start. He was taken to hospital but his injuries were reported not to be serious by the medical services. — AFP

“  
We had pressure problems over the last 50km, the car wasn't accelerating, we thought it might pack up three kilometres from the finish

**SEBASTIEN LOEB**  
*French driver*

Toyota's driver Nasser al Attiyah of Qatar and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France compete during Stage 7 of the Dakar Rally 2022 between the Saudi capital Riyadh and Al Dawadimi town. — AFP

# England dig in to salvage heart-pumping draw

**SYDNEY:** Battle-weary England dug deep for a gripping draw with just one wicket left to deny dominant Australia a 4-0 series lead in the fourth Ashes Test in Sydney on Sunday.

Number 11 batsman James Anderson doggedly played out a tense 102nd and final over from leg-spinner Steve Smith in deteriorating evening light as England ended on 270 for nine chasing a 388-run target in a heart-pumping finish.

It all came down to the last six balls at the Sydney Cricket Ground with eight fielders crowding around the bat as Anderson fended off Smith's part-time leg-spin.

Australia had looked set to win the day-long battle and pull off a thrilling victory when they claimed the ninth wicket of Jack Leach, caught in the slips by David Warner off Smith for 26 to mass team celebrations.

But Anderson and long-time pace partner Stuart Broad played out the remaining two nail-bitingly tense overs to give the beleaguered tourists a morale-boosting fighting draw after losing the Ashes series 3-0 inside 12 days.

Ben Stokes with a gutsy 60, his second half-century of the match, and first-innings centurion Jonny Bairstow's 41 held up the Australian victory charge. But once both departed after tea, the Australians were relentless in taking the strug-



England's Stuart Broad (L) and James Anderson shake hands at the end of day five and the fourth Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground. — AFP

gle down to the final over.

#### BRAVE BAIRSTOW

"It was really important (to see it through)," England skipper Joe Root said.

"It's been a difficult tour, we've found it tough, but I am proud of the determination and character in finding a way to get a result.

"I've said we wanted to put some pride back into the badge and give something back to people at home."

The draw means that Australia no longer have the lure of a 5-0 series clean sweep with the fifth and final Test to be played in Hobart, as a day-night match, getting under way on Friday.

"Yeah, we were really keen (for 4-0) but that was a great game of Test cricket," Australia captain Pat Cummins said.

"A bit less weather might have got us there. It was a hard-fought game, that's why we love it."

Bairstow's brave effort came to an end with 10.4 overs left when he was caught close in by Marnus

Labuschagne off Scott Boland.

Bairstow, who batted with an injured thumb, backed up his first innings century with a determined 105-ball knock.

Nathan Lyon made a key breakthrough with the wicket of Stokes, who defied the Australians for 123 balls. It was Lyon's 16th wicket of the series, the most among the Australian bowlers. Lyon got extra bounce, Stokes, troubled by a side strain injury, was in two minds and was caught by Smith at slip.

Cummins produced a big inswinger to trap wounded Jos Buttler lbw for 11, confirmed on a review, to get into the English tail as the overs counted down.

Mark Wood lasted just two balls before Cummins snared him lbw for a duck, the inswinger slamming into his front foot.

#### PHENOMENAL BOLAND

Boland earlier removed Root caught behind off a tantalising outswinger for 24 to break up his stubborn 60-run partnership with Stokes.

Boland has had a phenomenal introduction to Test cricket since his debut in last month's Melbourne Test where he was man of the match with 6-7 in the second innings and so far he has taken 14 wickets in the series at 8.64.

Cameron Green grabbed the biggest breakthrough of the morning with the wicket of Zak Craw-

ley, who had made 77, just as the English opener was looking like he would score a hundred in a flowing performance.

The young giant ripped a yorker under Crawley's bat, striking his boot in front of the wicket.

Crawley impressed during his 100-ball knock with 13 fours, batting with positive intent and doing more than enough to keep his opening spot with Rory Burns likely to return to partner him for the final Test after another failure from Haseeb Hameed.

Hameed was caught by Alex Carey off Boland for nine and Dawid Malan went for four, deceived by Lyon and bowled off-stump. — AFP

| SCOREBOARD                                                                                                                                   |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Australia first innings 416-8 decl</b>                                                                                                    |            |
| <b>England first innings 294</b>                                                                                                             |            |
| <b>Australia second innings 265-6 decl</b>                                                                                                   |            |
| <b>England second innings</b>                                                                                                                |            |
| Z Crawley lbw Green .....                                                                                                                    | 77         |
| H Hameed c Carey b Boland .....                                                                                                              | 9          |
| D Malan b Lyon .....                                                                                                                         | 4          |
| J Root c Carey b Boland .....                                                                                                                | 24         |
| B Stokes c Smith b Lyon .....                                                                                                                | 60         |
| J Bairstow c Labuschagne b Boland .....                                                                                                      | 41         |
| J Buttler lbw Cummins .....                                                                                                                  | 11         |
| M Wood lbw Cummins .....                                                                                                                     | 0          |
| J Leach c Warner b Smith .....                                                                                                               | 26         |
| S Broad not out .....                                                                                                                        | 8          |
| J Anderson not out .....                                                                                                                     | 0          |
| Extras (lb7, nb3) .....                                                                                                                      | 10         |
| <b>Total (for 9 wkts, 102 overs) .....</b>                                                                                                   | <b>270</b> |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-46, 2-74, 3-96, 4-156, 5-193, 6-217, 7-218, 8-237, 9-270                                                           |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Starc 18-2-68-0, Cummins 22-5-80-2, Boland 24-11-30-3, Green 10-1-38-1, Lyon 22-10-28-2, Labuschagne 2-0-9-0, Smith 4-1-10-1 |            |

# NZ head for massive total as Latham hits 186

**CHRISTCHURCH:** Captain Tom Latham smashed an unbeaten 186 as New Zealand bounced back from their shock defeat in Mount Maunganui to amass 349-1 on the opening day of the second and final Test against Bangladesh on Sunday.

Latham raised 148 runs with fellow opener Will Young and then consolidated New Zealand's position with his still-flourishing 201-run stand with Devon Conway, who remained not out on 99.

"The way Tom hit some of his drives, the sound of ball meeting the bat was awesome," New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi told reporters.

"To be not out and bat the whole day and to be continuing tomorrow with Devon...it was a fantastic effort from both ends."

Smarting from their shock defeat in the series opener, world Test champions New Zealand got the perfect start with Latham leading by example after being put into bat at Christchurch's Hagley Oval.

The left-hander, leading the side in absence of an injured Kane Williamson, was given out lbw to Ebadot Hossain twice in the ninth over and both decisions were reversed after the batsman reviewed them.

Ebadot created another chance soon after the lunch break but Liton Das spilled Young, then on 26, at second slip with the batsman rubbing salt in the wound with a rare seven runs after running three and picking up four overthrows.



Shoriful Islam finally broke the stand when he had Young caught at gully for 54 but Latham continued to punish the wayward Bangladesh bowlers as he raced to a 133-ball century.

Latham, whose free-flowing knock included 28 boundaries, was on 169 when Bangladesh blew a review trying to get him caught behind.

"Unfortunately we did not bowl enough good balls to create the sort of pressure that we created last week," Bangladesh fast bowling coach Ottis Gibson told reporters.

"New Zealand would have been hurting from last week and they came back and showed why there are one of the best teams in the world."

Bangladesh were forced into

making two changes to the squad that had triumphed in Mount Maunganui.

Opener Mahmudul Hasan (hand) and middle order batsman Mushfiqur Rahim (groin) missed out with injuries and were replaced by Nurul Hasan and Mohammad Naim.

New Zealand brought in Daryl Mitchell for fellow all-rounder Rachin Ravindra.

— Reuters

| SCOREBOARD                                                                                                 |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>New Zealand first innings</b>                                                                           |            |
| T Latham not out .....                                                                                     | 186        |
| W Young c Naim b Shoriful .....                                                                            | 54         |
| D Conway not out .....                                                                                     | 99         |
| Extras (lb7, w3) .....                                                                                     | 10         |
| <b>Total: (one wicket; 90 overs) .....</b>                                                                 | <b>349</b> |
| <b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-148                                                                              |            |
| <b>Bowling:</b> Taskin 22-5-68-0, Shoriful 18-6-50-1, Ebadot 21-1-114-0, Mehidy 25-1-95-0, Shanto 4-0-15-0 |            |

# Rafi too good for IAS as Stallions move to top

**MUSCAT:** Star all-rounder Rafi Ullah had a terrific outing, helping Oman Stallions to a massive 225-run victory against IAS in a 50-over Premier Division League clash at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Stallions' huge total of 393 for 8 included Rafi's scintillating 91 off 41 with as many as 10 sixes, Vinayak Shukla's 86 and Pratik Athavale's 67. Imran Muhammed and Mudassar Iqbal claimed three wickets each.

