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NADAL BEATS MEDVEDEV AGAIN TO REACH ACAPULCO ATP FINAL



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AL MOROOJ DAIRY TO EXPAND RANGE OF CAMEL MILK-BASED PRODUCTS



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THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Abinader of the Dominican Republic, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly Dominican people. — ONA

FACT TO SUPPORT SPACE MISSION

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Omani technology firm ETCO signed an initial agreement with international digital technology specialist Tuatara to support the Sultanate of Oman's space mission: The Low Earth Orbit Project.

DETAILS ON P13

READ IN OPINION



WE HAVE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE
THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

IT'S TIME TO TAKE BACK THE CLASSROOM
RAY PETERSEN

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INSIDE



MUSCAT'S HOTEL ROOM INVENTORY TO SEE GROWTH

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DEADLY RAINS, FLOODS HIT EASTERN AUSTRALIA

P6

Russian troops advance in Ukraine



A general view shows damage to the upper floors of a building in Kyiv after it was reportedly struck by a Russian rocket. — AFP

Ministry of Labour gets RO 232.9m revenues

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

On the back of an increase in various fees and administrative charges, the Ministry of Labour witnessed a massive growth in its revenues in 2021.

According to figures released by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, permit fees for the recruitment of foreign workforce, which was among the highest among all, alone accounted to RO 217.4 million.

The total revenues from fees, work contracts, fines and others, according to the minister, amounted to RO 232.9 million during the previous year.

With regard to other revenues, the second-highest revenue of RO 9.4 million was from the Job Security Fund, followed by RO 4.8 million from fines relating to different labour violations.

REVIEW OF THE FEES

The announcement of these figures came amid a revelation that the ministry has already completed a review of the fees currently being charged for the issuance of work permits for expatriates.

"We have completed the review on visa fees, and it will be announced within a few weeks", the minister said, during a press conference last week.

TriDubai clinch Ironman honours

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 26

TriDubai claimed the top honours in the Ironman 70.3 Oman 2022 as home team Oman Triathlon emerged second here on Friday. Trilife.ru finished third in the race which offers qualifying slots for the Ironman 70.3 World Championship. The triathlon event included a one-loop 1.9 km swim course, one-loop 90 km bike course and three-loop 21.1 km run course. The event kicked off in the presence of Maitha bint Saif Al Mahrouqi, Undersecretary of the

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

A total of 561 participants from 50 countries took part in the competition.

The event began at the Waterfront Mall in Shatti Al Qurum with the swim course.

In the bike stage next, the riders went through Al Massa Mall, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos Street, Darsait Heights, Muttrah Waterfront, Al Bustan Palace, Darsait Bridge, Old Ministry of Sports Affairs building, Wadi Adei bridge, Amerat Police Station and back to Wadi Adei, Qurum Signal, Royal Opera House Muscat.

Least at risk of freshwater depletion

Even as many countries will probably face water stress in the coming years, the Sultanate of Oman is among the Arab countries least at risk of depleting freshwater. This is revealed in a new classification in a report on Arab countries most vulnerable to the dangers of depleting freshwater resources forever issued by the Arab Gulf Centre for Studies and Research in Kuwait. **DETAILS ON P2**

KYIV: Russia on Saturday ordered its troops to advance in Ukraine "from all directions" as the Ukrainian capital Kyiv imposed a blanket curfew and officials reported 198 civilian deaths. Kyiv residents took shelter to the sound of explosions as Ukraine's army said it had held back an assault on the capital but was fighting Russian troops which had infiltrated the city.

CRUISE MISSILES

Moscow said it had fired cruise missiles at military targets and would "develop the offensive from all directions" after accusing Ukraine of having "rejected" talks. But, on day three of Russia's invasion, a defiant Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed his country would never give in to the Kremlin. Zelensky spoke in a video message, wearing olive green military-style clothing and looking tired but determined.

"I am here. We will not lay down any weapons. We will defend our state, because our weap-

Zelensky spoke in a video message, wearing olive green military-style clothing and looking tired but determined

ons are our truth," the 44-year-old said. "Our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children and we will protect all of this."

He later said Ukraine had "derailed" the Russian plan of overthrowing him and urged Russians to pressure Putin into stopping the conflict. Ignoring warnings from the West, Russian President Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion that the UN refugee agency said has forced almost 116,000 people to flee to neighbouring countries. Tens of thousands more are estimated to be displaced within Ukraine, with many on the move to western areas of the country less affected by the fighting.

SEE ALSO P6

RO 3 billion investment in tourism sector by 2023

ALL SET TO TARGET INBOUND, DOMESTIC TOURISTS

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The government is working on new tourism policy, which will consider the requirements and basic principles of Oman Vision 2040, the Minister of Heritage and Tourism has said.

During a recent interaction, he said around RO 700 million is spent by citizens on foreign tourism. "Therefore, the new investment programmes and recreational projects will try to reduce the gap in the amount spent abroad and for domestic tourism."

"The government is working hard to resolve the issue of providing basic facilities at various tourist sites in the country", Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said.

He said over the next two years there will be a change in the level of services provided at various sites.

He said that traditional neighbourhoods and settlements are protected by law and the priority is for the maintenance of the heritage monuments including castles, forts, towers, and the aflaj system.

The new investment programmes and recreational projects will try to reduce the gap in the amount spent abroad and for domestic tourism

SALIM BIN MOHAMMED AL MAHROUQI
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

The country's largest entertainment project called Al Sharq will be ready by the mid of 2024 in Barka. The other projects include Al Nakheel Tourism Resort Project and the one in Qurayat.

INVESTMENTS

The minister said that the government seeks to attract investments worth RO 3 billion by 2023 with the focus on developing public beaches in partnership with small and medium enterprises.

"We have seen the dissatisfaction of some tourists and local population about poor basic services at some tourist sites. The ministry is trying hard to solve this matter soon", Al Mahrouqi had said earlier.

The minister said projects will be implemented in Dhofar Governorate on a priority basis, which includes the establishment of visitor centre and heritage sites.

"Promotional programmes have not been activated during the past two years due to the pandemic, and the next one aims to increase the intensity of promotion, presence and employment of all possible means", the minister added.

Al Mahrouqi also mentioned the opening of integrated service stations along the Al Batinah Expressway.

The government will provide importance to provide financing to small and medium-sized enterprises through easy availability of loans at low-interest rates. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said the government plans to take advantage of the World Cup 2022 in partnership with Oman Air and Omran.



Final stage of Bilarab award for architectural design begins today

MUSCAT: The final stage of the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design will begin today at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Ten entries shortlisted for the award's final stage were invited to present details of their projects

before the jury for two days to be discussed elaborately from the technical and engineering perspectives. The organisers of the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design earlier received a long list of 356 entries that satisfied

the award's conditions. Entrants who did not meet the conditions for participation and those who failed to submit the initial delivery requirements such as illustrations, site plan, or detailed description of the project, were rejected.

ANNOUNCEMENT
The 10 winning projects of the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design will be announced on March 15. The judging panel earlier made observations for the qualifying projects with the aim

of developing and improving them. The entrants are required to present their project in an integrated manner with regard to the technical and engineering aspects. The entries submitted for the award varied from architectural

landmarks, some of which are inspired by the Omani culture, to tourist attractions and commercial establishments inspired by Omani history, in addition to parks and open commercial markets equipped with various facilities.
— ONA



Information minister opens *Al Arabi* magazine exhibition at MIBF

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair 2022, on Saturday opened a photo exhibition organised by the Kuwait *Al Arabi* magazine on the sidelines of the Muscat International Book Fair. Al Harrasi and the attendees were briefed about the photographs and its topics by Ibrahim al Mulaifi, Editor-in-Chief of *Al Arabi* magazine. The exhibition showcases pictures from the Sultanate of Oman since the early 70s depicting themes such as people, place and culture reflecting the blessed Renaissance led by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA) during the exhibition opening, the minister said: "There is no doubt that *Al Arabi* magazine is one of the



most important Arab cultural magazines that brought culture closer to the Arab reader in general using simple but deep language that can easily reach the general public. *Al Arabi* is not an elite magazine but rather a magazine that suits all segments of readers regardless of their cultural background and educational level." The minister of information pointed out that the Sultanate of Oman, with its history, culture,

civilisational uniqueness, renaissance, and lifestyles was present in many of the articles published by the magazine throughout its long history. He added that *Al Arabi* magazine had, and is still having, a strong presence among Omani readers and intellectuals. This exhibition, the minister said, offers an overview of the topics and articles published by *Al Arabi* magazine to its readers about the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Oman and Saudi Arabia review higher education cooperation

MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, received Dr Issa bin Hassan al Ansari, President of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU), and his accompanying delegation, on Saturday. The minister welcomed the delegation and briefed them about the educational institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Al Ansari presented an historic overview of the establishment of the university explaining the most prominent principles, values and policies on which the university is based, as well as the international and regional partnerships linked to the university. He explained the most prominent academic, research and societal achievements of



PMU. The two sides discussed fields of joint cooperation between the ministry and PMU. The minister pointed to the ministry's interest in benefiting from the university's experience in the field of foresight studies, artificial intelligence and cyber security and attracting international students, managing

endowment institutions and upgrading international rankings. The minister gave directives to set up a joint committee between the ministry and PMU to exchange experiences in various research and academic fields, and to measure the possibility of establishing joint funding sources to serve research studies in both countries.

Oman least at risk of freshwater depletion

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutyvp

Even as many countries will probably face water stress in the coming years, the Sultanate of Oman is among the Arab countries least at risk of depleting freshwater.

This is revealed in a new classification in a report on Arab countries most vulnerable to the dangers of depleting freshwater resources forever issued by the Arab Gulf Centre for Studies and Research in Kuwait.

"The Sultanate of Oman ranked nineteenth, Somalia ranked twentieth, and Comoros came at the bottom of the ranking, and the last three countries were ranked as the least Arab countries facing the dangers of running out of fresh water," the report said.

In the Sultanate of Oman, groundwater accounts for roughly 78 per cent of the water supply. Most are renewable in nature, being recharged annually by rainfall or through surface water infiltration. Non-renewable groundwater exists in the interior regions in the Al Najd, Al Masarat and Rimal Al Sharqiya.

At the same time, desalinated water accounts for the next highest share of water supply, about 15 per cent. Currently, there are nearly 100 desalination plants in the Sultanate of Oman with roughly a 50-50 split regarding seawater or brackish water as the feedstock.

Surface water accounts for about 6 per cent of the total water supply. The annual average wadi flow is estimated at 211 million m3. While average rainfall is estimated at 9.5 billion m3 per year, about 80 per cent of this precipitation evaporates.



In the Sultanate of Oman, groundwater accounts for roughly 78 per cent of the water supply. Most are renewable in nature, being recharged annually by rainfall or through surface water infiltration

According to the report, which was based on the study of different research and statistical sources in each Arab country, Palestine topped the list of Arab countries threatened with freshwater depletion. "Various indicators reveal the increased exposure of Palestinian environmental resources to stress, especially at the level of shrinking freshwater reserves,"

the report points out. Qatar ranked as the second most Arab country facing the dangers of depleting fresh groundwater, followed by Jordan in third place, Lebanon in fourth place, Egypt in fifth place and Kuwait in sixth position. The UAE ranked seventh, while Libya ranked eighth, Bahrain ranked ninth, Syria ranked tenth, Mauritania ranked eleventh, Tunisia ranked twelfth, Algeria ranked thirteenth, followed by Morocco in the fourteenth place. Sudan ranked fifteenth, Saudi Arabia ranked sixteenth, Yemen ranked seventeenth and Iraq ranked eighteenth. The Middle East region depends heavily upon groundwater and desalinated seawater and faces exceptional water-related challenges for the foreseeable future.

Big jump in MoL revenues

FROM P1

Dr Mahad said that the new labour law is in the final stages and has reached the Council of Ministers for approval. In line with its initiative to address the increasing demand for jobs by nationals, the ministry took a step forward through its decision No 12/2021 and increased the fees for obtaining work permits for recruiting non-Omani workforce. Besides the significant increase in the fees, the ministerial decision made those fees specific to different levels of positions and different types of

professions and occupations. For many years till June last year, the fees associated with a work permit of recruiting non-Omani workforce was to some extent a fixed cost and did not vary based on the level of position, salary range, or type of profession to be occupied by such workforce. He also revealed that the ministry, in cooperation with other departments concerned, detected a number of labour law violations during the period. As many as 58,720 expatriate workers including both males and females left the country last year. The minister also revealed that there was a request to study

raising the minimum wage, which presently stands at RO 325. "This matter requires a great effort and includes studying the market conditions besides other factors, such as the situation of the economy, as well as the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic," he said. Dr Mahad said that the ministry will provide high-quality electronic services that meet the needs of the beneficiaries of the services it provides, including working to complete the development of the work permit system to raise the level of readiness of the system.



CPA chairman reviews consumer protection efforts in Al Wusta

MUSCAT: Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), visited Al Wusta Governorate to review efforts undertaken by the Authority in monitoring the markets and ensuring the suppliers' commitment to the consumer protection laws and regulations.

The CPA chairman toured a number of markets in the governorate to check traders' abidance by the law and ensure they are not exploiting the conditions to hike commodity prices.

He stressed the importance of cooperation on the part of suppliers and their commitment to laws and legislation that contribute to the stability of markets stemming from the CPA's keenness to provide commodities that are safe for consumers.

During the visit, the



CPA chairman met with administrators and inspectors and closely examined the workflow mechanism. He praised the efforts aimed at monitoring the markets and intensifying inspection, urging CPA officials to intensify efforts to serve consumers and speed up the provision of all services rendered to consumers, emphasising the importance of consumers' awareness in enabling the CPA to accomplish its tasks effectively.

The CPA chairman's visit coincides with the 'stick to the original' campaign which aims at stemming commercial fraud in all governorates. The campaign follows the issuance of the GCC Anti Commercial-Fraud Law which aims at strengthening the legal system to protect the markets from harmful practices and provide more protection for consumers.



Low visibility alert

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

There are chances of an increase in relative humidity with the possibility of fog formation and low horizontal visibility over the parts of the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, South Al

Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Wusta, and Dhofar, according to the latest weather forecast issued by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The authority has advised all to take precautions during fog and low visibility especially while driving and doing outdoor activities.