IAS were marching on slow and steady at 79 for 1 in 18 overs before it ran into Rafi Ullah's golden arm and collapsed for a lowly 168 in the 45th over. Rafi conceded only 31 runs in his 9 overs, picking up 4 wickets whereas Akshay Patel bagged 3 for 31 in 10. Haythim Bahar (42) and Akmal Shahzad (41) were IAS' top scorers.

Stallions now lead the points table with 14 from 8 matches followed by Muscat CT who have 12 from 7.

#### SUFYAN BOWLS RENAISSANCE TO VICTORY

Earlier on Friday, the Sultanate of Oman all-rounder Sufyan Mahmood's magnificent 5 for 39 powered Renaissance to a comfortable 6-wicket win over AER International Trading and Contracting in a Premier Division game at the same venue.

Sufyan was outstanding with the ball as AER found his seaming deliveries too hot to handle on a chilly morning, getting dismissed for 112 in 26.2 overs. Asif Khan and Mehdi Hasan took two wickets each. Usama Aqeel top-scored with 47.

Sufyan showed his batting



form as well, top-scoring with an unbeaten 32 off 40 as Renaissance surpassed the total in 22.4 overs, scoring 118 for 4. Shubo Pal batted well too for his 31 off 37. Aqib Javeed bagged 2 for 25.

#### IRFAN, RAJESH STAR IN SUNLIGHT WIN

Hafiz Irfan and Rajesh Devashya were Sunlight's heroes in an impressive 89-run win over Ernst & Young in a 50-over A Division League match at OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Irfan led the batting honours with a fluent 61 followed by stylish 48 by Nasir and 46 by Rafique Mujib. Amandeep Singh picked up 3 for 43.

Ernst & Young were struggling at 54 for 4 in 9 before collapsing to 116 for 9 in 25. However, a 70-run last-wicket partnership between Masud Pervez (67 not out off 60) and Chadith Lakmal (8 off 23) helped salvage some pride as E&A scored 186 all out in 36.2 overs. Rajesh was the main destroyer with 5 for 36 whereas

Irfan bagged 2 for 42.

#### BRIEF SCORES

##### Premier Division

Oman Stallions 393 for 8 in 50 overs (Rafi Ullah 91 – 3x4, 10x6, Vinayak Shukla 86 – 8x4, 3x6, Pratik Athavale 67 – 10x4, Imran Muhammad 3-67, Mudassar Iqbal 3-74, Khalid Rasheed 2-74) beat IAS (Ibn Abdul Samad Eng & Cons) 168 all out in 44.1 overs (Haythim Bahar 42 – 6x4, Akmal Shahzad 41 – 7x4, Rafi Ullah 4-31, Akshaykumar Patel 3-31, Utkarsh Sahu 2-43) by 225 runs.

##### A Division

Sunlight 275 for 9 in 50 overs (Hafiz Irfan 61 – 6x4, Nasir 48 – 5x4, 1x6, Rafique Mujib 46 – 6x4, Madhur Bhatnagar 41 – 3x4, Amandeep Singh 3-43) beat Ernst & Young 186 all out in 36.2 overs (Masud Pervez 67 – 11x4, 2x6, Shrey Wilson 62 – 7x4, 3x6, Rajesh Devashya 5-36, Hafiz Irfan 2-42) by 89 runs.

##### Premier Division

AER International Trad. & Cont. 112 all out in 26.2 overs (Usama Aqeel 47 – 6x4, Sufyan Mahmood 5-39, Asif Khan 2-7, Mehdi Hasan 2-0) lost to Renaissance 118 for 4 in 22.4 overs (Sufyan Mahmood 32 – 1x4, 2x6, Shubo Pal 31 – 2x4, 1x6, Aqib Javeed 2-25) by 6 wickets.



Canada's Steven Diez, Felix Auger-Aliassime, Denis Shapovalov and Brayden Schnur pose with the trophy and their national flag. – Reuters

# Shapovalov, Auger-Aliassime fire Canada to ATP Cup triumph

**SYDNEY:** Denis Shapovalov and Felix Auger-Aliassime put in commanding performances against Spanish opponents to win their respective singles matches and fire Canada to the ATP Cup title on Sunday.

Shapovalov showed plenty of aggression to beat Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta 6-4 6-3 in the opening singles rubber to put Canada one win away from winning the \$10 million team-based competition.

World number 11 Auger-Aliassime then served strongly to take down Roberto Bautista Agut 7-6(3) 6-3 and give Canada an unassailable 2-0 lead in the tie.

Canada, the first team in the ATP Cup's three-year history to have lost a tie en route to the final, were swept by the United States in their group opener and also lost their first match against Britain.

But Felix Auger-Aliassime and Shapovalov, who had contracted the novel coronavirus in the leadup to the tournament, bounced back with tie wins over Britain, Germany and then last year's winners Russia.

"The emotions are unbelievable. There's no better feeling than winning. We left everything out there", said Auger-Aliassime. "We came back from far in this competition, losing our

first four matches. But we never stopped believing.

"I think that's very important. We trust each other to the highest level... it came down to the perfect result. I'm super thrilled for everybody in the whole team and myself, of course."

Carreno Busta came into the evening contest at the Ken Rosewall Arena in Sydney brimming with confidence, having not dropped a set all week and with a 4-1 head-to-head record against the 14th-ranked Shapovalov.

But the 22-year-old left-hander survived a barrage of breakpoint chances, including five in the opening game of the match, and

held his nerve to claim victory in an hour and 38 minutes to give Canada a 1-0 lead in the tie.

"(I had) a little bit of nerves going out. Obviously I've got a tough record against Carreno Busta, so I knew it was going to be a tough match", Shapovalov said.

Spain ended up as ATP Cup runner-up for a second time after losing the 2020 final to Serbia.

Auger-Aliassime saved 10 of the 11 break points he faced, hit 15 aces against Bautista Agut and another big serve on his second matchpoint was enough to close out the match in two hours and 10 minutes and spark celebrations in the Canada camp. — Reuters

## Djokovic did not have guaranteed entry to Australia: Government



Members of the local Serbian community rally outside a government detention centre where Serbia's Novak Djokovic is staying in Melbourne. – AFP

**MELBOURNE:** The Australian government had not given tennis star Novak Djokovic an assurance that a medical exemption that he said he had to enter Australia without a Covid-19 vaccination would be accepted, government lawyers said in a court filing on Sunday.

The filing ahead of a court hearing on Monday was in defence of the government's decision to bar entry to the world number one player over his Covid-19 vaccination status.

Djokovic is hoping to win his 21st Grand Slam at the Australian Open, starting in Melbourne on January 17.

But instead of training, the Serbian player has been confined in a hotel used for asylum seekers and is challenging the decision to cancel his visa after being stopped on arrival at Melbourne Airport early on Thursday.

The drama has rocked world tennis, caused tensions between Serbia and Australia and become a flashpoint for opponents of vaccine mandates around the world.

Himself a vocal opponent of vaccine mandates, Djokovic had declined to reveal his vaccination status or reason for seeking a medical exemption from Australia's vaccination rules. But

his legal team said in a filing to the court on Saturday that the player had been granted an exemption due to having had the virus in December.

Djokovic's legal team said he had the necessary permissions to enter Australia, including an assessment from the Department of Home Affairs that responses on his travel declaration form indicated he met the conditions for quarantine-free arrival. The government disputed this.

"This is because there is no such thing as an assurance of entry by a non-citizen into Australia. Rather, there are criteria and conditions for entry, and reasons for refusal or cancellation of a visa", the government's filing said.

It said the department's email was not an assurance "that his so-called 'medical exemption' would be accepted", and his responses could be questioned and verified on his arrival.

The government also challenged Djokovic's claim for a medical exemption on the basis he had contracted Covid-19 and had recovered two weeks later. "There is no suggestion that the applicant had 'acute major medical illness' in December 2021. All he has said is that he tested positive for Covid-19. This is not the same", the filing said. — Reuters

# Nadal's Open preparations on track with Melbourne title

**MELBOURNE:** Spanish superstar Rafael Nadal's Australian Open preparations remain on track after he beat American Maxime Cressy 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 in the final of the Melbourne Summer Set on Sunday.

Nadal decided to play the lower level tournament to get some match practice after missing much of 2021 with injury and Covid-19.