IBRI SOUQ

Friday's habta is back in action



TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Omanis flock with livestock and several types of vegetables, fruits, and local products at the Ibri Souq. This is the scene at the market every Friday morning, as weekly 'habta' is back in action.

The old market souq witnesses an active commercial movement since the early morning on Fridays. Local traders come here from various wilayats and villages to sell the meat, poultry, foodstuffs, sweets, spices, etc. They also bring with them vegetables, fruits and utensils.

The sale of sheep and cows, called 'Munadah', are maximum at the souq on Fridays. "Habta of Ibri has become an important place among the local peo-



ple since ancient times. During festivals and official occasions, the market opens early morning and continues till 11am," said a trader who regularly comes to the souq.

Last Friday, the 'Al Habta' recorded a high footfall. Some 1,000 sheep and 300 cows were sold, and the price ranged between RO 25 and 300.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the souq visitors are following the protocols.

There have been requests from some quarters to renovate the market. There were plans also, but that has not yet been implemented.

"It needs renovation because the structure is very old surrounded by walls and old houses built of mud and stones," said a souq visitor.

Children flock to book fest

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Children are flocking to 26th Muscat International Book Fair at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) to take part in various educational and scientific activities. Avenue for child protection in tune with the Sultanate of Oman's motto of moulding an 'informed and empowered children of tomorrow' is largely attracting the bibliophile and writers and educationists.

The aesthetically pleasing pavilion of Children First Society' (CFS) is where one can get to know the status of children in Oman, facts pertaining to their education and development, and how well our children can be protected against real as well as virtual threats in life. Speaking to the *Observer*, Dr Uhood al Balushi, Deputy Chair of the Society, said CFS is an association that takes care of the issues of children and conducts awareness campaigns, training courses and other programmes for their overall protection and well-being in the Sultanate of Oman.

"We provide support and services to children of Oman as well as those who take care of the children such as families, parents, guardians, those who run child protection fronts and the like", said Dr Uhood who is also the founding member of CFS.

Started in 2009, the Society caters to the needs of a wide range of children and that's the reason

we are working on online bullying, Internet threats and the like.

"There are 3 different facets of children that the Society takes care of. They are education, health and culture. And as far as the Society is concerned, these three are the most important aspects of both Omani and expat children that need to be addressed."

The OFS, moving very closely with different kinds of institutions in both government and private sectors such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Development and the civil society of Oman, has helped a number of children and families as the emotional quotient of the children is concerned.

PROTECTING RIGHTS

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC), in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), has executed various projects that underline the importance of protecting rights of individuals and upheld children's rights and the Society works very closely with the OHRC.

"Our motto is to uphold human rights and the rights of children predominate the activities of the Society. Most importantly, protecting children from negligence and abuse is of great importance and is implemented in cooperation with various organisations like Omani Women's Associations (OWA) and the like", said Dr Al Balushi.



Our motto is to uphold human rights and the rights of children predominate the activities of the Society. Most importantly, protecting children from negligence and abuse is of great importance and is implemented in cooperation with various organisations like Omani Women's Associations (OWA) and the like

**DR UHOOD
AL BALUSHI**
Deputy Chair of the Society
CFS





Oman leads in banana production in GCC

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is a leader in producing bananas among the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries. Banana cultivation in the Sultanate of Oman occupies the second place after date palm cultivation. At the level of the Gulf countries, the Sultanate of Oman is at the forefront in producing bananas, and Al Batinah and Dhofar governorates contribute to the highest banana production.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is making great efforts to develop the production of this crop. It has introduced some new varieties for testing and evaluation, and it is expected that it will have a positive impact because of its significant impact on expanding the base of banana genetic resources.

The General Directorate of Agricultural and Animal Research, represented by the Tissue Agriculture and Biotechnology Research Centre, contributes to supplying farmers with different varieties of bananas. The centre has developed 11 banana varieties including (Malindi, Fard, Cavendish, Razat, AlAhmar, Boufan, Williams, Nagal and Pompeii Green) as part of developing economic fruit types and varieties. The project is funded by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund. In addition, more than 30,000 seedlings are produced annually in the centre for the various projects of the ministry, and they are distributed and sold according to Ministerial Resolution 95/2010.

Portable device for on-site testing of pesticides in food samples

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

An Omani research team has developed a portable device for detecting pesticides in environmental and food samples. The project by principal investigator Iman al Yahyai (pictured) from Sultan Qaboos University is among the 13 winning projects in the 8th National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The project was awarded in the Cultural, Social and Basic Sciences field in the Young Researcher's category.

For this research project, Iman and her team developed a portable device for on-site testing of pesticides in environmental and food samples by establishing chemiluminescence (CL) system resulting in a multi-emission peaks for selective determination of deltamethrin (DM). This system is based on the enhancing effect of polyphosphate (PP) on graphene quantum dots (GQDs) – potassium permanganate (KMnO4) CL reaction.

She said the magnificence of this work lies in providing a system that has an ability to emit light from more than one emitting species at different wavelengths under the same experimental



Picture for illustration

conditions. Herein, a paper cutting fabrication technique was used to make the simple square shaped lab on a paper device. Several experimental parameters were thoroughly optimised, including the paper size, the order of injecting the analyte and CL reagents and concentration and volumes of reagents.

The requirement of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to attach a certificate providing the maximum permissible percentage of pesticide content in local and imported foods increased the burden on importers due to the high cost and

length of time required to conduct the analysis.

She added that the need for farmers to transport their products over long distances to specialised laboratories can lead to food spoilage in many cases, reducing their profits. Moreover, trying to monitor the food quality, covering the whole fruit and vegetable products, results in a high overload on the government, which means spending a lot of money in providing the required instrumentations and specialist technicians, increasing the analysis cost and the time needed to perform the test.

This research project was conducted

The project by principal investigator Iman al Yahyai from Sultan Qaboos University is among the 13 winning projects in the 8th National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation

by Iman al Yahyai, Dr Haider al Lawati and Dr Javad Hassanzadeh. It was published in *Sensors and Actuators B: Chemical* journal with an impact factor of 7.460.

Iman said, "It is an absolute honour to receive the National Research Award instituted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. This award is very much important for me, and a significant milestone in my life to encourage me to devote more efforts, and I hope to continue doing my best in the future. I am tremendously thankful to my supervisor Dr Haider al Lawati for motivating me to continue having the highest level of dedication to accomplish this work in this way."

RO 3 billion investment in tourism sector

FROM P1

The experience on maintenance of heritage sites such as castles and forts in partnership with the private sector has been successful in investing in castles and fortresses such as Nizwa Fort, Jibreen Fort and Bahla.

Through the five-year plans to reach

the goals of the vision, the government seeks to attract investment, financial sustainability, and job creation.

The ministry has said various facilities, such as zipline, will be added at tourist sites in Salalah, including in Atin Plain and Wadi Darbat, in the coming winter season.

Earlier, the minister said the work has begun on the construction of the Bassa Beach development project in Khasab as part of the several projects planned for the governorate.

The agreement involves developing a land area of about 73,000 sqm that will feature a four-star resort and a

public park. Bassa has strategically located near Khasab Airport and 2.6 km from Khasab's city centre.

Some citizens have raised the fact that foreign tourists generally spend time inside hotels and not much is spent during their stay here in the Sultanate of Oman.

Hotel room inventory in Muscat to see steady growth despite Covid

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Despite the pandemic headwinds that the global hospitality industry has had to contend with over the past two years, new hotel development in prime tourism destinations in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE remains substantial even by global standards.

According to new research commissioned by Arabian Travel Market and conducted at the end of 2021 by hotel market intelligence and global benchmarking company STR, Makkah and Doha are both expanding their hotel room inventory by 76 per cent, followed by Riyadh, Medina, and Muscat with 66 per cent, 60 per cent, and 59 per cent growth respectively.

In Dubai, rooms growth stands at 26 per cent, considering its existing base and following years of continuous hotel development — it is still more than double the global average.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME – Arabian Travel Market (ATM), said, "With the global average sitting at 12 per



cent, we are witnessing multiple GCC destinations growing at six times those rates."

"These figures coupled with the ongoing relaxation in travel restrictions will undoubtedly encourage travel professionals throughout the Middle East and further afield. As such we are expecting a substantial increase in the number of participants at our live event this year, especially in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE," she added.

According to the report, there are almost 2.5 million ho-

tel rooms currently under contract around the world, 3.2 per cent or 80,000 rooms of that supply is taking place in Saudi Arabia alone.

Furthermore, although Expo 2020 in Dubai is now drawing to a close (March 31), the mega event has been the catalyst for accelerated hotel room growth in the UAE with almost 50,000 rooms still due to open across the Emirates.

Following closely behind is Doha with final preparations for the Fifa World Cup 2022 now being put in place. Doha

is on track to deliver 23,000 hotel rooms pre- and post-World Cup 2022, adding to the country's burgeoning hotel property portfolio.

"Whilst the actual numbers may not seem particularly significant in comparison to the global hotel room pipeline, the growth above existing supply is staggering and underlines government strategy to diversify their economies away from hydrocarbon receipts and their confidence in the growth of tourism throughout the region," said Curtis.



Call for Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM) (Super International SAOC)

The Board of Directors of Super International S.A.O.C. inviting Its Shareholders to attend the AGM Meeting at the given date time and venue.

The Agenda and terms of the meeting are attached to the Shareholder reports. The shareholder has the right to appoint any other person on his behalf to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the decisions taken by the Board.

You are requested to be at least half an hour ahead of time in the meeting.

Any enquiry on the agenda can be answered by

Mr. Younis Al Namani GSM # 92949673.

Meeting Date: Wednesday, 16th March 2022.

Time: 12:30 Noon.

Venue: Super Plaza – 2nd Floor. Way No. 4805 – Al Azaeba Muscat – Sultanate of Oman

هيئة تنمية المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة
SMEs Development Authority



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

SME invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

TENDER NAME	TENDER NO	LAST DATE FOR ELECTRONIC PURCHASE	LAST DAY TO SUBMIT BIDE	DOCUMENT VALUE
Maintenance of authority administration building in Al-Dhahirah, Ibri state	SMEs 8/2022	24/3/2022	3/4/2022	R.O. 25/-
Renovation of Existing building at Al-Khuwair For Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority	SMEs 9/2022	24/3/2022	3/4/2022	R.O. 180/-



Russian forces pound Ukraine for third day



People wait for a train to Poland at the railway station of the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. – AFP

KYIV: Russian forces pounded Ukrainian cities with artillery and cruise missiles on Saturday for a third day running but a defiant President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the capital Kyiv remained in Ukrainian hands.

As hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fled westwards towards the European Union, top Russian security official and ex-president Dmitry Medvedev said Moscow’s military operations would be waged relentlessly until their goals were achieved.

Ignoring weeks of Western warnings, President Vladimir Putin launched a three-pronged invasion of Ukraine on Thursday, saying the “neo-Nazis” in power in Kyiv threatened Russia’s security. The assault threatens to upend Europe’s post-Cold War order.

In a significant ratcheting up of

KYIV STILL IN UKRAINIAN HANDS

Russia’s rhetoric, Medvedev said new Western sanctions were a sign of the West’s impotence in the standoff and hinted at a severing of diplomatic ties, saying it was time to “padlock the embassies”.

After a night of airstrikes, there were some signs of panic in Kyiv. Reuters reporters saw Ukrainian soldiers and a group of women running along the street. Nearby, Ukrainian soldiers forced a man in civilian clothes to lie down on the pavement.

Kyiv’s mayor Vitali Klitschko said there was currently no major Russian military presence in Kyiv, but added that saboteur groups were active. The metro system is now serving only as a shelter for citizens and trains have stopped

running, he said.

Klitschko said 35 people, including two children, had been wounded overnight. He later announced the extension of a night-time curfew, which will now run from 5 pm until 8 am.

At least 198 Ukrainians, including three children, have been killed and 1,115 people wounded so far in Russia’s invasion, Interfax quoted Ukraine’s Health Ministry as saying. It was unclear whether the numbers comprised only civilian casualties.

“We have withstood and are successfully repelling enemy attacks. The fighting goes on,” Zelenskyy said in a video message posted on his social media. “We have the courage to defend our

homeland, to defend Europe.”

Britain said the bulk of Russian forces were now 30 km from the centre of Kyiv and said Russia had yet to gain control of Ukraine’s airspace.

The Kremlin said Putin had ordered troops to stop advancing on Friday but that they were moving forwards on Saturday after Kyiv refused to negotiate. Both Moscow and Kyiv had previously raised the possibility of peace talks but they came to nothing.

Ukraine, a democratic nation of 44 million people, won independence from Moscow in 1991 and wants to join Nato and the EU, goals Russia opposes. Putin says Ukraine is an illegitimate state carved out of Russia, a view Ukrainians see as aimed at erasing their distinctive history and identity. — Reuters

Biden approves \$350m military aid

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden instructed the US State Department to release up to an additional \$350 million worth of weapons from US stocks to Ukraine on Friday as it struggles to repulse a Russian invasion.

In a memorandum to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Biden directed that \$350 million allocated through the Foreign Assistance Act be designated for Ukraine’s defence.

Ukraine has been asking for Javelin anti-tank weapons and Stinger missiles to shoot down aircraft.

On Saturday, Blinken said in a statement that this third authorisation for weapons shipments to Ukraine was “unprecedented.” The Pentagon said the weapons included anti-armour, small arms and various munitions in support of Ukraine’s front-line defenders.

William and Kate tweet Ukraine support

LONDON: Britain’s Duke and Duchess of Cambridge have expressed their solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

William and Kate tweeted their support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and “all of Ukraine’s people” in a tweet personally signed off with their initials.

The couple included the flag of Ukraine in their tweet, which was retweeted by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

They wrote: “In October 2020 we had the privilege to meet President Zelenskyy and the First Lady to learn of their hope and optimism for Ukraine’s future. “Today we stand with the President and all of Ukraine’s people as they bravely fight for that future W & C.”

Refugees from Ukraine arrive in Germany

BERLIN: After Russia’s attack on Ukraine, the first war refugees have arrived in Germany, however their numbers are still relatively small.

At the Polish border near Görlitz, a single-digit number of people from Ukraine had arrived since Friday, a spokesperson for the Federal Police in Pirna said. In the state of Brandenburg which surrounds Berlin, the initial reception centre in Eisenhüttenstadt took in six refugees by noon on Saturday, according to its own information. A Ukrainian family arrived in Brandenburg an der Havel. The city of Hamburg had already registered three to four refugees at the arrival centre in the northern port city on Friday. Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the premiers of the federal states had discussed the possible admission of refugees on Friday.

‘Invasion’ and ‘assault’ in media banned

MOSCOW: Russia’s communications regulator on Saturday ordered independent media to remove reports describing Moscow’s attack on Ukraine as an “assault, invasion, or declaration of war” or face being blocked and fined. As Russian forces moved into Kyiv, Moscow’s defence ministry also said that Russian media should stick to the official version of events.

In a statement, the communications watchdog accused a number of independent media outlets of spreading “unreliable socially significant untrue information” about the shelling of Ukrainian cities by the Russian army and civilian deaths.

Russia bars flights from Bulgaria, Poland

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday closed its airspace to flights from Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic in tit-for-tat punitive measures following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

Britain has banned Russian flagship carrier Aeroflot from flying over the UK and several countries, including Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic, have closed their airspace to Russian carriers. “Air carriers of these states and/or registered in them are subject to restrictions on flights to destinations on the territory of the Russian Federation, including transit flights through the airspace of the Russian Federation,” the federal air transport agency Rosaviation said. —AFP/Reuters/dpa

Deadly rains, floods hit eastern Australia

SYDNEY: Torrential downpours lashed eastern Australia on Saturday, raising deadly floodwaters to decades-long highs, swamping homes and sweeping away cars.

Police in the eastern state of Queensland said they had found the body of a 37-year-old man, raising the flooding death toll to five people since early this week. At least one person is still missing.

Images of southeast Queensland broadcast on Australian media showed homes and roads flooded, areas of land



transformed into lakes and a large chunk of a concrete pier floating down the fast-running Brisbane River.

The water snatched the car of a

team of four emergency services workers who were heading to rescue a family from their flooded home overnight, said state police disaster coordinator Steve

Gollschewski.

“The vehicle in which they were travelling was swept off the road into floodwaters. Three of our members were rescued. One of those members is deceased,” Gollschewski told a news conference.

Elsewhere, another man’s body was found overnight.

“In some parts of southeast Queensland, this is the biggest event that they will see in a number of decades,” said state police and emergency services minister Mark Ryan. — AFP

HANOI

13 dead after tourist boat sinks in Vietnam

At least 13 people were killed and four others missing after a tourist boat capsized in bad weather off the coast of Hoi An, a world heritage-listed Vietnamese city, an official said.

The accident occurred as the vessel carrying 39 local tourists and crew members was returning to Hoi An from Cu Lao Cham island — a popular spot for diving, snorkelling and water sports.

Local Communist Party chief Nguyen Sinh confirmed



13 people drowned and four were missing. Rescue efforts were suspended in the evening because of fading light, he said.

“We cannot do anything further as it is too dark,” he said.

JAKARTA

Rescuers search for survivors after earthquake

Rescue teams in Indonesia were searching for six people still missing after a strong earthquake rocked Sumatra island a day earlier, killing at least eight people and injuring dozens.

The 6.2-magnitude quake hit the island’s north at a depth of 12 kilometres minutes after a less violent tremor on Friday morning, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), displacing thousands.

It damaged hundreds of homes and buildings including



mosques, schools and banks, forcing terrified residents to evacuate and shuttle loved ones to safety in temporary shelters. “At the moment the search is ongoing for six people we predict have been buried by a landslide.”

KHARTOUM

Mothers, fathers protest to support anti-coup youth

A demonstration of “mothers and fathers” took to the streets of Khartoum to support the young anti-coup protesters who have for months rallied against the military.

“We are demonstrating today to tell our sons and daughters that they are not alone,” Faiza Hussein, one of the protesters, said. She added that they are also calling on the authorities to “stop killing our children”.

At least 83 people have been killed and thousands injured



in unrest that has gripped the country since an October 25 military coup.

“We are here to support the youth in their revolution, and to demand an end to the killings,” said Hassan Ali, 63.

Putin is making a historic mistake

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

NEW YORK: In early 2000, I became the first senior US official to meet with Vladimir Putin in his new capacity as acting president of Russia. We in the Clinton administration did not know much about him at the time — just that he had started his career in the KGB.

I hoped the meeting would help me take the measure of the man and assess what his sudden elevation might mean for US-Russia relations, which had deteriorated amid the war in Chechnya.

Sitting across a small table from him in the Kremlin, I was immediately struck by the contrast between Putin and his bombastic predecessor, Boris Yeltsin.

Whereas Yeltsin had cajoled, blustered and flattered, Putin spoke unemotionally and without notes about his determination to resurrect Russia's economy and quash Chechen rebels. Flying home, I recorded my impressions.

"Putin is small and pale", I wrote, "so cold as to be almost reptilian." He claimed to understand why the Berlin Wall had to fall but had not expected the whole Soviet Union to collapse. "Putin is embarrassed by what happened to his country and determined to restore its greatness."

I have been reminded in recent months of that nearly three-hour session with Putin as he has massed troops on the border with neighbouring Ukraine. After calling Ukrainian statehood a fiction in a bizarre televised address, he issued a decree recognising the independence of two separatist-held regions in Ukraine and sending troops there.

Putin's revisionist and absurd assertion that Ukraine was "entirely created by Russia" and effectively robbed from the Russian empire is fully in keeping with his warped worldview. Most disturbing to me: It was his attempt to establish the pretext for a full-scale invasion. Should he do so, it will be a historic error. In the 20-odd years since we met, Putin has charted his course by ditching democratic development for Stalin's playbook.

He has collected political and economic power for himself — co-opting or crushing potential competition — while pushing to re-establish a sphere of Russian dominance through parts of the former Soviet Union.

Like other authoritarians, he equates his own well-being with that of the nation and opposition with treason. He is sure that Americans mirror both his cynicism and his lust for power and that in a world where everyone lies, he is under no obligation to tell the truth. Because he believes that the United States dominates its own region by force, he thinks Russia has the same right.

Putin has for years sought to burnish his country's international reputation, expand Russia's military and



A Ukrainian flag is waved during an anti-war protest, after Russia launched a massive military operation against Ukraine, in front of the United Nations Office in Geneva. — Reuters

economic might, weaken Nato and divide Europe (while driving a wedge between it and the United States). Ukraine features in all of that.

Instead of paving Russia's path to greatness, invading Ukraine would ensure Putin's infamy by leaving his country diplomatically isolated, economically crippled and strategically vulnerable in the face of a stronger, more united Western alliance. He's already set that in motion by announcing on Monday his decision to recognise the two separatist enclaves in Ukraine and send in Russian troops as "peacemakers." Now he has demanded that it recognise

Russia's claim to Crimea and relinquish its advanced weapons.

Putin's actions have triggered massive sanctions, with more to come if he launches a full-scale assault and attempts to seize the entire country. These would devastate not just his country's economy but also his tight circle of corrupt cronies — who in turn could challenge his leadership. What is sure to be a bloody and catastrophic war will drain Russian resources and cost Russian lives — while creating an urgent incentive for Europe to slash its dangerous reliance on Russian energy.

An inflation gauge is still rising, war could make it worse

A measure of inflation that the Federal Reserve watches closely accelerated again in January, hitting a new 40-year high and speeding up on a monthly basis as food and energy prices climbed sharply.

The Personal Consumption Expenditures index, which the Fed targets as it aims for 2 per cent annual inflation on average over time, rose 6.1 per cent over the past year, the fastest pace of increase since 1982. Prices climbed 0.6 per cent in January from December, up from 0.4 per cent the prior month.

The data, released by the Commerce Department, was a fresh reminder that inflation remains stubbornly high as Russia's invasion of Ukraine sends oil and other commodity prices higher and promises to continue to boost inflation.

The Fed has been preparing to steadily pull back its pandemic-era economic support in an effort to cool off consumer demand and tame prices. The White House is monitoring inflation closely as rising prices for food, rent and gas shake consumer confidence and dent President Joe Biden's approval ratings before midterm elections in November.

The new inflation reading won't surprise economists or policymakers — the Personal Consumption Expenditures number is fairly predictable because it is based on Consumer Price Index figures that come out more quickly, along with other already available data.

But it reaffirms that price increases, which were expected to prove temporary as the pandemic economy reopened, have instead lasted almost an entire year and seeped into areas not affected by the coronavirus.

Rapid price increases have hit a wide array of products and services, including used cars, chicken, restaurant meals and home furnishings, and several trends risk keeping inflation elevated. Notably, wages are rising rapidly, and employers are finding that they can pass their climbing labor costs along to shoppers.

Economists are also warily eyeing the conflict in Ukraine, which has already caused oil and gas prices to rise and is likely to further push up commodity costs.

But some are also betting that the uncertainty it has

spurred could inspire the Fed to take a more cautious approach as it tries to slow down the economy.

Stock prices rose on Friday as traders pared back expectations that the Federal Open Market Committee will make a large, half-percentage-point rate increase in March in an effort to decisively tamp down inflation.

"Despite the prospect of higher inflation, the Russian invasion leads us to now think the FOMC will raise rates by a more conservative" one-quarter point, Kathy Bostjancic, chief US economist at Oxford Economics, wrote in research note on Friday.

Researchers at Goldman Sachs estimate that an increase of \$10 per barrel of oil would increase headline inflation in the United States by a fifth of a percentage point while lowering economic output by just under a tenth of a percentage point.

While it is not clear how much gas prices will shoot up — it depends on the depth of the conflict, the breadth of sanctions and Russia's reaction — several commodity prices jerked higher in the hours after the invasion in Ukraine began.

Brent crude oil, the global benchmark, rose to more than \$100 per barrel on Thursday after the invasion began before moderating again on Friday. There is still a risk that oil prices could climb further if Russia reacts to sanctions from the United States and Europe. Russia is a major exporter of energy to Europe.

Some economists have noted an uncomfortable precedent when it comes to a gas shock.

Rising energy prices in the 1970s helped exacerbate inflation, causing rapid price increases to become a lasting feature of the economy, one that faded only after a painful response from the Fed. The central bank pushed interest rates — and unemployment — to double digits to bring price increases to heel during what is now known as the "Great Inflation."

That episode happened after years of quick price increases that the Fed had proved slow to tamp down. This time, the central bank is gearing up to pull back support promptly.

The Fed is expected to initiate a series of rate increases

The Ukrainian situation does not alter, the fundamental conclusion that it's time to change monetary policy

JULIA CORONADO
Founder, MacroPolicy Perspectives

in March, policy moves that should slow down lending and spending, which could translate into weaker hiring, more subdued economic growth and more modest price gains.

"The Ukrainian situation does not alter, likely, the fundamental conclusion that it's time to change monetary policy", said Julia Coronado, founder of MacroPolicy Perspectives. "They're not going to just shelve all the interest rate increases because there is a war in Ukraine."

Christopher Waller, a Fed governor, said during a speech on Thursday evening that the conflict could contribute to uncertainty but that for now, the Fed should promptly pull back its support for the economy to try to control "alarmingly" high inflation.

He suggested that if Friday's inflation report, along with other upcoming data, "indicate that the economy is still running exceedingly hot, a strong case can be made" for raising interest rates by half a percentage point in March, twice the usual size of increase.

Fed officials appear to be poised to debate whether a bigger-than-usual increase is warranted at their meeting next month.

While the Fed officially targets headline inflation, it also keeps a careful eye on a core price measure that strips out fuel and food costs, both of which bounce around from month to month.

Core inflation picked up by 5.2 per cent in January from the prior year, the quickest pace of increase since 1983. It has posted 0.5 per cent monthly increases for four straight months.

Annual inflation should start to slow down mechanically sometime in the coming months as prices are measured against stronger readings from last spring, when inflation first started to pick up. Fading government support is also weighing on household incomes, which could eventually help cause spending to slow somewhat.

But the moderation in price increases could prove more muted than economists and policymakers had previously expected, thanks in part to the potential for rising energy costs as the conflict in Ukraine escalates.

The different faces of addiction



Dr Hamed Al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

When you hear the word addiction you probably think of someone sniffing Cocaine or injecting heroine, but in fact there are different types of addictions affecting people from all around the world.

Addiction is a condition where the affected person is preoccupied about the subject of his addiction to the point that it becomes the centre of his or her life.

He spends most of his time seeking it while neglecting other aspects of his or her social and occupational life.

Classically addiction used to be linked to substances such as drugs and alcohol but recently psychologists described behavioural addiction which includes gambling, addiction to

food or shopping or video games. Some psychologists describe addiction to bodybuilding when the person becomes preoccupied with going to the gym and posting selfies in social media.

Along with the preoccupation with the substance or behaviour, the addicted person keeps needing more to get the same level of satisfaction. When he or she is unable to access the subject of the addiction, withdrawal symptoms kick in. These can be in the form of physical or psychological symptoms that the person goes back to the substance or behaviour in order to get relief.

So what happens to the brain of addicts?

When we do a pleasurable activity

REMEMBER THAT SPOTTING THE ADDICTION AND DEALING WITH IT EARLY MAKES RECOVERY MORE LIKELY. DON'T SHY OUT FROM SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

like walking on the beach, going on a holiday, or watching a movie or simply eating our favourite meal, our brain releases a chemical called dopamine.

This chemical is linked to motivation and learning. When a person takes a drug or drinks alcohol, this leads to the release of dopamine in higher quantities beyond the normal levels that comes from doing other pleasurable

activities. Dopamine makes the brain realise that a particular substance causes this amount of pleasure so instead of just liking it becomes addicted to it and with time the brain asks for more of the substance to get to the pleasure point.

This is why an addict can steal or kill and ignore his values in order to obtain the substance, in another-ward he or she becomes a slave to his addiction.

While addiction to alcohol and substance are easily recognised, behavioural addiction can be difficult to spot.

A teenager playing video games can easily get hooked to it as it's available, affordable and is not considered criminal. It's only when he or she starts locking him

or herself in the room and the academic performance drops or becomes aggressive when a parent tries to get him out of the room that the addiction becomes recognised.

So what can we do to address this issue?