He has not been totally fluent this week and was pushed hard by the American qualifier, but Nadal had too much experience for the 24-year-old serve-volleyer.

It was Nadal's 89th title on the ATP tour and the win ensures he has won at least one singles crown every year for the past 19 years.

Nadal said that, while he was not in perfect shape, he was happy with his form so far.

"Exactly where I would like to be is being 100 per cent healthy from last year, playing until the end of the season, and with not having come back after five, six months

away from competition", he said.

"So of course I am not exactly the place that I want to be.

"But I am very happy. If we put everything together and analyse all the things that I went through the last five months, including the Covid, of course I am happy.

"I think my practices have been much better than my level of tennis in the competition, but in some way that's very positive.

"The only thing that I need is to stay healthy and spend time on court, in official matches."

Cressy, who had to win through two rounds of qualifying just to make the main draw, started nervously but became more confident as the match wore on.

The American had a set point in the tiebreak but could not convert and, once Nadal claimed the first set, the final result was almost inevitable.

Nadal will be aiming to break the record for most Grand Slam singles titles at this month's

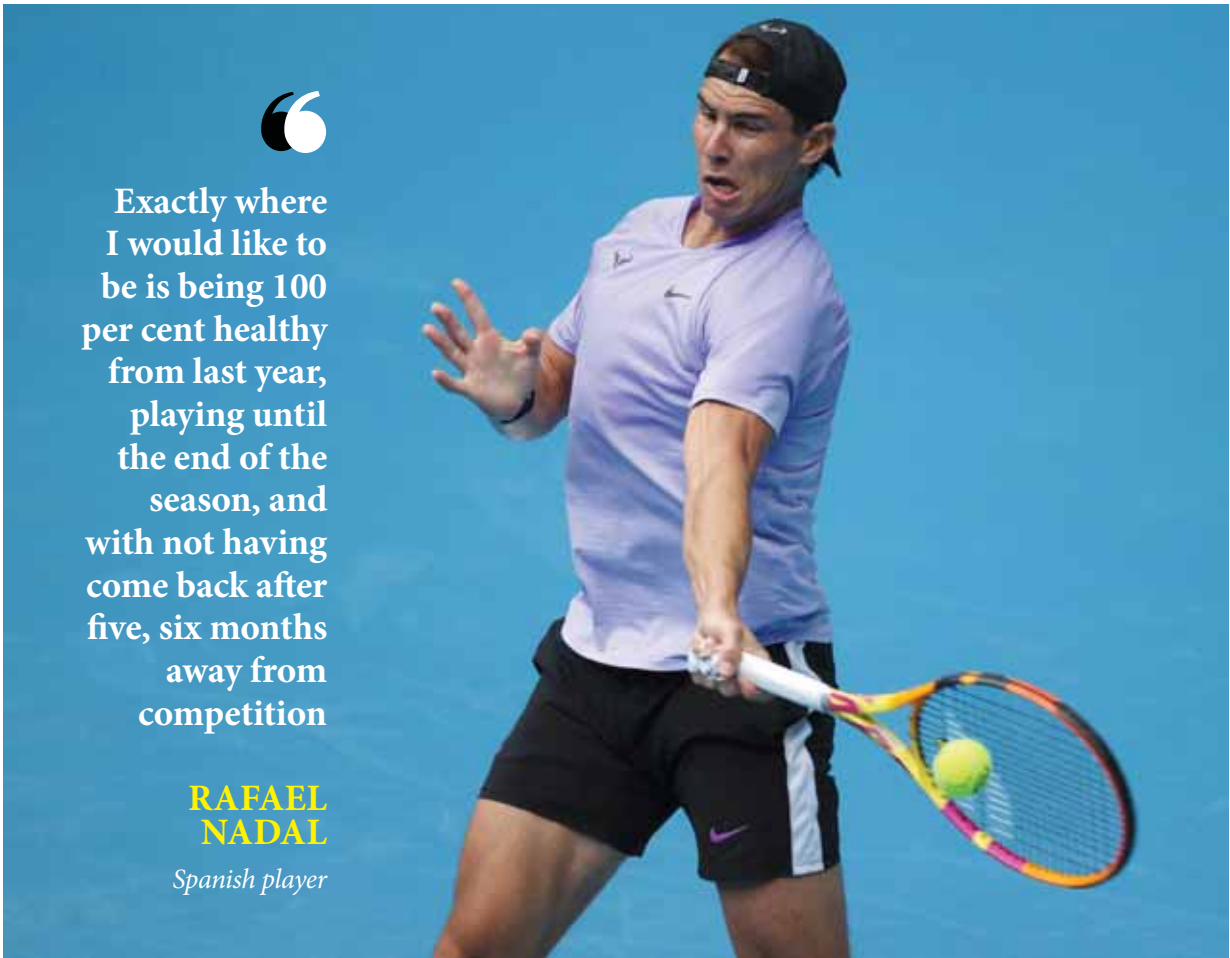
Australian Open. He is currently tied on 20 titles with Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, but with Federer injured and Djokovic's presence in doubt because of visa issues, Nadal has a chance to go one ahead of his great rivals.

Nadal was playing his first tournament since August after injury and Covid.

He said while he was sick he could not get out of bed for days, but once he began to recover he had no doubt he would come to Australia to try to win his second title at Melbourne Park.

"There have been some very challenging moments, and I have been working very hard even in the very tough moments", Nadal said.

"I am quite satisfied the way that I approached all these very challenging months in terms of attitude, in terms of positive spirit and in terms of passion to try to be back. "This title helps to keep going, and it's of course just the beginning." — AFP



“Exactly where I would like to be is being 100 per cent healthy from last year, playing until the end of the season, and with not having come back after five, six months away from competition

RAFAEL NADAL  
Spanish player



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CMA formally joins XBRL International, launches new platform



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JAN 9

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has formally joined the XBRL International — a global not-for profit organisation which develops and maintains the XBRL standards and related specifications.

At the same time, the Authority announced the launch of the XBRL platform as part of its strategy to enhance the investment appeal of capital market and insurance sectors in line with the digitalisation objectives of the Oman Vision 2040.

XBRL International is a global consortium of approximately 650 public and private organisations working together to support

the collection, sharing and use of financial data based on XBRL language to upgrade the efficiency of disclosure process in the capital markets to enhance the accuracy of financial data and avail to the investors on timely basis.

The CMA had earlier organised introductory sessions on XBRL reports in collaboration with the IRIS Business Services Limited, the project contractor.

The workshops were attended by capital market and insurance institutions and related parties such as the public joint stock companies, insurance companies, investment funds, the companies operating in the field of securities beside representatives of audit firms accredited by the CMA.

OQ to inaugurate RO 318 million Salalah LPG project next week

NEW LANDMARK: The launch of the project will further reinforce the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading producer and exporter of LPG, among a host of other refined petroleum products and petrochemicals

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, JAN 9

OQ — the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman — has announced that it will formally inaugurate its state-of-the-art Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant worth RO 318 Million in Salalah next Sunday, January 16, 2022.

This vital project works on processing natural gas liquids (NGLs) extracted from gas networks into LPG. The plant is designed and built to the highest technical and safety standards.

It consists of a number of components, notably a facility for the extraction of rich gas elements such as propane, butane and condensates from natural gas, as well as a fractionation plant, storage tanks, shipping facilities, and an interconnection pipeline system.

The launch of the project will further reinforce the Sultanate



of Oman's position as a leading producer and exporter of LPG, among a host of other refined petroleum products and petrochemicals.

OQ LPG has a capacity to process around 8 million standard cubic metres per day of lean gas to produce about 304 kilotons per year of LPG comprising 155 kilotons per year of propane (C3), 111 kilotons of butane (C4) and 38 kilotons of condensates (C5+).

The project is already in the commercial operation phase, producing and exporting propane, butane and condensate based on specified specs.

The first shipment of products

from OQ LPG, comprising about 5,000 metric tonnes of propane and a similar volume of butane, was loaded onto MT Searambler, for distribution in international markets.

Moreover, 10 per cent of the propane and butane products will be used as LPG for domestic use in the Governorate of Dhofar.

During the construction phase, the project made an important contribution to the local economy.

In line with its In-Country Value (ICV) development strategy, OQ awarded contracts totalling around RO 100 million to local vendors and service providers. More than 150 small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) benefited from OQ's ICV programme during the implementation of the project, helping in creating business opportunities and providing jobs for national cadres.

OQ LPG will also meet the energy requirements of local industrial and retail consumers. Surplus output will be exported to world markets through OQ Trading, the marketing arm of the Group.