If you or someone you know is affected by addiction the first step is to acknowledge the issue and not to deny it. Most countries have dedicated centres to treat addiction from drugs and alcohol while you can get help with behavioural addictions from trained psychiatrist and psychologist.

Remember that spotting the addiction and dealing with it early makes recovery more likely. Don't shy out from seeking professional help when you need it.

Arabs fear for wheat supplies after Russia invades Ukraine

CAIRO: Russia's invasion of Ukraine could mean less bread on the table in Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and elsewhere in the Arab world. The region is heavily dependent on wheat supplies from the two countries which are now at war, and any shortages of the staple food have potential to bring unrest.

If those supplies are disrupted, "the Ukraine crisis could trigger renewed protests and instability" in several Middle East and North Africa countries, the Washington-based Middle East Institute said.

The generals now ruling in Khartoum after an October coup have not forgotten: In 2019 one of their own, Field Marshall Omar al Bashir, Sudan's longtime ruler, was toppled by his military under pressure from mass demonstrations triggered by a tripling of the bread price.

Sudan is already facing regular anti-coup protests but seems to have taken the initiative to avoid demonstrations over bread.

When Russia's invasion began on Thursday, the second-highest figure in Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council was in Moscow to discuss trade ties.

Bread is already a luxury for millions in Yemen, where a seven-year war has pushed the country to the brink of famine.

"Most people can barely afford the basic foods," and the war in Ukraine will only "make things worse", Walid Salah, 35, a civil servant in the rebel-held capital Sanaa, said.

Russia is the world's top wheat exporter and Ukraine the fourth, according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture.

Moscow's invasion pushed the wheat price far above its previous record high in European trading to \$384 a tonne on Thursday.

David Beasley, the World Food Programme's Executive Director, said the Ukraine-Russia area provides half the agency's grains. The war, he said, "is going to have a dramatic impact".

WFP says 12.4 million people in conflict-ravaged Syria are also struggling with food insecurity. Before its civil war began in 2011, Syria produced enough wheat to feed its population but harvests then plunged and led to increased reliance on imports.

The Damascus regime is a staunch ally of Moscow which backed it militarily during the war.

"Syria imported some 1.5 million tonnes of wheat last year, largely from Russia," The Syria Report, an economic publication, said this month. Damascus says it is now working to distribute the stocks to use them over two months. — AFP



Thomas L. Friedman
The writer is an American political commentator and author

We have never been here before

The seven most dangerous words in journalism are: "The world will never be the same." In over four decades of reporting, I have rarely dared use that phrase. But I'm going there now in the wake of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Our world is not going to be the same again because this war has no historical parallel. It is a raw, 18th-century-style land grab by a superpower — but in a 21st-century globalised world.

This is the first war that will be covered on TikTok by super-empowered individuals armed only with smartphones, so acts of brutality will be documented and broadcast worldwide without any editors or filters. On the first day of the war, we saw invading Russian tank units unexpectedly being exposed by Google maps, because Google wanted to alert drivers that the Russian armour was causing traffic jams.

You have never seen this play before.

Yes, the Russian attempt to seize Ukraine is a throwback to earlier centuries — before the democracy revolutions in America and France — when a European monarch or Russian czar could simply decide that he wanted more territory, that the time was ripe to grab it, and so he did. And everyone in the region knew he would devour as much as he could and there was no global community to stop him.

In acting this way today, though, Putin is not only aiming to unilaterally rewrite the rules of the international system that have been in place since World War II — that no nation can just devour the nation next door — he is also out to alter that balance of power that he feels was imposed on Russia after the Cold War.

That balance — or imbalance in Putin's view — was the humiliating equivalent of the Versailles Treaty's impositions on Germany after World War I. In Russia's case, it meant Moscow having to swallow Nato's expansion not only to include the old Eastern European countries that had been part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, like Poland, but even, in principle, states that were part of the Soviet Union itself, like Ukraine.

I see many people citing Robert Kagan's fine book *The Jungle Grows Back* as a kind of shorthand for the return of this nasty and brutish style of geopolitics that Putin's invasion manifests.



But that picture is incomplete. Because this is not 1945 or 1989. We may be back in the jungle — but today the jungle is wired. It is wired together more intimately than ever before by telecommunications; satellites; trade; the Internet; road, rail and air networks; financial markets; and supply chains. So while the drama of war is playing out within the borders of Ukraine, the risks and repercussions of Putin's invasion are being felt across the globe — even in China, which has good cause to worry about its friend in the Kremlin.

WELCOME TO WORLD WAR WIRED, THE FIRST WAR IN A TOTALLY INTERCONNECTED WORLD. THIS WILL BE THE COSSACKS MEET THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Welcome to World War Wired — the first war in a totally interconnected world. This will be the Cossacks meet the World Wide Web. Like I said, you haven't been here before.

"It's been less than 24 hours since Russia invaded Ukraine, yet we already have more information about what's going on there than we would have in a week during the Iraq War," Daniel Johnson, who served as an infantry officer and journalist with

the US Army in Iraq, wrote in Slate on Thursday afternoon.

"What is coming out of Ukraine is simply impossible to produce on such a scale without citizens and soldiers throughout the country having easy access to cellphones, the Internet and, by extension, social media apps. A large-scale modern war will be livestreamed, minute by minute, battle by battle, death by death, to the world. What is occurring is already horrific, based on the information released just on the first day."

Russia is in the process of forcibly taking over a free country with a population of 44 million people, which is a little less than one-third the size of Russia's population. And the majority of these Ukrainians have been struggling to be part of the democratic, free-market West for 30 years and have already forged myriad trade, cultural and Internet ties to European Union companies, institutions and media.

We know that Putin has vastly improved Russia's armed forces, adding everything from hypersonic missile capabilities to advanced cyberwarfare tools. He has the firepower to bring Ukraine to heel. But in this modern era we have never seen an unfree country, Russia, try to rewrite the rules of the international system and take over a free country that is as big as Ukraine — especially when the unfree country, Russia, has an economy that is smaller than that of Texas.

— *The New York Times*

It's time to take back the classroom



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

What is important to Omanis right now? Covid? Yes, but its presence does look to be less threatening every day. The economy? Well yes, we tread lightly, but oil prices are stable, and tourism is on the rise again. The weather? It has been, um, changeable, let's say, but still cool. Families? They remain, after faith,

the strongest element of Omani society. But schoolkids and schools still suffer under the yolk of the pandemic, their education adversely affected.

It's time to walk away from the quicksand of online learning made necessary by the pandemic, to have teachers and pupils again face up to the effects of pandemic learning and face the challenges that must be the consequence of its 'contactless' learning mode. I am just one of the thousands of teachers having significant experience of online teaching, with the benefit of using multiple learning and support platforms. But, with recent classroom teaching experience while on study leave in the United Kingdom. It has been a genuine eye opener seeing how the school, a comprehensive, for 12- to 18-year-olds, its teachers and pupils, have responded to the process of getting their learning experiences 'back on track.'

SCHOOLKIDS AND SCHOOLS STILL SUFFER UNDER THE YOLK OF THE PANDEMIC, THEIR EDUCATION ADVERSELY AFFECTED

I must admit to hesitancy in 'mixing' again with large numbers of people in a relatively confined space, however, at the same time, I felt it was an opportunity to 'walk the walk', in terms of my often-quoted Covid mantra, that we must "trust the science," if we are ever to shake off the shackles of the pandemic. So, protected by my two Pfizer shots, and a booster, but still constantly masked around others, and still employing distancing protocols, frequent cleansing, and sanitising, I set forth.

The school, of 1,600 pupils and 100 odd teachers and teaching support staff, and custodial staff, were all given a full induction on the pandemic protocols to be utilised, and how graduating from one level of compliance to others would be reassessed on a weekly basis, with a consultative group formed to consider feedback from teacher, staff, and pupil representatives, and including government and health sector advice. Government by committee has always been viewed askance, with one wit noting that, "If Columbus had a committee, he would still be at the dock," while another, comedian Milton Berle said, "A committee keeps minutes and loses hours." We have all had such experiences, however, in this situation there was a defined single objective... to get the pupil's learning experience, back from the brink, to being a quality learning experience once more.

What has surprised me, more than anything, has been the way in which the pupils have embraced the need, and the responsibility, for maintaining the pandemic protocols. While it has confirmed, for me, the resilience of youth, it has also forced the indelible impression that they recognise the social failings of isolation that facetime can never make up for, the failings of ever so well-intentioned online learning, and their realisation that teachers are essential to their personal and educational development. Throughout the school, a realisation has dawned... Teachers need their pupils, otherwise why are they teaching? They need their pupils to 'complete them,' to make them the best version of what they are. As a shepherd needs their flock, thus are teachers. So too, do pupils need their guides, of course they have parents, siblings, and families, but the knowledge and experience of teachers, no matter how good the intention, nobody can replace an effective teacher in a pupil's eyes, or indeed, in their experience.

This symbiotic relationship, at this school, and no doubt at others too, has gained momentum from the confidence that everyone has in knowing what is expected of them, and what a revelation it is, to be sharing in this experience. The Sultanate of Oman too, I am convinced, now really needs to be 'taking the bull by the horns,' and reclaiming the educational high ground, sooner, rather than later.



LARGEST HOSPITAL SHIP

Local residents look at the largest hospital ship in the world *The Global Mery* docking at the port of Rotterdam. This hospital ship is presented to the public for two weeks before it starts its mission.

— AFP

The economic consequences of the Ukraine war



Jason Furman

The author is a former chair of President Barack Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, is Professor of the Practice of Economic Policy at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government and Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been rapid and dramatic, but the economic consequences will be much slower to materialise and less spectacular. The war itself is enormously tragic, first and foremost for the Ukrainian people, but also for the Russian people and the global order more generally. When something like this happens, we expect it to be like a morality play in which all the bad consequences play out equally dramatically in every dimension, including the economy. But the economy does not work that way.

True, financial markets reacted swiftly to news of Russia's invasion. The MSCI All Country World Index, a leading global equity gauge, fell to its lowest level in almost a year.

The price of oil rose above \$100 a barrel, while European natural gas prices initially surged by almost 70 per cent.

These energy-price increases will negatively affect the global economy. Europe is especially vulnerable, because it did little in recent years to reduce its dependence on Russian gas, and in some cases — notably, Germany, which abandoned nuclear power — even exacerbated it.

Oil-importing countries will experience a headwind from higher prices. The United States is more hedged: Because its oil production is equal to its oil consumption, more expensive oil is roughly neutral for GDP.

But higher oil prices will hurt US consumers while helping a more limited segment of businesses and workers tied to the oil and gas industry.

The price surge will also add to inflation, which is already at its highest levels in a generation in the US, Europe, and other advanced economies.

But some perspective on these immediate consequences is in order. At \$100 a barrel, oil is about one-quarter below its inflation-adjusted price during 2011 to 2014. Moreover, prices for oil futures are lower than spot prices, suggesting that the market expects this increase to be temporary.

Central banks may therefore largely look through events in Ukraine, neither holding off on

tightening nor speeding it up in response to higher headline inflation. And global stock markets are still up over the last year.

Similarly, although the Russian stock market has fallen significantly since the start of the invasion, Western sanctions are unlikely to have immediate dramatic effects. Sanctions rarely do; they are simply not the economic equivalent of the bombs that Russia is currently dropping on Ukraine.

THE WAR ITSELF IS ENORMOUSLY TRAGIC, FIRST AND FOREMOST FOR THE UKRAINIAN PEOPLE, BUT ALSO FOR THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE AND THE GLOBAL ORDER MORE GENERALLY

Moreover, Russia is better prepared than most countries to weather sanctions. The country has been running an enormous current-account surplus and has accumulated record foreign-exchange reserves of \$630 billion — sufficient to cover nearly two years of imports. And while Russia is dependent on revenue from Europe, Europeans are dependent on Russia's oil and gas — which may be even harder to replace in the short run.

But, in the longer term, Russia will likely be the biggest economic loser from the conflict (after Ukraine, whose losses will go well beyond what can be measured in the national accounts).

Russia's economy, and the well-being of its population, have been stagnant since the Kremlin's 2014 annexation of Crimea. The fallout from its current, large-scale invasion will almost certainly be more severe over time. Sanctions will increasingly take a toll, and Russia's growing isolation, as well as heightened

investor uncertainty, will weaken trade and other economic links. In addition, Europe can be expected to reduce its fossil-fuel dependence on Russia.

The longer-term economic consequences for the rest of the world will be far less severe than they are for Russia, but they will still be a persistent challenge for policymakers. There is a risk, albeit a relatively unlikely one, that higher short-run inflation will become embedded in increasingly unanchored inflation expectations, and thus persist. If that happens, central banks' already difficult job will become even more complicated.

In addition, defence budgets are likely to rise in Europe, the US, and some other countries to reflect the increasingly dangerous global situation. This will not reduce GDP growth, but it will reduce people's well-being, because resources dedicated to defence are resources that cannot go towards consumption or investment in education, healthcare, or infrastructure.

The medium- and long-term consequences for the global economy of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will depend on choices. By invading, Russia has already made one terrible choice.

The US, the European Union, and other governments have made initial choices on sanctions, but it remains to be seen how Russia will react to them or whether further penalties will be imposed. To the extent that sanctions and counter-responses escalate, the costs will be larger — first and foremost for Russia, but also to some degree for the rest of the global economy.

Global economic relations are positive-sum, and Russia's growing isolation will remove a small positive. More broadly, uncertainty is never good for the economy.

But, as the world continues to respond to the Russian invasion, concerns about GDP seem minor by comparison. Far more important is a world where people and countries feel secure.

And that is something worth paying for — even more than the world's leaders have paid so far.

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TOP PADDLERS TO LOCK HORNS IN FIRST EVER WTT CONTENDER IN MUSCAT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The top seeded table tennis players will shine in Muscat as WTT Contender Muscat 2022 competitions will begin on Sunday at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

More than 200 paddlers, technical delegation members and umpires representing 41 countries will take part in the mega TT event in Muscat. The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) completed all the logistics and technical preparations ahead of the event start.

Earlier on Friday, the draw of men's singles put Oman's Mashal al Shahi in a clash with the Russian Vladimir Sidorenko in the qualification draw of round two while Badar al Jassasi will meet Chinese Xu Yingbin in the same round.