Furthermore, the Group is studying the feasibility of using LPG products to develop petrochemical industries to help optimise value creation.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman Electricity Spot Market set to be a reality

LIBERALISATION: Market operator sets up dedicated website (oemo.om) for placing offers

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

A further chapter in the ongoing liberalisation of the power sector in the Sultanate of Oman shortly begins with the formal launch of the Electricity Spot Market — enabling licensed generators for the first time to offer their surplus capacity at the most competitive rate.

Its imminent launch — the first in the Middle East — follows nearly six months of market trials by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) which, in addition to its statutory role as the power procurer, is also the Market Operator of the new platform.

As a first step in the roll-out of the Electricity Spot Market, OPWP as the Market Operator unveiled a dedicated website (oemo.om) to enable generators to compete for the opportunity to offer their capacity in line with specific



guidelines governing the operation of the Electricity Spot Market.

Earlier, OPWP had described the spot market as an “important milestone” for the Omani electricity sector. “The market is expected to provide a competitive environment for trading of energy in order to reduce the cost of electricity procurement and avoid long term power

purchase agreements (PPAs).

The market will provide an opportunity for the electricity generation companies who have expired PPAs with OPWP to compete and exploit its assets. It will also provide a platform for self-generators with the ability to sell surplus electricity production in the market,” OPWP — part of Nama Group — explained.

“The market will provide an opportunity for the electricity generation companies who have expired PPAs with OPWP to compete and exploit its assets. It will also provide a platform for self-generators with the ability to sell surplus electricity production in the market,d

OPWP

When brought online, the electricity spot market will be open for all generation companies operating in the Main Interconnected System (MIS) network to participate.

But upon the completion of the ongoing North-South Interconnection Project, linking the MIS with the network of Dhofar Governorate, other generators

will be able to participate as well.

“Under the spot market, expiring plants are able to submit cost reflective offers for energy on a daily basis and they are all paid the same price (System Marginal Price).

The benefits of introducing the spot market include increasing the residual value of the plants after their contracts expire and ensuring that plants with higher efficiency are prioritised in dispatch.

Generators holding PPAs when the market operations are initiated are also required to submit offers into the market. However, they are settled and invoiced as per PPAs,” the Market Operator further added.

Significantly, investors in solar and wind projects can also offer to sell their uncontracted output via the Spot Market and thus optimise the return on their investments.

Conversely, large consumers, for their part, can keep a tab on spot market quotes and opt for suppliers offering the best tariffs – an option that can be exercised when the market is further liberalised through the legalisation of ‘bilaterals.’

Sohar International concludes 9th virtual edition of Viewpoints



MUSCAT: Hosted by the Chairman of Sohar International, Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi (pictured), Sohar International recently concluded its 9th virtual edition of Viewpoints. The latest session featured as its distinguished guest speaker Mary Louise Gorno who is the Managing Director of Ingenuity International LLC and specialises in organisational governance, succession planning, and managing leadership issues.

In line with the subject, “Step by Step: A Journey to Now”, Gorno covered the different aspects of assuming a courageous leadership style in the corporate world and highlighted how it was instrumental in driving progress. She also enlightened the women participants on maintaining a balance between work and personal life, and managing both diligently. The virtual edition, which was live-streamed via Sohar International’s YouTube channel and Zoom platform, saw the active participation of university students, industry leaders, C-suite executives and professionals from different sectors of society.



Mercedes-Benz Oman announces latest range of pre-owned vehicles

MUSCAT: Setting benchmarks for luxury and performance, Mercedes-Benz Oman has announced its latest line-up of certified pre-owned cars.

Customers can drive away in their favourite Mercedes-Benz and enter a world of comfort, innovation and advanced technology at exclusive prices that are valid until March 31, 2022.

Offering a variety of sought-after vehicles, the all-star range includes the family-friendly A 200 Sedan (year 2021), starting at RO 17,319 including VAT, the dynamic and elegant E 200 (year 2020) starting at RO 20,994 including VAT, the eye-catching and intelligent plug-in hybrid C 300 e (year 2020) starting at RO 20,994 including VAT, and the unmatched GLC 300 4MATIC (year 2021) starting at RO 24,669 including VAT.

“Mercedes-Benz aspires to offer the ultimate in vehicle comfort, safety and luxury, and

Start the new year with exclusive benefits across Toyota range

MUSCAT: Toyota is offering a fantastic opportunity to customers to start the new year with their dream Toyota and benefit with exclusive offers. Toyota has some of the most dependable and trusted vehicles in its range. Owning a Toyota is always one of the most beneficial and fulfilling experiences one can enjoy.

On a new Toyota, customers can benefit with service 2 years/20,000 kms, 5 years/50,000 kms (On LC200 4.6 & 5.7 models only) and 8 years/80,000 kms (On Corolla 1.8 HEV only) (whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 125 to RO 450. The campaign is valid until March 9, 2022.

Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

In the Sultanate of Oman, Toyota range include sedans like the Yaris. The **Yaris** sedan with a choice of 1.3-litre and 1.5-litre engines, delivers a dynamic driving experience. It is equipped with 15” alloy wheels, daytime running lights, smart entry & push button start, auto air conditioner and more.

The **Toyota Corolla** — the popular choice of people around the world has been developed from a driver and passengers’ point of view first. The Corolla is also available in a Hybrid option.

The sleek and stylish **Toyota Camry** has been one of the best-sellers. Equipped with a range of



exciting features, technology and more, the Camry is also available in a 2.5l, 3.5l and Hybrid options.

The **Toyota Avalon** is a statement of luxury. It is equipped with 3.5l V6 Engine, LED headlamps with adaptive cornering lamps, premium leather seat material, 9” navigation system with 14 JBL speakers, head up display, Toyota safety sense and more.

In the SUV range customers can choose from the C-HR. The **C-HR**, represents a leap forward in design, manufacturing and engineering for Toyota. The C-HR offers impressive fuel economy with 23.9 kms/l as per GSO Conformity Certificate and carries a Hybrid battery warranty of 8 years/160,000 kms.

The **Highlander** offers an impressive fuel economy of 20 kms/l (GLE Grade) & 19.3 kms/l (LTD Grade) as per GSO Conformity Certificate and comes with 8 years/160,000 kms Hybrid

battery warranty.

The sporty and stylish **RAV4** ticks all the boxes when it comes to enjoying extraordinary moments. The RAV4 includes features like 19” alloy wheels, LED headlamps & DRL, power back door, wide moonroof, 7” TFT multi information display, wireless charger and more.

The **Fortuner** is equipped with 4.0L, V6 Engine, 18” alloy wheels, LED projector headlamps with DRL, navigation system, power & ventilated driver & front passenger seats, power back door and more.

The powerful and capable **Prado** includes 4.0L, V6 engine, LED headlamps & fog lamp, 9” navigation system, ventilated front seats, moonroof, airbags: driver + front passenger + curtain + side (front) + knee (driver) and more.

The pride of the land — the **Land Cruiser** is a symbol of strength, durability and reliability.

ahlibank launches one-minute mobile-app based for instant account opening service



MUSCAT: Complementing the ongoing global digitisation process and meet the growing demand for ‘instant’ banking practices, ahlibank has introduced a new mobile app-based account opening service where all new-to-bank customers can open an account just within one minute.

Having demonstrated its intent to forge ahead as a vibrant and innovative bank of choice for people who desire personal banking experience, ahlibank has structured the instant account opening app to project its ideals of digitisation and enhance avenues for customers who are looking to conduct their banking transactions from the comfort of their individual space. The new facility also upholds the value it places on providing round-the-clock service to its customers.

Commenting on the merits of the new mobile app, Muneer bin Ahmed al Balushi, AGM — Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, “Digitalisation is the need of the hour and, at ahlibank, we have well realised the importance of constantly upgrading our services to stay abreast with the global banking industry. The new service will enhance the level of service we provide, and will also help in exceeding the expectations of our customers. Through this service we intend to reach out to all our potential customers, assuring them of our ongoing endeavours to create and implement innovative solutions for their ever-changing requirements.”

“Over the years, we have demonstrated our single-minded commitment to customer service, and continue to pursue the same with innovative solutions and exclusive services.

We rely on customer feedback for positive growth and have a team of professionals who constantly assess market requirements and propose developmental plans that put us in the driving seat. Today, we are proud of our credentials as the fastest growing bank in the Sultanate of Oman and are confident that our offers of distinctive and timely banking services and products will propel us to greater heights.”