Ahmed al Riyami will take on England's Tom Jarvis in a tight encounter. Oman's top seeding player, Muhannad al Balushi, the

More than 200 paddlers, technical delegation members and umpires representing 41 countries will take part in the mega TT event in Muscat

runner up of the senior singles category, will play in the main draw of 32 as an opportunity of the hosts.

Oman's domestic paddlers aims from this top TT event to showcase their top efforts. It will be great chance for the local players to gain the international experience and to develop their world ranking points.

Oman's paddlers went through comprehensive training programme under watchful eyes of the Iranian coach Omid Shamas Sharbabki, the head coach of the national TT team.

The six days event will feature attendance of World No 5 Jingkun



Liang of China and his teammate Gayoyuan Lin (WR No 10), besides WR No 11 Quadri Aruna from Nigeria and French top paddler Gauzy (WR No 20) and many other top seeded paddlers who will compete in the world-class TT tourney in Muscat.

The mega TT event will be under OTTA organisation in coordination with WTT and World TT governing body ITTF. The event in Muscat will feature four categories including men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles.

All the participants will compete for the cash prize of \$75,000. The main competition venue will accommodate eight tables as eight games will be held at the same time.

Many other tables will be allocated in the practising areas for the warm-up sessions. Egypt's Mohammed El Dawlaty is the WTT event supervisor while OTTA's Sajad Mohammed Baqir is the Event Director.

■ 'SOKO' OF ROYAL CAVALRY SECOND AT SAUDI ARABIA CUP FOR CAVALRY

The horse 'Soko' of the Royal Cavalry was positioned as the runner-up at the Al Maneefah Cup in the "Saudi Arabia Cup for Cavalry". The rider Olive Pele managed to end the 2,100 metres for the purebred Arabian Horses at the second place in the King Abdulaziz equestrian racecourse in Riyadh. Qatar's First Class, owned by Naif al Kaabi and mounted by Ronan Thomas, clinched the first place. The competitions were tough as more than 240 horses took part in the race including the top series of horses with the attendance of the professional coaches. 'Dhergam' from Saudi Arabia finished in third place



Poland refuses to play 2022 World Cup play-off against Russia

WARSAW: Poland will not play their 2022 World Cup play-off with Russia in Moscow on March 24 because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the president of the Polish football federation said on Saturday.

The conflict has entered the third day since Russian leader Vladimir Putin unleashed a full-scale invasion that has killed dozens of people, forced more than 50,000 to flee Ukraine in just 48 hours and sparked fears of a wider conflict in Europe.

"The time for talking is over. It is time to act. Due to the escalation of the Russian Federation's aggression in Ukraine, the Polish team does not envisage playing

the play-off against Russia", wrote Cezary Kulesza, adding it was the "only correct decision".

He said he would work with the Swedish and Czech federations — the winners of their match would have to play in Russia (on March 29) if the latter beat Poland — to present a unified position to Fifa.

The three federations issued a joint statement on Thursday demanding FIFA move the respective play-offs from Russia — who only four years ago hosted the World Cup finals. Polish captain Robert Lewandowski — who had tweeted on Friday he would consult his team-mates about the match — welcomed his federation's move. — AFP



Oman Sail to kick off 2022 season at Asian Sailing Championships

MUSCAT: Oman Sail will kick off the 2022 sailing season at the Asian Sailing Championships in Abu Dhabi where teams in three classes will compete from 27 February to March 6.

The 49er, Windsurfing and ILCA 4 teams will join over 140 sailors from 17 countries across the continent at the Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club for a week of action against some of the best in Asia, under the guidance of team leader Mohsin al Busaidy.

The Omani contingent features Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi in the 49er class, coached by Zakariya al Wahabi; Abdulmajeed al Hadrami and Abdullah al Sarhi in the Windsurfing class, along with coach Sultan al Balushi; and Nibras al Owaisi will team with Elyass al Fhadli in the ILCA 4 class which is coached by Mundher al Kindi.

Team leader, Mohsin al Busaidy, Head of the Youth Sailing Pathway at Oman Sail, said, "This



is an important test for our sailors across three classes and a great opportunity to put into practice the techniques we have been learning in training. Qualifying for Paris 2024 is our main objective, and this tournament is the first step this year to reach that level. It will be an interesting opportunity for the team and a great chance to get into the rhythm of competitive

sailing early in the year."

Racing will be staged in the harbour and open waters surrounding the Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club every day from Tuesday March 1 until Sunday March 6. The final day of races will also feature the medal event where the prizes will be decided, before concluding with a prizegiving and closing ceremony.

The 49er, Windsurfing and ILCA 4 teams will join over 140 sailors from 17 countries across the continent at the Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club for a week of action against some of the best in Asia, under the guidance of team leader Mohsin al Busaidy

The event is organised by the UAE Sailing & Rowing Federation (UAE SARF) under the sanction of the Asian Sailing Federation (ASAF). All participants will be subject to Covid-19 testing requirements and safety protocols as implemented by the authorities of the UAE and Abu Dhabi to ensure a safe tournament for all sailors, coaches, dignitaries and media.

OOC General Assembly to elect BoD tomorrow

The General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will hold a regular meeting tomorrow morning "Monday" at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Al-Arfan.

The agenda will be to elect OOC board of directors for the electoral cycle (2020 + 1 - 2024) in the presence of members of Board of Directors, the General Assembly, candidates for membership of the Board for the next electoral cycle, the representative of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, as well as the representative of the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Council of Asia, in addition to the election and appeal committees, and various media outlets.

The General Assembly will recommend Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair for OOC presidency, and His Highness Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Saeed, for vice-president.

The members of Oman Olympic Committee that will also be recommended: Taha bin Sulaiman al Kashiri as a member of an executive council for international sports Federations listed in the Olympic Games and Dr Abdullah bin Khamis bin Ali Ambosaidi as a representative of sports federations with international sports listed In the Olympic Games, Qais bin Saud bin Hamad al Zakani as a sport figure, Dr Mansour bin Sultan al Taouki as representatives of athletes after he was elected by the Oman Athletics Committee at its first meeting this year held on January 23.

The members of OOC

Board of Directors (2020 + 1-2024) will also recommended candidates from sports federations of international sports federations listed in the Olympic Games: Saif bin Said bin Rashid al Rashidi, President of Oman Cycling Federation, and Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saeed Bamakhl Chairman of Oman Table Tennis Federation, Eng Khalfan bin Saleh bin Mohammed al Naabi, President of Oman Basketball Federation, and Dr Marwan bin Juma bin Ali al Juma, President of Oman Hockey Federation, Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah bin Abdul Rahim al Maqbali, President of Oman Volleyball Federation, and Mohsen bin Hamad bin Ali al Masrouri, Vice-President of Oman Football Federation.

A representative from Women Sport will also be elected for the Board.

The meeting will also approve the last minutes of General Assembly held on December 27, 2021 and reviewing the report of the Board of Directors on its work for the past year, programmes, activities and action plans for the next year, as well as discussing the auditor's report and the approval of the final account for the fiscal year ended 2021.

The Board of Directors will hold a meeting immediately after the end of the electoral process to determine the basic positions implemented by the Board, the positions of the Secretary-General and the Treasurer, as well as the new Board will form the sub-committees, and discuss many priority topics during the coming period.



Khawar bowls Majees to big win, Ali stars in exciting win for Al Jadidi

MUSCAT: Oman star Khawar Ali's 5/24 and Ravindra K'Ratne's excellent 81 not out powered Majees CT to an emphatic eight-wicket victory against AER International Trading and Contracting in a Premier Division 50-over League clash at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Khawar's brilliant bowling was instrumental in AER getting dismissed for 167 in 48.3 overs despite Aamir Kaleem's superb 64.

Majees raced to the target in only 30.3 overs, scoring 168 for 2 thanks to Ranvindra's top knock that included five huge sixes. Danish Mohammed bagged 2 for 38.

Brief Scores (Premier Division): AER International Trad. & Contracting 167 all out in 48.3 overs (Aamir Kaleem 64 - 2x6, Khawar Ali 5-24) lost to Majees 168 for 2 in 30.3 overs (Ravindra K'Ratne 81 - 8x4, 5x6, Khurram Khan 34 - 7x4, Danish



Al Jadidi Stars Nidhin Mohan Muhammed Ali and Pradeep Kumar

Mohammad 2-38) by 8 wickets.

ALI BOWLS AL JADIDI TO VICTORY

Muhammed Ali picked up 4 for 37 to pave the way for Al Jadidi Stars' exciting 4-wicket win over Orient Travels/Abu Amin Metal in a 50-over A Division League match at OC Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Orient Travels was bowled out for 220 in 44.4 overs despite Adil Khan's fluent 89 and Darwish Ellickal's 33.

Apart from Ali's superb spell, Parameswaran Shankar and Muhammed Waqas bowled well too, taking two wickets each.

Top knocks by Pradeep Kumar (62 off 71), Nidhin Mohan (43 off

54) and Nishanth Meethalveedu (33 off 33) helped Al Jadidi to 224 for 6 in 39.4 overs for a comfortable win. Gurvir Singh took 2 for 46.

Brief Scores (A Division): Orient Travels / Abu Amin Metal 220 all out in 44.4 overs (Adil Khan 89 - 8x4, 1x6, Darwish Ellickal 33 - 3x4, 2x6, Muhammed Ali 4-37, Parameswaran Shankar 2-35, Muhammad Waqas 2-36) lost to Al Jadidi Stars 224 for 6 in 39.4 overs (Pradeep Kumar 62 - 4x4, 1x6, Nidhin Mohan 43 - 4x4, Nishanth Meethalveedu 33 - 4x4, Gurvir Singh 2-46) by 4 wickets.

WASIM STARS IN EASY WIN FOR RUWI

Wasim Ismail's magnificent 75 not out off 57 was the highlight of OCT Ruwi's thumping 8-wicket victory against Maniz Azad International in a 30-over B Division League encounter at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Ruwi bowled superbly to dismiss Maniz Azad for 193 in the 30th over thanks to brilliant bowling by Khalid Pir (3 for 30) and Ali Akbar (3 for 31). Krishna Pradhan (39) and Muhammed Attique (37) were its main batters.

OCT Ruwi took only 21.2 overs to surpass the target, scoring 195 for 2 thanks to outstanding knocks from Wasim, Mohammed al Balushi (43 off 21) and Zubair Ali Akbar (40 off 37).

Brief Scores (B Division): Maniz Azad International 193 all out in 29.2 overs (Krishna Pradhan 39 - 7x4, Muhammad Attique 37 - 5x4, 1x6, Khalid Pir 3-30, Ali Akbar 3-31) lost to OCT Ruwi 195 for 2 in 21.2 overs (Wasim Ismail 75 - 9x4, 2x6, Mohammed al Balushi 43 - 6x4, 2x6, Zubair Ali 40 - 6x4) by 8 wickets.

NAVEED STARS IN PDO WIN

In another B Division game, top PDO all-rounder Abdul

Naveed powered his side to a 69-run victory against Bank Muscat at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

PDO's 247 all out in 30 overs included top knocks by Abdul Naveed (56 off 27), Mazhar Javed (47 off 40) and Awais Mohamed (32 off 37). Amir Mehmood and Benny Mathew claimed two wickets each.

PDO was equally good with the ball, restricting Bank Muscat to 178 for 8 in 30 overs due to brilliant bowling by Abdul Naveed, Muhammed Idrees and Nadeem Ahmed. Asghar Khan topscored with 36 off 31.

Brief Scores (B Division): PDO RC 247 all out in 30 overs (Abdul Naveed 56 - 9x4, 2x6, Mazhar Javed 47 - 3x4, 2x6, Awais Mohamed 32 - 4x4, Amir Mehmood 2-49, Benny Mathew 2-43) beat Bank Muscat 178 for 8 in 30 overs (Asghar Khan 36 - 5x4, Abdul Naveed 2-26, Muhammed Idrees 2-26, Nadeem Ahmed 2-41) by 69 runs.



SALIM AND HAMAD TRIUMPH

O A A H O L D S O M A N F R E E S T Y L E D R I F T R O U N D 3

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 26

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) continued the action by holding the Oman Freestyle Drift 2021-22 after the grand success of Oman International Drift Championship recently.

At the Muscat Drift Arena, Oman's Salim al Saadi emerged champion in 4x4 category and UAE driver Hamad al Kaabi claimed the sedan section honours in Round 3 of the Oman Freestyle Drift on Friday night.

Mohammed al Kindi, OAA board member, was the chief guest and gave away the trophies to the top-three winners in two categories at the concluding ceremony.

UAE drifter Khalifa Ibrahim finished second in sedan class,



while Oman's Mohammed al Qalhathi bagged third spot.

In the 4x4 class, Omani drivers Abdulaziz al Saadi was second and HH Sayyid Dhu al Kufl claimed the third position.

Al Kaabi was in top form and performed consistently to collect 154 points from the three rounds in the finals.

After a stable 50 points each in the first two runs, the UAE drifter bettered to 54 points in the third and last run.

Compatriot Ibrahim, who was ahead after the first two runs (56 points and 53 points), slipped

to second due to a below par performance of 43 points in the last run.

Hamad claimed the top prize with a two-point difference to Khalifa who finished on 152 points.

Local drifter Mohammed al Qalhathi claimed third position in sedan section with 147 points.

UAE's Mohammed al Dahmani was fourth with 144 points and Oman's Salim al Saadi was overall fifth with 138 points.

A total of 25 drifters were in action in the finals at the Oman Automobile Association's drift venue.

Local drivers Ibrahim al Azri (137), Waqqas al Balushi (119), Jasim al Farsi (115), Mana al Ajmi (111), Abdulaziz al Saadi (107) and HH Sayyid Dhu al Kufl (106) also had decent runs to finish in the sixth to eleventh positions respectively.



Nadal beats Medvedev again to reach Acapulco ATP final

ACAPULCO, Mexico: Rafael Nadal beat Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 6-3 on Friday to reach the final of the ATP Mexico Open and ensure the Russian will not celebrate his rise to number one with the Acapulco trophy.

Medvedev was unable to avenge his loss to Nadal in the Australian Open final, where the Spaniard rallied from two sets down to triumph in five and claim a record-setting 21st Grand Slam singles title.

But the 26-year-old Russian departs Mexico knowing he'll move to number one in the world on Monday. He was assured of reaching the summit when Serbian star Novak Djokovic fell in the quarterfinals at Dubai on Thursday.