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Customers can now open their savings account by simply registering their personal details; this is further simplified by scanning the ID card from the front and backside, and by taking a selfie with one’s mobile phone to document the identity of the account holder.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds regional head receives 10-year investor visa

MUSCAT: As part of the Investment Residency Programme announced by the Government of Oman, Najeeb K, Regional Head of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Oman received a 10-year investor visa from Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in the presence of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) for Investment Promotion and top officials from ROP, in an event held at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion yesterday.

Investment Residency Programme offers long-term five- and ten-year renewable residence permits to investors in the Sultanate of Oman.

“I am extremely humbled to be granted with this coveted visa. It is definitely a significant day for me, and I am grateful to the authorities of this great country for considering me and the leadership of Malabar Gold & Diamonds’ for giving me the opportunity to lead the growth



of the brand in the Sultanate of Oman”, commented Najeeb K — Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Oman on the achievement.

Najeeb heads the operations in Oman region of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, where he has been employed for the last 13+ years and is also a shareholder in the organisation.

He has been residing in the Sultanate of Oman for more than 11 years.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds is the flagship company of Malabar Group, a leading diversified Indian business conglomerate.

Established in 1993 in the Indian state of Kerala, Malabar Gold & Diamonds today has a strong retail network of over 260 outlets spread across ten countries, 14 wholesale units in addition to offices, design centres, and factories spread across India, the Middle East, Far East & USA.

With an annual turnover of \$4.51 billion, the company currently ranks one among the largest jewellery retailers globally and has over 4,000 shareholders 13,000 professionals working for its continued success.



# Sultanate of Oman ideal for investment: OCCI

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

With its strategic geographical positioning and favourable investment climate, Oman is an attractive destination for foreign investments, says Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh (pictured), Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Saleh said: "I honestly want to tell the investors to consider the Sultanate of Oman as their investment destination as we are continually working to making it ideal for investment."

Besides offering political and economic stability, we are strategically positioned in the best geographical location with easy access to the Gulf and Asian and African markets."

"Additionally, the special law to protect the rights for foreign investors, availability of easy loans



with low benefits and convenient repayment periods, and Oman being a member of World Trade Organization (WTO) too is an advantage that we want to share with the investors", adds Al Saleh.

Oman enjoys Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with various trading blocks and individual nations, thanks to the open free trade and market policy. It offers low customs rates of taxation on many imported products.

About the service charges, the OCCI Chairman said, "We have already made 50 per cent reduction of service charges

to those companies who are achieving the target percentage of Omanisation and also 25 per cent for those companies who are Omanised."

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has recently announced some 50 projects and that the charges for those who want to invest in the country in projects are much lesser than the other investors besides the long-time residence permits.

"Oman has a lot of opportunities in the recently announced 50 projects and other projects announced by the other ministries and the returns are good. Projects are ready to be handpicked for investments."

And there are lot of incentives that the government is giving to them in terms of land which is offered at a cheaper price and there are reduced charges for those who want to do set up operations.

## India invites bids to set up gas sales network

**NEW DELHI:** India has invited bids in an auction for licences to supply natural gas to households, automobiles and small industries in some areas of five states, as the country pushes to cut its carbon emissions.

India, the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, has set a 2070 goal for net zero carbon emissions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is targeting raising the share of natural gas in India's energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.2 per cent. Natural gas, while still a fossil fuel, emits less CO2 than coal

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board set a deadline of April 6 to submit bids for city gas distribution (CGD) authorisation for areas offered in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

The board has so far awarded CGD licences for some areas of 27 states and union territories covering 70 per cent of India's population, and is in the process of finalising winners for its previous round, in which 26 entities had submitted bids for 61 geographical areas.

After bids in the latest rounds are finalised, about 88 per cent of the country's area will be authorised for the development of the CGD Network, providing access to natural gas to about 98 per cent of India's population, the board said. — **Reuters**



Employees work at a storage facility for crude oil at an oil field at Barmer in Rajasthan. — **Reuters**

## Oil jumps over Kazakhstan unrest



Towers and smokestacks are silhouetted at an oil refinery in Melbourne, Australia. — **Reuters**

**LONDON:** Unrest in Opec+ member Kazakhstan has pushed up oil prices as investors fear supply interruptions, but the uranium market appears less affected despite the Central Asian country being the world's second largest producer. "Riots obviously can stop production and exports", said Bjarne Schieldrop, an analyst at Swedish bank SEB.

Over the week, crude prices gained about five per cent and on Friday Brent exceeded \$83 per barrel, "putting it at its highest level since the price slide triggered by the first appearance of the Omicron variant in late November", said Carsten Fritsch, commodities analyst at Commerzbank.

Protests spread across the country of 19 million this week in outrage over a New Year increase in prices for liquid petroleum gas (LPG), which many use to fuel cars. Thousands took to the streets in Almaty and in the western province of Mangystau in protests that broadened to include anti-government slogans.

Violence erupted when police fired tear gas and stun grenades at thousands protesting in Almaty on Tuesday.

The next day protesters stormed government buildings, setting them ablaze, and a nationwide state of emergency

was declared.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev rejected calls for talks with protesters after days of unprecedented unrest. The country is the largest oil producer in central Asia with a twelfth of the world's proven reserves, according to the US EIA.

Kazakhstan produced around 1.8 million barrels a day in 2020. The country is also the second largest oil producer in the Opec+ group of top oil producers, behind Russia.

Hydrocarbons made up 21 per cent of its GDP in 2020, according to the World Bank. Production by Tengizchevroil, the largest oil venture in Kazakhstan, "has been temporarily adjusted as a result of protests at the Tengiz field", said Stephen Brennock of PVM brokerage. But several analysts said there was no indication that oil production had been seriously affected. Production at the country's top three fields was "said to be continuing."

"Unrest in Kazakhstan is bullish in the short-term", said Neil Wilson, an analyst at Markets.com.

At close of trading on Friday, crude oil prices had fallen slightly, with Brent falling 0.28 percent to \$81.76 and West Texas Intermediate down 0.54 per cent at \$79.03. — **Reuters**

## Tech savvy or tech slave?

The world's population is close to 7.9 billion out of which more than 5.40 billion people now use mobile phones whereas around 4.8 billion people use Internet and active messenger/social media users exceed 4.5 billion.

This includes many who live more on social media rather than on oxygen. Every digitally active person should know that they, along with their not so active buddies whom they keep tagging, have already been profiled with all their personal data by the tech giants.

A database that is unheard of, unimaginable and unprecedented in the history of mankind has been created with the help of tech companies ruthlessly exploiting our ever increasing addiction to their free services.

This database, when used with facial recognition technology and AI tools poses serious privacy and national security threats. With such a penetration of technology, technological slavery has also crept in. I may be wrong but I strongly believe that anything stored electronically on any of our devices is seriously exposed to be compromised.

Most of the mobile device operating systems have default factory settings to copy all contents of your mobile phones including contacts, notes, calendar entries and photos on their 'cloudy' cloud and keep updating it on a real-time basis, sometimes even without your explicit knowledge, on the pretext of keeping a backup of your data.

Their services are designed in such a way that it requires or even indirectly forces us to keep logged in to their services and connected to the Internet all the time so they can keep copying your digital footprints on a real-time basis.

Computer operating systems seems to have learnt it lately from mobile operating systems and now boasts of a having gigantic cloud storage that appears to have default setting to back up all your computer data on their 'free drive'.

Their latest updates even encourages you to link your computer to your mobile device for your 'convenience'. We must also be aware that each and every such device with their mike and camera also has the potential of being converted into a remote listening, watching and recording device through malwares. One such malware might be caught and closed down but hundred others silently creep into digital space.

A popular 'free' service provider has default setting to track and store the coordinates of every location that you have ever visited or logged in from. They also track and store your location by the IP address. They also store the link of every video watched by you on their platform, every single website that you have ever visited on all your known



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MUBEEN KHAN

devices using their browser.

A very popular smartphone also tracks your movements and separately identifies significant locations visited by you and throws this data to its cloud. I could not understand why do my smartphone needed to do that before I found this out and disabled it.

This is unprecedented invasion in privacy and confidentiality of our movements, personal and business data stored on our computers and devices. Every piece of our personal and business information is being stored at a location far away and beyond the borders out of our control creating the big data about every digitally active human.

We are so much addicted to these free services that we blindly accept and grant permissions to them to control of our digital life. We must remember that "when something is free, we are not customers, we are the products."

**Avoid placing data or personal pictures on cloud**

We should never store our personal or business data on any free cloud storage. No cost savings can justify the compromising the confidentiality of our data. We can chose to backup our data on an external storage media keeping our data in our personal control.