Nadal pushed his perfect 2022 record to 14-0, but it wasn't as

simple as the scoreline might suggest.

He powered through the first set without facing a break point and broke Medvedev in the opening game of the second.

But the 35-year-old world number five found himself in trouble in the fourth game, fighting off four break points to preserve his advantage.

Medvedev pushed him again in a marathon sixth game but failed to convert any of his seven break chances.

"I played some amazing points on the break points," said Nadal, who used everything in his arsenal to fend off Medvedev — from his classic powerful forehands to aggressive forays to the net.

"The second set was very emotional," Nadal said. "Daniil was playing very aggressive —



Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his semifinal match against Russia's Daniil Medvedev. — Reuters

drop shots, winners. It was a very difficult set.

"I feel lucky to win that set, because he had a lot of chances."

Serving to extend the match at 5-3, Medvedev took a 40-0 lead before a spate of errors, including his seventh double fault of the contest, gave Nadal an opening and allowed him to wrap it up on his second match point.

In Saturday's final, Nadal will face Cameron Norrie, who pushed his winning streak to eight straight matches with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece.

Britain's 12th-ranked Norrie, who lifted the trophy at Delray Beach last week, broke in the ninth game of each set and calmly served them out.

Tsitsipas, who reached the Rotterdam final earlier this month, had not dropped a set all week until

he ran into the in-form Briton — who faced just one break point in the match.

Nadal has won all three of his career meetings with Norrie — at the Australian Open, Barcelona and Roland Garros in 2021.

But he said Norrie has made big strides since then.

"His level of tennis is huge," Nadal said. "He improved a lot at the beginning of last year, and this year he continues."

"It's going to be a big challenge, but we are in the final of a 500 here in Acapulco, so can't expect an easy opponent. I'm excited about being in the final."

Nadal is seeking a fourth Acapulco title. He won his first two, in 2005 and 2013, when the tournament was played on clay, and added a third in 2020 after it had moved to hardcourts. — AFP



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Pact signed to support the Sultanate of Oman’s Low Earth Orbit space mission

LANDMARK AGREEMENT: ETCO and Tuatara sign a strategic contract detailing the initial stage of the historic mission

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Omani technology firm ETCO signed on Thursday an initial agreement with international digital technology specialist Tuatara to support the Sultanate of Oman’s space mission: the Low Earth Orbit Project.

The agreement was also inked on behalf of the other signees of Memoranda of Understanding from October 2021 and January 2022 — Virgin Orbit and SatRevolution.

As part of this historic mission for the Sultanate of Oman, regarding the Low Earth Orbit project scheduled for this year, the group plans to launch the first Omani CubeSat satellite aboard a Virgin Orbit rocket that will conduct scientific research and capture space imagery.

The results will be digitally analysed, using computer vision (CV), machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI) by Tuatara — the AI and data



analytics company in strategic partnership with ETCO. The mission will be followed by a Deep Space launch, that will take place in the near future.

Under the agreement, the project will initially deliver a nanosatellite that will enable groundbreaking scientific research and capture high-resolution images during the low Earth orbit.

The collected data and images, both from the low Earth orbit and deep space missions, will

potentially allow for the detection of hidden patterns, identify trends and predict changes caused, for example, by the climate or by natural disasters.

Such research would be cost-effective by increasing the sustainability of Oil & Gas exploration: minimising the time needed when choosing new well locations; reducing the risk of unmonitored leakage and predicting the environmental impact of natural resource exploration.

“Digital images acquired within the Low Earth Orbit mission can be further utilised by many other industries and used to detect seismic lines, document persistent offshore oil seepage, map rock formations, elevation, and major structures, identify barren and productive basin areas or perform noninvasive mapping to preserved areas,” Krzysztof Goworek, VP and Chief Innovation Officer at Tuatara said.

“We are proud that the we can be a part of Oman space

programme and develop solutions that will translate outer space data into digital insights and provide scientific data which will boost not only the growth of the STEM industry but will also help Omani businesses in achieving more efficient, more sustainable growth.”

This partnership follows the Memorandum of Understanding signed during the International Astronautical Congress held in October 2021 in Dubai, establishing the co-operation of the parties to design, manufacture and launch the first Omani satellite, manufactured by Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator SatRevolution, on board Virgin Orbit’s LauncherOne in the first ever launch from the United Kingdom’s Spaceport Cornwall in 2022.

Both the Low Earth Orbit project and deep space programmes will contribute to the near-term goals of the Sultanate of Oman.

This exciting mission will also provide investment and research opportunities involving university Academic Exchange Programmes, thus unlocking new horizons for the next generation of world space explorers and innovators, whilst investing in national talent that will build a promising future for the Omani people.

178% jump
in Invest Easy
transactions



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 26

More than 183,000 transactions have been handled through the ‘Invest Easy’ portal in 2021, representing a growth of 178.8 per cent over the previous year’s total of 65,705 transactions, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

In a statement to ONA, the ministry said the applications for various services were received via its offices (14,247), through its departments and directorates (48,452), through self-service avenues (36,662), via portals operated by the Sohar, Duqm and Al Mazayuna free zones), through law firms (478), and by Sanad offices (81,898 transactions).

Besides offering convenience, ease of use and speedy processing services, the Invest Easy portal also enables companies to update their corporate particulars electronically, reduces hidden practices, and creates a professional environment suitable for business and investment.

Al Morooj Dairy to expand range of camel milk-based products

STRATEGIC GOALS: The project targets the collection of both camel milk (4.32 million litres per year) and cow milk (3.24 million litres per year)

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 26

Al Morooj Dairy, the first commercial-scale camel milk processing project in the Sultanate of Oman, is weighing plans to roll out a broader range of processed dairy products with an eye on local, regional and international markets.

Salalah-based Al Morooj Dairy, which is an affiliate of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OIFC) — part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — launched its maiden camel milk brand ‘Watani’ last week — the first Omani camel milk brand in the local market.

In an exclusive interview to the *Observer*, Dr Nasser bin Ali bin Musallam Bait Said, CEO,



“
Al Morooj Dairy is a socioeconomic project that strengthens cooperation between Omani cattle herders and the private sector in helping the rural community utilise their livestock wealth

DR NASSER BIN ALI
BIN MUSALLAM
BAIT SAID
CEO, Al Morooj Dairy



said the company has eventual plans to grow its portfolio of dairy products based on camel milk. “As part of our sales strategy, we are planning to convert part of the camel milk production into Long Life milk and milk powder, with the aim of exporting these products to neighbouring markets.

In its fluid mix, the option of

producing long life milk in aseptic packaging will ensure retention of its quality at ambient temperatures for a period of six months,” the CEO said. “Additionally, the camel milk will be processed into value-added products such as camel cheese, cream, ghee, ice-cream etc,” he further added.

Earlier, Dr Nasser hailed

the significance of Al Morooj Dairy, which he described as a “socioeconomic project that strengthens cooperation between Omani cattle herders and the private sector in helping the rural community utilise their livestock wealth”.

Importantly, the project targets the collection of both camel milk

(annual collection estimated at 4.32 million litres per year) and cow milk (3.24 million litres per year).

Collection centres have been piloted at three locations — Niyabat Ghado, Niyabat Zeek and Niyabat Hajeef — with plans for further centres to be added later, he said.

Significantly, around 620 Omani farmers are currently supplying raw cow milk and raw camel milk to the project through these collection centres. Efforts are ongoing to register more families into the network, Dr Nasser stated.

According to the CEO, a co-packing arrangement with Al Safwa Dairy and Beverages, located at Saada in Salalah, allows for Al Morooj’s fresh cow milk and camel milk output to be processed into fresh pasteurised milk products.

But to ensure that the collection system meets high industry and quality standards, several measures have been put in place, he explained.

Bank Muscat and AXA Gulf offer unique savings, investment plans

MUSCAT: In line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’ and its commitment to innovative products that cater to the unique needs of its customers, Bank Muscat has announced the availability of class-leading retirement and children’s education plans through its strategic tie-up with AXA Gulf, one of the leading insurance providers in the region, recently acquired by GIG (Gulf Insurance Group).

Through this alliance, the bank offers highly customisable bancassurance products that cater to customer needs in a fast-changing world. Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said: “The bank is delighted to partner with AXA Gulf Insurance, one of the region’s leading insurers, to offer unique and bespoke savings and retirement plans that help our customers meet their financial



Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani

milestones and offer them peace of mind regarding their family’s future. They can rest assured that their future life goals can be accomplished through these plans and that their loved ones will be covered should anything unexpected happen to the family’s breadwinner.

“We encourage all of our clients to learn more about these one-of-a-kind, highly customisable plans that can help them reach their financial objectives in the future.”

Mehdi bin Salim al Harthy, General Manager and Head of Partnerships for AXA Gulf in



Mehdi bin Salim al Harthy

Oman, said: “We are pleased to further strengthen our long-standing partnership with Bank Muscat.

Our customers can rest assured that their savings and retirement plans are managed by a dedicated team of wealth-management specialists and that they are receiving the best life protection services available in the Sultanate of Oman.

“We are committed to being a trusted partner to our valued customers and their families by offering highly innovative products that provide

complete peace of mind.” AXA’s savings plan is a unit-linked insurance plan, which combines savings and life protection under a single integrated policy.

The plan is primarily intended to help customers set aside a part of their present savings to meet a future financial milestone — like saving up for retirement or to fund their children’s higher education.

Customers have access to financial advisers who can design highly customised solutions depending on each customer’s unique profile and financial needs.

At the same time, the AXA Savings plan also provides excellent protection against unforeseen events, offering good financial protection to the investor’s family, as well as an excellent retirement plan that takes care of one’s needs in old age. More details about the plan are available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Bancassurance/pages/details.aspx#savings> or by calling 24032684.

9th National Defence batch visits Duqm SEZ



DUQM: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) hosted a visit by a delegation representing the 9th National Defence batch, headed by Air Vice Marshal Eng Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC), and a number of faculty members, to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The delegation was received by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of OPAZ, and a number of officials from SEZAD and companies operating in the zone.

The guests were briefed about the different capabilities of SEZAD in a number of sectors, most notably the renewable energy sector (green energy), logistics and others.

Further, the delegation toured a number of projects and facilities in the Zone, including the port and dry dock and energy projects such as Duqm Refinery and central facilities.

Other projects covered during the visit included the multi-purpose fishing port, Port of Duqm, the dry dock, Karwa Motors factory, the tourism zone and Rock Garden.

Ooredoo sends winners to Manchester Derby



MUSCAT: Four lucky football fans have scored big with an all-expenses paid trip to the Manchester Derby in Ooredoo’s football-themed raffle draw. It’s the latest round in an exciting series, which gives customers a chance to attend the season’s major matches around Europe.

All Home Internet, Hala prepaid and Shahry postpaid customers can be in the draw to win a once-in-a-lifetime trip, which includes match tickets, air travel and accommodation for them and a friend, simply by upgrading, subscribing to plans or recharging.

Watch this space for the upcoming ‘La Liga’s El Clasico’

raffle draw, which has already been launched!

All Home Internet customers have to do to enter the draw is activate a new connection or upgrade their existing plan.

Hala customers simply need to activate a new SIM or recharge. Plus, more recharges mean more chances of winning. Meanwhile, Shahry customers, both new subscribers or those upgrading their plans, will automatically be entered into the draw. Winners are being announced on Ooredoo’s social media channels. So don’t miss out, grab the chance today to be part of the game! To find out more visit www.ooredoo.om.

MSX30 Index closes the week down by 1.36%

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week down by 1.36 per cent. All indices closed red for the week. The financial index ended lower by 1.22 per cent. Services index and industrial index ended down by 0.77 per cent and 1.08 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed down by 1.58 per cent.

National Gas company announced that in line with their overall strategy, they have been in discussions with their joint venture partner, Unigaz International in their JV entity, Unigaz LLC to buy out their share in the joint venture.

They have agreed on a mutually acceptable transfer price and on February 22, they have received a confirmation that they are proceeding with the transfer documents.

Further to their disclosure on divestment from Joint Venture Company, it is intimated to the shareholders that Unigaz LLC has agreed to buy out their entire 51 per cent share in the joint venture at a transfer price of RO 407,000.

Al Mouj Muscat has entered into a new partnership with United Finance, giving residents the option of preferred financing

Traded Value of Property in Oman (OMR mn)



rates. The new agreement and attractive rates, residents benefit from having a premium and personalised service through a fast and convenient process for securing finance.

The preferred rates United Finance have introduced to Al Mouj Muscat require only a 20-per cent down payment for up to three years credit which applies to owners as well as tenants at Al Mouj Muscat who meet the eligibility criteria.

Shell Oman Marketing Company has launched its first electric vehicle (EV) charging hub in the Sultanate of Oman, located at Al Bandar Service Station in Seeb. It has supplemented the

existing fuel station with a fast electric charging point, catering to the EV owners in the capital.

The new Shell Recharge service will enable customers to charge their EVs speedily and to enjoy seamless drives within and around the city. Already featuring an environmentally sustainable design with built-in solar panels on the Shell Select store, the service station is now also equipped with a 50kW electric charging point.

Value of traded property in Oman went down by 3.5 per cent YoY to RO 216.3 million compared to RO 224.1 million in January 2021.

Traded value of mortgage

Oman recorded net outflows of \$5.0 million in the month of January 2022. Oman’s highest positive inflow YoY came in the month of June 2021 when net inflows during the month were recorded at \$75 million

contracts during the same period fell by 28.1 per cent to RO 80.2 million compared to RO 111.7 million in same period last year.

Traded value of sale contracts rose by 23.1 per cent to RO 134.2 million in January 2022 compared to RO 109.0 million last year.

Number of properties issued in January 2022 declined by 25.6 per cent to 20,613 compared to 27,700 in January 2021.

Oman recorded net outflows of \$5.0 million in the month of January 2022. Oman’s highest positive inflow YoY came in the month of June 2021 when net inflows during the month were recorded at \$75 million. [Courtesy: U-Capital]

Experience fine journeys in flagship GAC Motor GA8 sedan

MUSCAT: GAC Motor GA8 is fantastic sedan that makes a fantastic mark with its stunning design, power and comfort. The GA8 offer flagship sedan experiences for those in search of value-for-money.

The GA8 flagship sedan is sure to make a lasting impression on every arrival with its LED headlights with alarm for headlight on and follow-me-home function, 17” aluminium alloy wheels, LED daytime running lights, LED high mounted brake light, front and rear fog lights, power adjustable side mirrors, dedicated LED cornering lights and more.

Giving you the opportunity to take the lead and enjoy the experience is the turbo-charged 2.0L, 194 HP engine that produces 300 Nm torque at 1600-4500 RPM. This engine is paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

Making journeys comfortable and smooth are the double wishbone independent suspension and rear five-link beam independent suspension.

Making every entry warm and welcoming are the well-appointed interiors. An experience inside the GA8 will definitely encourage you to spend more time in it.

Passengers can easily get away in a world of their own and enjoy



uplifting moments even on a busy day with the available three-zone automatic air conditioning,

second row AC vents, negative ion air purifier, leather and leatherette-trimmed seats, 10-

way power adjustable driver’s seat, 6-way power adjustable front passenger’s seat, power sunroof with jam protection and more.

Increasing the levels on convenience and technology are a range of features like AM/FM, audio and video system, 10-inch colour touch screen display, and navigation system, 6 speakers, speed based volume adjustment, cruise control, rear parking sensors, wide-angle (180-deg) backup camera system, passive entry passive start, eco drive and more.

Keeping passengers safe on every journey are a range of features that include dual front,

front side and side curtain airbags, electronic stability programme, electronic parking brake with auto-hold, impact sensing door unlock and engine immobiliser with anti-theft alarm.

New World Autos LLC is the distributor for GAC Motor vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman.

For more information, please visit www.gacmotoroman.com or www.youtube.com/GAC_Motor_Oman or www.facebook.com/GAC_Motor_Oman or www.instagram.com/GAC_Motor_Oman/. For further details, and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah.

Al Morooj Dairy to expand range of camel milk-based products

FROM PAGE 13

“We receive raw cow and camel milk in separate clean stainless-steel (SS) cans from farmers at the corresponding centres and record the farmer’s registration number. Samples are then subjected to chemical analysis. If the test samples comply with our quality standards, the milk is approved and ready to be sent to the company’s chilling plant.

At the plant, the milk is pumped through the PHE (plate heat exchanger) and cooled to below 4 degrees Celsius to preserve the milk from microbial growth. The chilled milk is then transferred to the clean and sanitized insulated SS storage tanks and maintained in chilled condition. Based on the results of further QC testing, the chilled milk is then transferred in insulated SS tankers for despatch to the Al-Safwa Dairy and Beverages plant, he added.

Al Morooj’s Watani brand of fresh camel milk is targeted at general customers across all ages, says Dr Nasser. “The health conscious have begun to use camel milk these days. Camel milk is also suitable for consumption by children and the elderly as well. The majority of customers are Omanis, and they are used to consuming camel milk as part of their day-to-day diet.”

Tejarah Talks session focuses on sustainability as a business imperative

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 26

Tejarah Talks, a new business initiative by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) was launched on Wednesday evening at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North with a session entitled ‘Sustainability – A Nice-to-have or a Need-to-have?’ Supported by SOHAR Port and Freezone, HSBC and Oman Business Forum, Tejarah Talks attendees heard from a panel of local and international businesses committed to reversing climate change through innovative thinking, helping lower Oman’s CO2 emissions, improve sustainability and lead Oman’s transition to renewables.

Maymuna al Adawi, MoCIIP Director and Tejarah Talks organiser, said: “Omani consumers used to fall into two distinct categories a niche group of eco-friendly shoppers and everyone else. Today that distinction no longer exists. Sustainability is mainstream and the public particularly Oman’s youth want the brands they choose to engage with to be eco-



friendly.”

The February 23 Tejarah Talks session was moderated by His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm. The panelists were: Mazin al Saadi, HSSE Manager, Mazoon Dairy; Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO, SOHAR Port and Freezone; Dr Firas al Abduwani, VP, Clean Energy OQ Alternative Energy; Simon Adcock, Head, Commercial Banking, HSBC;

and Dr Michael Tsang, Founder, Three Pillars Consulting.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a sizeable shift in Omani consumer attitudes towards climate change which has inspired firms, large and small, to innovate and re-evaluate their way of working and become more sustainable.

“Businesses in manufacturing, energy, tourism

and food production are finding interesting and exciting ways to address sustainability issues,” commented His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm and moderator of Wednesday evening’s Tejarah Talks.

“The upshot is companies discovering new ways to go green, protect the environment and make substantial savings.” In addition to the financial savings

Omani businesses can make through green practices, there is also scope to attract investment with sustainability increasingly becoming a prominent criterion for funding, pointed out HH Sayyid Dr Adham.

A recent Barclays study revealed that 75 per cent of businesses interviewed benefited commercially after going green. For many firms, investing in sustainable measures is not just an ethical decision, but also a profitable one.

One third of businesses surveyed by Barclays also reported lower business costs as a result of their green investments, while 27 per cent believed their actions would help their company gain environmentally responsible status in the marketplace.

“It is clear from the Barclays study that investing in green and sustainable measures not only enhances brand image, but also increases competitive advantage. In fact, there is no doubt that improving a company’s reputation by showing dedication to sustainability can have an indirect effect on a firm’s net profits,” added the MoCIIP Director.

Omani firm initiates first Caravan Park in India’s Kerala state

KABEER YOUSUF

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An Omani firm has initiated the first park for caravans in the south Indian state of Kerala, a place which has an increasing number of ‘homes on wheels’ owned by High Networth Individuals (HNIs).

Located in the scenic tourism spot in Vagamon in the hilly district of Idukki, the first of such tourism projects in the post-Covid-19 era for Kerala tourism aims, in return, to market Oman tourism in the state.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Aadil Alexander (pictured), Managing Director of Adrak Constructions in Oman which owns Karavan Meadows, developed by Adrak Hotels and Resorts and managed by Citrine



Hospitality Ventures, said that the project was set up to support bilateral tourism between the Sultanate of Oman and India.

“The Caravan Park is the first of its kind in the state at a time when individually-owned as well as hired caravans are having great demand and bilateral tourism can be supported by marketing Oman’s tourist spots to the guests to the Park as well as sending Omani tourists to India,” he noted.

The Caravan Park features a restaurant with grilling

facilities, private rest-house, housekeeping, round-the-clock individual service and campfire, among others and can accommodate two caravans at the moment.

Caravan tourism is set to redefine the state’s travel industry as an innovative product after houseboats. The concept of caravan tourism began gaining shape last year as a remedy to the prolonged crisis in the tourism sector caused by the pandemic.

Plans are afoot to set up 120 caravan parks and as many as 353 entrepreneurs have registered for running caravans in the state. “We have plans to make further investments in this sector and expand the facilities to accommodate eight caravans in the near future,” Aadil said.

IITC partners with Omani SME to promote information security

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 26

International Information Technology Co LLC (IITC), an OHI Group Company, has joined forces with local Omani SME Hemaya Information Security to enable the delivery of the latter’s specialised security services to the local market.

Muscat-based IITC is a leading service provider of enterprise IT infrastructure, complex business solutions and high-quality learning services for more than three decades in the Sultanate of Oman. IITC helps its customer transform digitally as their preferred technology partner.

Hemaya Information Security, a registered SME, works in the field of IT security by providing flexible, secure, ICT project management and cost-effective solutions to clients. The continuing revolution in



the IT industry is creating great opportunities to companies with foresight to react faster to customers’ needs and open new areas of business.

“Through this partnership, IITC and Hemaya customers will leverage a perfect synergy covering the most demanding technology requirements of any project, as IITC will add to their portfolio of services, some of the

most advanced security services, giving their customers to meet specialised security consultants who have expertise in the field,” said Parag Gurumukhi, DGM - Sales, IITC.

“It has always been OHI’s endeavour to encourage local SME companies and help them increase their market presence and provide financial strength at the same time,” he added.

Western businesses cut Russia ties over Ukraine invasion

LONDON: Some Western companies severed their ties with Russia on Friday, and others studied whether and how to do so, as President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine triggered sanctions and pressure to abandon some business dealings.

European sports and entertainment businesses were among the first to announce such moves. Premier League club Manchester United withdrew the sponsorship rights of Russian airline Aeroflot, Formula One cancelled the 2022 Russian Grand Prix, and

organisers of the Eurovision song contest said Russia would not be allowed to participate in this year’s final.

The “inclusion of a Russian entry in this year’s (Eurovision) contest would bring the competition into disrepute,” the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) said in a statement. Gadget maker Dell Technologies Inc said it suspended sales in Ukraine and Russia and would closely monitor the situation to determine next steps.

New US rules on exports to Russia announced on Thursday



The logo of Russia’s flagship airline Aeroflot is seen on an Airbus A320-200 in Colomiers near Toulouse, France. — Reuters

covered computers, and Dell accounted for about 6 per cent of computer shipments to Russia last quarter, according to researcher IDC.

US carrier Delta Air Lines Inc said, without providing a reason, that it had suspended its codesharing service with Aeroflot. Alexandria, Virginia, marketing consultant Dan Sondhelm said companies were trying to balance the reputational risk of continuing to deal with Moscow with their economic interests and concerns about upsetting some of their investors.

“It will take some time for companies to make their decisions to act or do nothing,” Sondhelm said. “It doesn’t happen overnight.”

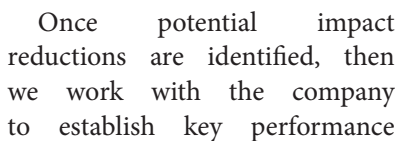
The United States on Thursday imposed sanctions on Russia that targeted five major Russian banks, including state-backed Sberbank and VTB, the country’s two largest lenders, as well as wealthy individuals, and announced new export control measures.

On Friday, European Union member states agreed to freeze European assets of Putin and his foreign minister, among other measures. — Reuters

DR MICHAEL TSANG

BUSINESS STORIES ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER

That being said, a sustainable future for Oman — and the rest of the world for that matter —



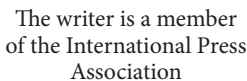
Moreover, regulations and policies for energy efficiency and carbon reductions will only get more stringent each year in order to reduce emissions enough to be in line with the 1.5°C warming scenario outlined by the IPCC.

Having said that, companies will ultimately find that they

This is a common situation that we see, namely that perceived environmental benefits are not always guaranteed and it is only possible to definitively say this after conducting a GHG assessment across the life-cycle.

Much of that is cross-border

Such scenarios are distant right now. But it's clearly enough to keep investors on their toes. — **Reuters**



In the immediate aftermath of the tension escalation in any conflict from the Vietnam war onwards, the markets rebounded sharply.

And indeed the market reacted after the first initial shock. Bitcoin, the leading cryptocurrency in terms of market capitalisation, went from \$39,000 down to \$34,700 in just a few hours, but roared back to \$39,800 in the next

All cryptocurrencies are speculative products. Anyone investing in it should seek financial advice.

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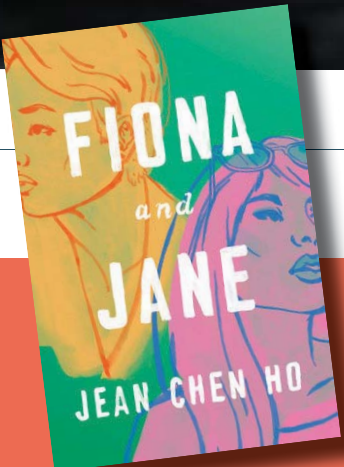
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READ



FIONA AND JANE
BY JEAN CHEN HO

Jean Chen Ho's Fiona and Jane follows the eponymous Taiwanese American duo over the course of 20 years. After growing up together in California, the two best friends are separated when Fiona lights out for New York — a move that leaves Jane to deal with her father's untimely death without her BFF by her side.

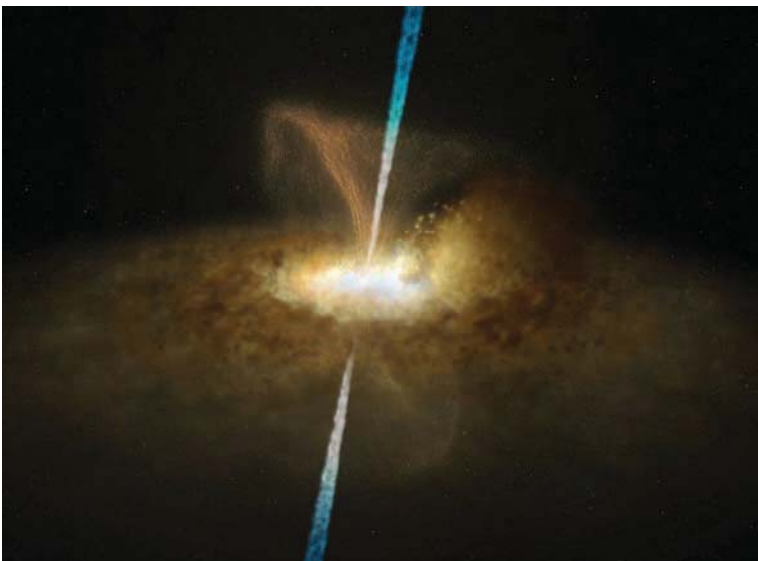
CONSERVATION

New observations help explain universe's most energetic objects

OBSERVATIONS SHOWING a roughly dough-nut-shaped cloud of cosmic dust and gas shrouding a huge black hole at the heart of a galaxy similar in size to our Milky Way are providing scientists with new clarity about the universe's most energetic objects. Scientists said on Wednesday that their observations involving the supermassive black hole at the centre of galaxy Messier 77 and its surrounding cloud lend support to predictions made three decades ago about what are called "active galactic nuclei."

These are places at the cen-

tres of many large galaxies that have tremendous luminosity — sometimes outshining all of a galaxy's billions of stars combined — and produce the universe's most energetic outbursts seen since the Big Bang event 13.8 billion years ago. The energy arises from gas violently falling into a supermassive black hole that is surrounded by a cloud of tiny particles of rock and soot along with mostly hydrogen gas. Black holes are extraordinarily dense objects possessing gravitational pulls so powerful even light cannot escape them. Supermassive black



holes, which reside at the centre of many galaxies, including our own, are the largest of them. Messier 77, also called NGC

1068 or the Squid Galaxy, is located 47 million light years — the distance light travels in a year, 9.5 trillion km — from the Earth in the constellation Cetus.