We must check default settings of any new device that we buy and change privacy settings and not blindly give all permissions to copy contacts, notes, photos and back up all data.

We should not keep 'logged

in' all the time on any mobile service. Rather log in when we need to install / update any app on our device and then log out. Personal photos and videos are more secure on conventional cameras than your ever vulnerable mobile or tab.

**Do not keep mobile device connected to Internet all the time**

A constant Internet connection is needed to listen to your live conversation or live track your location hence not being connected to the Internet all the time on our devices can cripple any malicious activity.

You may want to have the habit of 'switching on' the Internet only when you need it and then 'switch if off'.

You may choose not to have 'connect automatically' Wi-Fi option on your devices but rather connect to Internet only when you need it.

**Don't be hostage to one service provider**

There are multiple map services like Google maps, Petal maps, Apple maps, Karta GPS. There are dozens of web browsers like microsoft edge, chrome, firefox, petal browser and several free email services like gmail, qq mail, outlook, yahoo mail, rediffmail, hotmail and multiple search engines like Google Search, Petal Search, duckduckgo, bing, yahoo etc.

Don't stick to only one service provider for all your needs but rather use different ones for different requirements so not one service provider has all you search, email, browsing or location data.

**Stop unnecessary activity tracking by service providers**

You should disable all location tracking, web-browsing history and delete the other historical activity data that your service providers have already stored.

Carefully scrutinise and change all default settings of your smartphone and other devices which invade into your privacy. You really do not want to have a digital daddy who monitors you more than your own daddy.

Privacy is a personal privilege that cannot be sold out for anything including these so called free services. Stay Alert, Stay Safe.

*The writer is a Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) from ISACA, USA. He is also Ex-Chairman of Muscat Chapter of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) and Ex-Vice President of Oman Chapter of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA).*

Pricey oil gives Kazakh investors emergency cover

Vladimir Putin is lending his Kazakh counterpart a hand. The Russian president and his regional allies sent troops to Kazakhstan to quash a bloody nationwide uprising.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev says order has been restored. Even if that's true, major oil and gas investors like Chevron and Royal Dutch Shell may suffer populist fallout. Paradoxically, high energy prices provide some cover against hasty renegotiation of contracts.

Dozens have died in the uprising which began as a protest against increases in the domestic price of fuel. The situation remains volatile, although the arrival of Russian troops increases the chances of Tokayev prevailing.

Assuming he does, he'll still need to make some changes. For one, he may find himself indebted to the Kremlin, resulting in a tighter alliance with Moscow, oil-rich Kazakhstan's Soviet-era master.

Ironically, that in itself may add to the grievances of the anti-government protestors demanding similar freedoms to other post-Soviet states.

For companies like Chevron and ExxonMobil, the revolt underscores the importance of the social part of the environmental, social and governance principles designed to keep workers and locals happy in places where they operate.

The two US majors participate in the Tengiz oil field on the Caspian Sea where workers have been protesting. The consortium developing the Karachaganak gas condensate field, led by Shell and Eni, is also braced for trouble.

The Karachaganak companies have a long history of dispute over profit-sharing with the state.

An under-pressure leader — be it Tokayev or somebody else — could easily be tempted to put the squeeze anew on the oil firms, who settled the most recent spat in 2020 by handing over more than \$1 billion.

However, that outcome may provide some protection. Under its terms, the state also got a larger slice of royalty revenue from Kazakhstan's 1.6 million barrels/day of production. With the oil price now above \$80, Tokayev should have plenty of cash to spend on appeasing his disenfranchised populace.

Ripping up contracts could hurt investment and even production, threatening those financial flows. Similarly, healthy oil receipts lower the cost of government borrowing. With national debt at just 27 per cent of GDP, there's lots of scope for Tokayev to mortgage his way out of trouble.

A shakedown of Big Oil might be doubly counterproductive. — Reuters

Paradoxically, high energy prices provide some cover against hasty renegotiation of contracts



ALUMINIUM ROLLS

An employee works at the production line of aluminium rolls at a factory in Zouping, Shandong province, China. Aluminium rose back towards \$3,000 a tonne on Friday as the amount of metal available in London Metal Exchange warehouses fell and traders worried that high energy costs would force more smelters to cut output, worsening a supply shortage. — Reuters

The power and poison of MMT



KOICHI HAMADA

The author, a Professor Emeritus at Yale University, was a special adviser to former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

MMT HOLDS THAT, AS LONG AS DEBT IS DENOMINATED IN A COUNTRY'S OWN CURRENCY, ITS GOVERNMENT CANNOT DEFAULT

When Democratic Senator Joe Manchin announced that he would not support US President Joe Biden's Build Back Better Act — effectively dooming the president's signature legislative initiative — he cited America's "staggering debt."

His concerns echoed those of Biden's Republican opponents, who insist that all that spending would expand the deficit and leave future generations groaning under the weight of a heavy tax burden.

But would it? Proponents of Modern Monetary Theory would beg to differ. The Build Back Better Act's detractors subscribe to the conventional Ricardian assumption that, over time, a government must balance its budget, just like a private firm.

But MMT holds that, as long as debt is denominated in a country's own currency, its government cannot default. Excessive government spending can fuel inflation, but as long as prices are stable, governments can spend away, using fiscal deficits — rather than tax revenues — to support employment and finance public goods.

While MMT is not new, it has been gaining traction in recent years. And a significant share of its following nowadays comes across almost as zealots, unwilling to brook any dissent.

Meanwhile, mainstream economists largely regard MMT as tantamount to professional heresy, with some avoiding so much as uttering its name. Needless to say, the rigid stances of MMT's devotees

and detractors have not lent themselves to productive discussion.

This is a serious loss for policymakers, because MMT includes both problematic propositions and perfectly reasonable — even highly useful — positions. In the latter category, the idea that stands out is essentially functional finance theory.

Proposed by Abba Lerner in 1943, FFT holds that, because governments borrowing in their own currency can always print money to service their debts, but still face inflation risks, they should aim to balance supply and demand at full employment, rather than fret about balancing the budget. In Lerner's view, well-targeted deficit spending is an effective way for governments to "maintain prosperity."

FFT supports the case for Build Back Better, which includes spending on goods like education, infrastructure, and the green transition.

The Biden administration claims that the act would be financed entirely with tax revenues. But even if that turned out not to be the case, as his detractors predict, wouldn't inadequate infrastructure, depleted human capital, and a planet ravaged by climate change hurt future generations more?

To be sure, US policymakers broadly recognise the importance of such investments, especially in infrastructure; the US Congress recently passed, with bipartisan support, a \$1 trillion spending plan that aims to advance objectives like overhauling the electricity grid, upgrading railways, and expanding access to high-

speed Internet.

But even some Democrats demanded that the new funds contained in the package be entirely offset by new tax revenue — a development that highlights enduring resistance to the logic of MMT (or FFT).

And yet, as the *Wall Street Journal's* James Mackintosh recently argued, this may be largely a "rhetorical" issue. After all, he notes, "the infrastructure act is, in fact, debt-financed anyway."

And it may well be that many of Build Back Better's supporters are not convinced by Biden's claims that tax revenues will offset the new spending, but are not that concerned about it. But MMT and FFT are not synonymous.

MMT includes additional proposition that, in my view, are unsound. The first is that monetary policy should be conducted in such a way that it facilitates fiscal-policy decisions, such as by maintaining a constant (very low) interest rate. This expresses a crucial feature of post-Keynesian economics: interest rates, rather than money supply, are the key variables. This defies conventional economic thinking, which focuses on the interaction of stock and flow variables and the role of expectations.

More important, if interest rates are held constant, and prices start to rise, inflation could snowball. MMT proponents would advocate tax hikes as a way to manage aggregate demand and control inflation. But, given what we know about asset dynamics, this would be a hard sell.

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'Ocean battery' targets renewable energy dilemma

JOSHUA MELVIN

A wind turbine sitting idle on a calm day or spinning swiftly when power demand is already met poses a problem for renewables, and is one researchers think can be tackled under the sea.

In one vision, offshore wind farms could use seawater to essentially store energy until it's needed, helping wean humanity off fossil fuels. "We came up with a solution that we call the ocean battery," Frits Blik, CEO of Dutch startup Ocean Grazer said while showing off the system at the CES tech fair in Las Vegas.

Amid the growing push away from

climate-warming energy sources like coal, stockpiling green energy is key, experts say.

That's because nature does not always deliver wind — or sun — at the moment when electricity is most in demand.

Blik's "ocean battery" relies on massive flexible bladders on the seabed, which are filled up with seawater by the wind farm.

When the power is needed, the pressure of the ocean squeezes the water through the system on the seafloor that includes turbines — and the result is electricity.

A key consideration with energy is cost, and storage systems involving some type of battery are not only very expensive but also at risk of

leaks or contamination in an ocean environment.

Systems that rely on pressure are already used in hydroelectric dams that pump water into the reservoir behind the dam when electricity demand falls, effectively storing it to come back through the facility's turbines.

The US Department of Energy traces the concept, called "pumped storage hydropower," to Italy and Switzerland in the 1890s, though facilities can now be found all around the world.

As for the underwater version of this type of storage, Ocean Grazer is not alone in trying to make it work.

FLASC, a spin-off of the University of Malta, has a system that uses

renewably made electricity to pump water into a chamber that contains under-pressure air, which can then turn a hydraulic turbine to generate power.

Another initiative called StEnSea (Stored energy in the sea), uses hollow concrete spheres under the pressure of the deep ocean, and was tested in a German lake in 2016.

Blik, the Ocean Grazer CEO, said undersea systems take advantage of the pressure below the ocean that is free, while creating a system that he said is about 80 per cent efficient in storing energy.

He sees storage systems as key for renewables, which have boomed as the price to produce such energy has dropped and made them a steadily

growing part of the energy mix worldwide.

Renewables are the fastest-growing source in the United States, increasing 42 per cent from 2010 to 2020, according to the nonprofit Center for Climate and Energy Solutions. Yet deploying systems like the "ocean battery" on the scale needed to work as part of an electricity grid is still years away.

Blik said his company aims to have an offshore system in place by 2025, though one will be deployed onshore in the northern Netherlands by 2023. Though various aspects of energy storage via pressure are not new, the pairing of it with green energy sources carries significant potential.

— AFP

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**Announcement of Capital Reduction**

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Khoor Al Siabi United LLC ENT**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1099145**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from **RO 250,000 to 50,000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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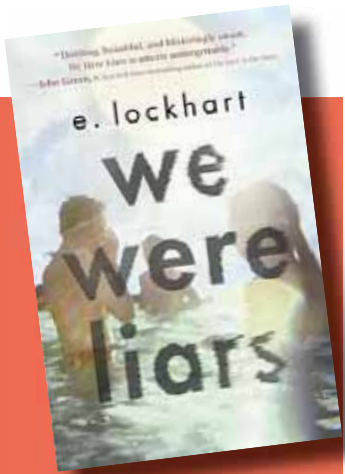
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## Saffron, the King of spices, grown locally

Recently, Hatim al Fahdi, a resident from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, tried to replant this agricultural product, and eventually succeeded in planting the Omani Saffron. Hatim became the first Omani who revive the planting of this precious agricultural product in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar...**P20**

### CEREMONY

#### READ



**WE WERE LIARS**  
BY E. LOCKHART

A mysterious young adult novel about a wealthy family who spends every summer on their private island. The story focuses on the main character, Cadence. After Cadence suffers a head injury during one of the summers, she cannot remember almost anything from that trip to the island.

## Golden Globes to be private event with no live-stream

**THE GOLDEN GLOBES** will be a private event this year with no live-stream, organisers said, as they prepare to hold a pared-down ceremony on Sunday with no celebrity red carpet following controversy last year.

Dramas “The Power of the Dog” and “Belfast” lead nominations with seven nods each, and winners will be announced online. Last year, broadcaster NBC dropped plans to televise the event following criticism of the Hollywood Foreign Press

Association (HFPA), which votes on the annual film and television awards — one of the biggest ahead of the Oscars. The HFPA was criticised for the lack of racial diversity among its members and critics also raised questions over

whether close relationships with movie studios may have swayed choices for nominees and winners. In October, the HFPA said it had added 21 new members, six of whom are Black. “This year’s event is going to



be a private event and will not be live-streamed,” organisers said on the Golden Globes official Twitter page late on Thursday. “We will be providing real-time updates on winners on the Golden Globes website and our social media.” Earlier this week, the HFPA said there would be no audience or red carpet at the event, which would also “shine a light on the (group’s) long-established philanthropy work”. It has also banned gifts and favours and implemented diversity and sexual harassment training for members. The group, which numbers just over 100, plans to further expand this year. Rapper and actor Snoop Dogg announced the nominations for the 79th Golden Globes last month. — **Reuters**



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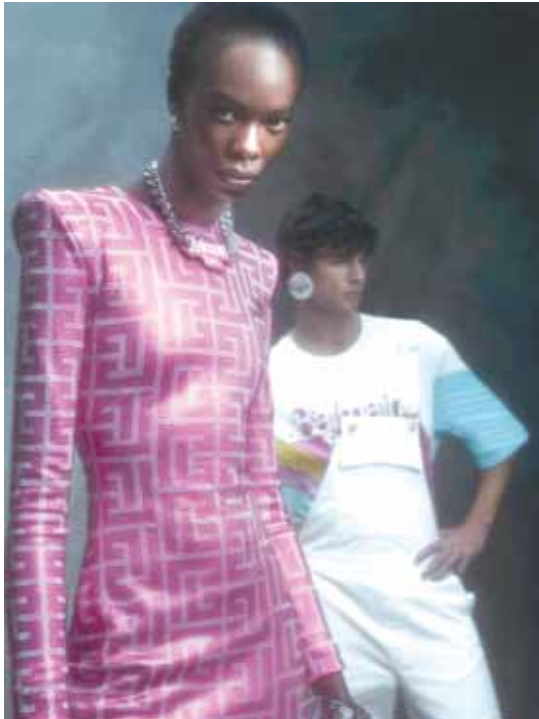
## INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



## AROUND THE WORLD

### FASHION

# Barbie and Balmain Want to Make Toys the Next Big Fashion Frontier



**IT'S THE FIRST** two weeks of the new year, but the competition to win the 2022 fashion collaboration game, that ever-escalating race to come up with the most eye-popping, head-shaking counterintuitive pairing of brands, has already begun.

First out of the gate: Balmain, the French high fashion house, and Barbie, the ultimate plastic doll. It may signal the official breaching of the next big fashion frontier: the world of toys. Though the marriage of Mattel iconography and material iconography is not exactly what you might expect.

There is no doll involved: Instead there is a 50-piece Barbie-inspired collection for grown-ups. It is modelled by racially diverse avatars and will include three nonfungible tokens of one-off looks to be auctioned online, each of which comes with a doll-size physical design, thus extending Barbie's reach into the digital collectible space.

And most pointedly, both the collection and the NFT looks are unisex: Barbie clothing that erases the Ken-Barbie divide. After all, even in the era of the first female vice-president, when Barbie and all the antiquated female stereotypes she can represent seem irrelevant, the collection is disarmingly appealing. It was designed with a dash of irony filtered through pink glasses and the giant grin of a boy who once felt he wasn't supposed to play with dolls and has now been given free rein to reimagine the most popular one in the world.

"Having Barbie in my Balmain army, making a collection inspired by her where there are no boy clothes or girl clothes, is my small revenge," said Olivier Rousteing, creative director of Balmain. "I think Barbie represents a joyful dream world. There's nothing wrong with a dream. But let's push the dream and not dream of the 1950s or 1960s, but 2022. For me, it's a lot more than just a commercial project. It's very emotional."

He was speaking, he said, from personal experience — "as a kid, I did play with Barbies and did feel some rejection for it" — which was the reason he was interested in taking his relationship with Mattel beyond the dress-the-doll phase.

Rousteing previously made looks for the Claudia Schiffer Barbie and, in 2021, invited a computer-generated Barbie and Ken to the Balmain digital fashion show. And he is but one of a long list of designers who have made clothes for the doll, including Jean-Paul Gaultier, Michael Kors, Donatella Versace, Diane von Furstenberg and Karl Lagerfeld. — **NYTservices**

### MUSIC

# Music to Remember



By Maggie Jeans OBE  
Photos by Captain Ralph Wood

**THE AL BUSTAN** Palace Ritz Carlton Hotel hosted its annual complimentary Festive Concert last week to welcome in 2022. The 250 people who attended were in for a rare musical treat after two long years of Covid restrictions. The audience was masked and the seating was well spaced for the first live classical concert in nearly two years. The venue was the Majan Ballroom not the Oman Auditorium and the star of the evening was the organ, installed by the London firm Mander in 1985 by the late HM Sultan Qaboos for the GCC conference for which the hotel was originally constructed.