Its supermassive black hole has a mass roughly 10 million times greater than our sun. The observations, using the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope in Chile's Atacama Desert, provided strong support for what is called the "unified model" of active galactic nuclei. This model holds that all active galactic nuclei are basically the same but that some appear from the vantage point of Earth to have different properties. Some look intensely bright because the position of their ring-like cloud does not obscure the gas plummeting into the black hole from our viewing angle. Others look dark because the cloud blocks our view of what is truly happening. Messier 77's active galactic nucleus is one of the dark ones, but the new observations indicate that it actually possesses the same qualities as the bright ones. — Reuters



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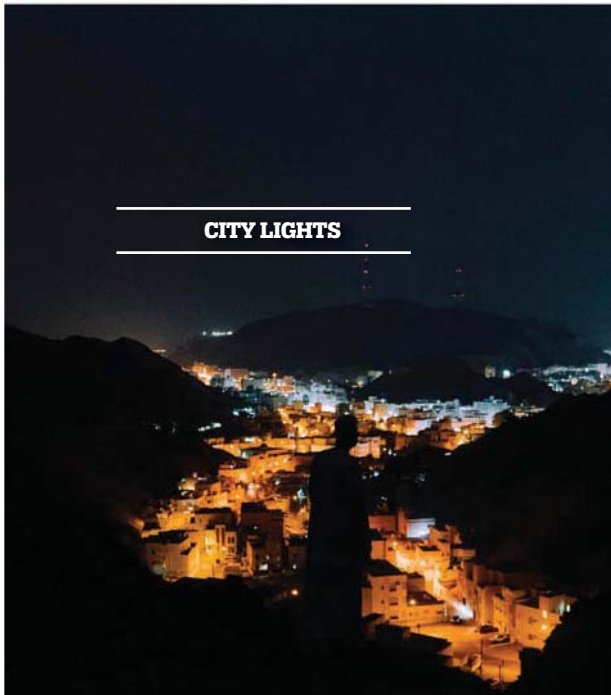


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AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

Bolivian house with devil sculptures spooks highland city



A BOLIVIAN MINER has covered his house with sculptures of long-horned devils and other scary creatures, intended as a playful nod to the country's colonial past but which has instead shocked some neighbours who fear a link to occult rituals. The adobe-brick house in the high-altitude city of El Alto belongs to David Choque, who hired an artist to create the skeletal devils from cement and wood and installed them on his roof, doors and walls.

There is an imprint of a black skull on Choque's front door and giant teeth around one window frame, below which an intricately carved dragon lurks.

Choque told Reuters he hoped the spooky house could spur local tourism.

"Close-minded people will think it's something supernatural, but people need to open their minds and see it as a tourist attraction, something that can improve the area," said Choque, who comes from a mining family.

"It'll bring good things, not evil." Choque added that the sculptures are an allusion to life in Bolivian mines centuries ago during Spanish colonial rule when local indigenous men were frightened and forced into digging for silver.

The colonial masters would show miners images of devils and warn them they would be abducted by the spirits if they refused to work.

Over three centuries of Spanish domination, Bolivia, like Mexico, was a major source of silver that was shipped to Asia in exchange for goods like porcelain and silk, in one of the world's first major commodity trades.

Some neighbours see the devils on Choque's house, many with their mouths bared in grotesque grins, as signals to Satanic worshippers, and Choque laments he is battling baseless rumours.

One resident, Maria Laurel, said she has heard talk of naked rituals in the house. "The neighbours here are scared," she said as she leaned against her car. "The truth is it frightens me."

Choque denied any such rituals, and noted that similar depictions of devils appear on altars at mine entrances where workers often leave offerings including coca leaves and alcohol, believing this will protect them in the mines.

—Reuters

FASHION

The Real Housewives of Sustainable Fashion



THE EYE DOESN'T always know where to settle.

On the purple-and-orange wicker purse in the shape of a frog? On the rhinestone horns stuck to the tops of lime-green sneakers? On the protruding, heart-shaped hips of a pink velvet gown, formed by old-fashioned side hoops?

Visiting the set of a Collina Strada shoot is not unlike being greeted by a delegation from another planet. The models, in their layers of mismatched candy-coloured clothing, are a new species, bred from Goth mall rats and granola girls. They don't strut and pose. They frolic and stomp.

On this Monday in February, they have been plucked from their grungy fantasyland and dropped into a rented film studio in South Brooklyn. Here, the brand is working on a project bridging our world and theirs: a parody of the mid-2000s reality show "The Hills" (Collina translates to "hill" in Italian) with some "Real Housewives" energy.

"The Collinas," which debuted on Wednesday at New York Fashion Week, is not the company's first fashion film. In September 2020, when the pandemic forced labels to swap their runway

shows for online presentations, it released a video titled "Change Is Cute."

At the time, the digitisation of fashion shows wasn't ideal for many designers, who may depend on traditional in-person formats to reach buyers, editors and influencers. Collina Strada, however, saw an opportunity to fully express the world it envisioned for its clothes — something only really possible in digital form.

"Change Is Cute" opens on a white bull (died purple and covered in orange squiggles) and cow (painted in rainbow florals) roaming a hilly landscape (except the hills are covered in hand-drawn fruit wallpaper). It only gets weirder from there.

This season, Collina Strada decided to continue its world-building through video. (After "Change Is Cute" came Collina Land, a video game funded by Gucci as part of its platform for emerging designers, and "Collina-mals," a project that enlisted David Mattingly, the artist behind the science fantasy series "Animorphs.") The difference this time is that the film is scripted.

Hillary Taymour, the 34-year-old founder and creative director of Collina Strada, said she wanted to make a "pure fashion come-

dy."

Taymour didn't keep up with "The Hills" when it aired on MTV from 2006 to 2010. She was around "The Hills," though, living in Los Angeles and going to the same clubs as its stars, who were around the same age. Taymour dressed somewhat similarly, too, though more "indie sleaze party girl," she said: tube tops, heavy eyeliner, American Apparel jeans and Marc by Marc Jacobs heels.

"I didn't even wash my hair," she said. "I still don't."

Although she founded Collina Strada in 2009, the brand's visual identity (upcycling and tie-dyeing; using natural materials like "syk" made from the waste of rose bushes; casting models who are not willowy white women but nonbinary people, disabled people, sexagenarians) didn't crystallise until about 2019, she said. That was the year she was named a finalist for the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund, a prestigious award for emerging American designers.

Just as the first episode of "The Hills" revolves around its star, Lauren Conrad, embarking on a fashion internship, "The Collinas" tells the story of a new intern starting at Collina Strada. — **NYT**

COLUMN



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Ancient Arabic Proverbs

THIS WEEK WE CONTINUE with ancient proverbs from Arabia:

5) The Camel Leaders and The Archers Blended: in ancient wars, soldiers either led horses and camels on ground or were archers. In the heat of battle, both factions mingled and was hard to tell them apart. Hence the proverb is used to describe total confusion.

6) The Sword Preceded the Blame: There was a man called Dhubba who was a camel herder. He had two sons: Sa'ad and Saeed. One evening, the camels went astray and Dhubba asked his sons to bring them home. After long hours, Sa'ad came back but not Saeed. Dhubba went to the market and saw a man called Al Harith ibn Ka'ab wearing clothes similar to that of Saeed. He asked him about it and Al Harith confessed that he'd got them from a man he'd killed on the road. Dhubba didn't react, instead he asked Al Harith to hand him the sword he was carrying. Al Harith obliged carelessly — unaware that this was the father of his victim — and got stabbed and killed instantly by his own sword. People gathered around the two and started blaming Dhubba for being hasty and he answered: "The sword preceded the blame". It's used in situations where it's too late to criticise.

7) Every Vessel Overflows with its Content: This comes from a poem by an Iraqi poet nicknamed Hees Bees (1089-1179 A.D) that means: you could never hide your true nature, no matter how hard you try.

8) His Dust Could Never Be Parted: there are two stories of the origin of this proverb. The first is that this was used to describe horse riders who were so skillful that other riders could never catch up with them or the dust they left at their wake. The second is that the proverb was originally used to describe fast horses that were so light-footed you could barely see the dust at their hoofs. In both cases, it's used to describe humans

that excel in whatever they do.

9) Beware of the Fury of the Patient: you could never predict the outcome of pushing patient people too hard. Just be careful!

10) Time is Like a Sword if You Don't Cut It, It Will Cut You Down: don't waste precious time doing silly things.

11) The Convoy Moves and the Dogs Bark: The great Muslim theologian Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i (767-820 A.D) composed the following verses in reply to a man who angered him: "Curse as much as you like for my silence is the answer to the mean, I'm not running out of replies but lions never answer to dogs". From this verse came the proverb that indicates the futility of failure's talk against the successful.

12) Clouds aren't Affected by Dog Barks: this is somehow similar to the proverb above. Mean talk doesn't affect the honourable.

13) Greater than Fire on a Mountain Top: Al Khansa (575-646 A.D) was an Arab poetess most famously known for elegies composed for her brother Sakhr, who suffered from war injuries for a long time and died eventually. The proverb comes from a verse describing him as: "Greater than fire on a mountain top".

14) Time Has Eaten and Drank Over It: when ages had passed over something, this proverb is used. It comes from a poetic verse: "How many people we've seen before us, that time had eaten and drank over them".

15) To Know Where the Shoulder is Eaten From: describes cunning people who are so smart that they know the best way of eating the complicated shoulder meat without exposing the bone.

(To be continued....)

Rasha al Raisi

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By Hammam al Badi
Insta: @HammamBadi

Sitting in his modern workshop surrounded by the trappings of his trade, Moosa al Zaabi is hard at work on an exquisite piece of household furniture that he knows will eventually find a home in a chic villa or residential apartment. MOX.WOOD, as his outfit is called, is not the typical carpentry workshop. It's distinctly upmarket

It was during his stay in Britain that an innate interest in carpentry was rekindled and fostered into a rewarding career, says Moosa. Trained and mentored by British woodworkers, the young apprentice worked on his wood-working skills till he was satisfied that they would hold him in good stead if he chose to open a workshop upon his return to the Sultanate of Oman. MOX.WOOD became a reality in the summer of 2017. The brand name derives from 'Mox' — an affectionate nickname that Moosa earned from his friends in

areas of office work. Working in construction using wood brings a new avenue of growth, and skill sets for our workforce, instead of relying on international labour. Omanis have the potential to be self-sufficient in this trade, which in turn allows us to be independent financially and technically." Moosa strongly believes that young Omanis should learn the basics of woodwork so they can be self-sufficient when they need to do certain jobs around their homes. "Learning how to re-balance a door, fix a fence, put shelves up, use power tools in a



Elevating woodworking into an art form

in its product offering and quality — the realisation of the entrepreneur's dream to fashion functional works of art from wood. But MOX.WOOD, an up-and-coming Omani woodworking brand, is more than just the story of a young Omani with a passion to succeed in a field that is decidedly off-the-beaten track for people like Moosa. It's also a story that speaks of enterprise, resolve and agility. Sharing his remarkable story with the Observer, Moosa says his current trade as a woodworking specialist was, in part, the culmination of many twists and turns in his educational pathway. Following the completion of his schooling in his native Al Khabourah, the youngster moved to Dubai where he obtained a diploma from the Academy of Technical Training for Aviation Management and Safety. Travelling onward to the UK, he studied Environmental Health and Safety and also acquired an armful of qualifications in, among other areas, NEBOSH, IOSH, First Aid, VIP Protection Security, SIA Security and even Dog Handling.

the UK. Located in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah the workshop currently specialises in the crafting of wooden doors, roofs, chairs, tables, kitchen units, cupboards, beds and other pieces of furniture. Over the years, Moosa has seen his carpentry business thrive and grow, necessitating the relocation of his workshop to more expansive settings to include a training centre, showroom and office as well. Going forward, he also plans to position MOX.WOOD as the leading wood-working brand in the Sultanate of Oman before exploring options to establish a presence in overseas markets as well. Part of his longer-term vision is to elevate MOX.WOOD into a centre of excellence where young Omanis can acquire international-class qualifications in wood-working. "I have a strong desire to educate people who are interested in carpentry work", Moosa explains. "My primary objective is to empower Omanis, and especially the youth of Oman to look at careers outside of the traditional

safe way are all good examples of DIY. This will help to save money and avoid the hassle of bringing someone in to do these jobs. In England I observed a broad spectrum of people from ladies to teenagers doing gardening and DIY work around the house, without the need for external support. There's no reason why we can't empower our whole Omani community to be able to help themselves in these small activities." MOX.WOOD, he adds, is a signature woodworking brand — a standard made possible by the procurement of equipment and hardware from leading international suppliers. "To guarantee the quality of my work, I decided to import machinery, accessories and materials from the UK, which was hugely expensive", he said. However, while the demand for his specialist services continues to be strong, a big dampener is the high cost of wood, materials and tools, he laments. Adding to his woes has been the pandemic and its aftermath, with the prices of wood, paint and aluminium having quadrupled since the outbreak. Availability of some sup-

plies has also been proving problematic on occasion. "In the circumstance, we had to stockpile raw materials which required a large investment. That, combined with the market conditions and limited ability to work due to the lockdown in place at the time, presented cash flow issues. However, the market is now reopening and we are starting to rebuild the business once again", Moosa noted. An accomplished craftsman, Moosa's woodworking skills are evident in a range of homes and projects that were undertaken in the UK during his stay there — work that is now showcased on MOX.WOOD's social media platforms. The brand has also represented the Sultanate of Oman at the International Carving Association's event in Bahrain, and the Wood Maker Fair in

Muscat as well. But long-term, Moosa aims to create wooden homes that amount to works of art. "My goal is to bring alive the dreams of people who wish to live in wooden cabins amid the beautiful outdoors. This will give me a sense of purpose and accomplishment", he remarks. The talented woodworker's fascination with wooden cabins began in the UK where he and his family visited so many beauty spots and had mini vacations in log cabins. "Taking that ideology and flogging the experiences across Instagram and YouTube sparked so much interest from the Omanis. I wanted to re-create these little pockets of happiness where our own people can step away from their normal life into rustic luxury that our cabins afford."