This organ is similar to the one at Magdalen College, Oxford and although small packs a punch when pulling out all the stops! The first organ arrived in Oman in 1975 and is now residing in Ghala Church and a further 9 organs in Oman followed, including the magnificent German-built Orgelbau Klais pipe organ at the Royal Opera House Muscat which graces the stage of the auditorium and runs on railway tracks so that it can be easily moved. His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos was passionate about music and a talented organist himself.

The concert began with Corelli's Christmas Concerto and was followed by two chorales written by J S Bach, "Der Jahr alt ist vergangen", a reflective piece written for New Year's Eve and "In dir ist Freude" a jolly composition for New Year's Day. The first half concluded with Handel's Concerto in F for Organ & Strings. A short interval was followed by Vivaldi's Concerto in D minor for Organ and Strings.

The piece de resistance was Bach's Toccata and



Fugue in D minor BWV 565, The word "toccata" comes from the Italian toccare (to touch). This type of keyboard piece was designed to highlight the performer's technical ability — literally, how well the player could "touch" the keys. The toccata usually has a free form that sounds improvisational. This demanding piece was rendered with confidence and flare — a superb treat for the audience!

The organ is a highly complex musical instrument and with regular maintenance and playing will last for several centuries. Until recently, this was the task of Ian Hockley, lately Oman's Royal Organist who was centre stage last night cementing his growing international reputation, supported by a very talented string ensemble led by Luca Blasio who has been soloist and tutor to the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) since 2009.

Thanks also to Muscat Strings who upheld Oman's outstanding musical tradition. Welcome also to Riley Court-Wood, who recently came to Oman as conductor of the Sultanate's second orchestra, the Muscat Philharmonic.

The evening performance concluded with "Spring" from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi. Luca gave the audience a brilliant solo, played with joy. The entire piece was performed at the Bustan for the first time in Oman by ROSO with Luca Blasio in the lead under the baton of Paolo Olmi. Many of the audience remembered this landmark concert in 2013.

Organisers of the event thanked the enthusiasm of Nabil al Zadjali, the General Manager of the hotel, for making the event possible. It is hoped that the Bustan Palace may hopefully stage a second concert later in the year — watch this space!

### WORKOUT

# Pandemic fuels online exercise boom

**INTERACTIVE COMMENT SECTIONS** and virtual reality headsets: Internet-connected fitness gear and services have boomed during the pandemic as at-home athletes seek a proxy for gym life.

While home workouts long predate the coronavirus, they have taken on a social aspect that looks set to become the standard in a world reshaped by the pandemic.

"A big part of going to the gym together is sort of suffering together... you build a camaraderie around that," Jeremy Needham, who does customer education for US boxing fitness company Liteboxer, said at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas.

"And now that we don't share that space, at least in real time, we have to do it virtually," he added.

Like other companies that sell Internet-connected fitness gear, Liteboxer offers customers access to workouts, competitions and other features for a monthly charge — on top of the roughly \$1,200 wall-mounted machine.

The market for fitness tech has been growing for years, but the industry has gotten a boost in the last couple of years, similarly to how the pandemic accelerated e-commerce and remote working trends.

"Connected equipment exploded onto the scene in a big way as consumers had to shift the way to work out during the pandemic," CES organiser Consumer Technology Association (CTA) noted in an industry forecast.

Internet-connected exercise equipment was a nearly \$3.8 billion market in 2021, and double-digit percentage growth is expected this year, CTA's forecast said.

"(Customers) want connectivity," said Richard Kowalski, an analyst with CTA. "They want to engage with other people online."

Connected rowing machine maker Hydrow allows customers to comment and like others' workouts, and users have developed their own social media groups.

"You start talking to each other and then all of a sudden, you have a group of maybe six guys, you know, from all over the world," Aquil Abdullah, who leads workouts on the system, said.

"A guy is in London, a guy is out in California, a guy is down in Florida, and you have this community."

The machines, which sell for \$2,295, have the usual rowing bar and seat, but also a screen that allows clients to exercise along with instructors on the water, in locales from Miami to London.

"We do these workouts, and so that's part of building community and building those connections," said Abdullah, who rowed for the US at the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

But the connected fitness industry has shown some sensitivity to the changing conditions of the pandemic and the way it affects equipment users' lives.

Fitness firm Peloton's shares have been under pressure since early November, when the company cut its forecast as more consumers returned to reopening gyms.

Credit Suisse downgraded the firm in December, saying the market shifts have forced Peloton to increase advertising and discounting.

However, as cases of Covid's Omicron variant break records around the world, many are again hunkering down at home.

That shift could work in favour of home fitness tech companies.

CTA took a bullish perspective, saying "the growth trajectory suggests that health-conscious consumers are finding practicality and convenience in exercising at home, even as gyms and workout classes reopen." — **AFP**





# Saffron, the King of spices, grown locally

By Baraah al Mujaini  
Photos by: Hassan Al-Mayahi  
Instagram Acc: hh\_510

**A**l Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the Sultanate of Oman's mesmerising landscape destinations, where the distinguished weather, special nature and vibrant residents.

The Jabal has its own distinct weather conditions that facilitate planting special types of fruits, vegetables and flowers that rarely can be found elsewhere in Oman. Some of these plants are the sweet pomegranates, tasty guavas, colourful roses and many other types of plants that can be found only in Jabal Al Akhdhar.

We are very much familiar with the Iranian Saffron, but have you ever heard about Omani Saffron?

Saffron is a kind of plant that looks like a flower with reddish-purple colour. Plenty of flowers are used to extract a little amount of the Saffron that we buy.

There were some attempts to plant saffron in the past in Jabal Al Akhdhar, however, all went unnoticed and disappeared. Recently, Hatim al Fahdi, a resident from al Jabal Al Akhdhar, tried to replant this agricultural product, and eventually had succeed in planting the Omani Saffron. Hatim becomes the first Omani who revives the planting of this precious agricultural product in Jabal Al Akhdhar.

"The first reason is the environment I grew up in. It is mainly dependent on agricultural. Since I was a kid, I was so much involved with agriculture, I find myself interested in this sector even more as I practice the different agricultural activities with my family and friends", Hatim answered when asked about the reason behind choosing to revive this kind of plant. "The idea of Omani Saffron revival has been always a matter of negotiations in our community, at least for the recent time, especially when remembering how our ancestors had achieved it for the first time, and how suddenly it disappeared for several factors; one of which is the lack of the special care this type of flowers needed", he added.

Stepping for a new experience is always accompanied by some fears and concerns, so what were they for Hatim when he first decided to revive the Omani Saffron? "I had lots of questions in mind before stepping to this experience, I was asking myself to what extent this might work? What is the purpose of this? And many other questions", he said. "Mainly, I was thinking about the agricultural

challenges, which are concerned with the area required for this type of plant, watering process, fertilisers, pests and absolutely the time needed to get the saffron stigma required for the planting process", Hatim expressed his fears.

Unexpected challenges emerge in any new experience, and these challenges play a pivotal role in shaping the results which are depending on how it was managed. Hatim has also experienced several considerable obstacles, for instance seeking an appropriate land for planting the Saffron, in addition to the permit he had to get, and all the costly financial requirements he had to pay.

Amid all the challenges and fears, Hatim had expected the success of this experience; mainly because of the high quality saffron stigmas he had chosen and the perfect weather conditions of this year. All these factors played a critical role in achieving the high-quality of the Saffron planted by Hatim.

Furthermore, Hatim expressed his optimism regarding the quality of the Saffron. He believes the special Omani soil is the secret beyond this uniqueness of this Omani Saffron in the market. Besides, "It is 100% original", he stressed.

This unforgettable experience exposed Hatim to new lessons which are beneficial for him. Some of which are the importance of spreading the agricultural culture and knowledge among the generations, especially about those rare plants and flowers like Saffron. Also, reviving these types of semi-extinct plants will be fruitful for the economic and tourism sectors in Oman. "I am eagerly excited to re-plant Saffron many times in the future for trading, and I am requesting competent authorities to give me a hand to achieve my ambition in selling my Omani Saffron product", Hatim answered.

Lots of people complain about the expensive prices of most Omani products, particularly those which are produced in Jabal Al Akhdhar. However, Hatim sees that the prices are suitable when compared to effort the farmers exert. "I would only say to those people to put themselves on the farmers' situation. I also want to remind them that they are buying these products from farms, not companies neither investors or wealthy traders", he answered. Regarding the prices, Hatim said, "They are unstable, and they are influenced by external factors".

Hatim is feeling grateful for the Omani market as it supports the Omani products and contributes to its success and spread around different Omani governorates, yet there is always an ambition to have a massive market to promote and exhibit the variant Omani products from all Omani governorates.

