

HM greetings to Zanzibar President

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met President Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi of Zanzibar. The meeting comes within the framework of Sayyid Badr's visit to the United Republic of Tanzania. Sayyid Badr conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes of permanent health and happiness to President Mwinyi.

DETAILS ON P2



P12

HAMED TAKES ON 560-KM 'BORDER TO COAST' CHALLENGE



P13

OMAN CRUDE SLIPS FROM 12-YEAR HIGH TO \$122



P19

GYLLENHAAL'S 'LOST DAUGHTER' TRIUMPHS AT INDIE SPIRIT AWARDS



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO PAKISTAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on the death of Muhammad Rafiq Tarar, former president of Pakistan. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Alvi, family of the departed and the people of Pakistan. — ONA

NEW DELHI

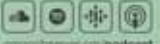
INDIA TO RESUME REGULAR FLIGHTS

Regular international flight operations will resume from March 27 and will follow the standard operating procedures effective at Indian airports for foreign arrivals and departures, the Indian government said on Tuesday. "After having recognised the increased vaccination coverage across the globe and in consultation with the stakeholders, the Government of India has decided to resume scheduled commercial international passenger services", the Ministry of Civil Aviation said. Scheduled international flight have remained suspended in India since March 23, 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.





HEALTHY AGING



INSIDE



PROMINENT SUDANESE POLITICIAN DETAINED

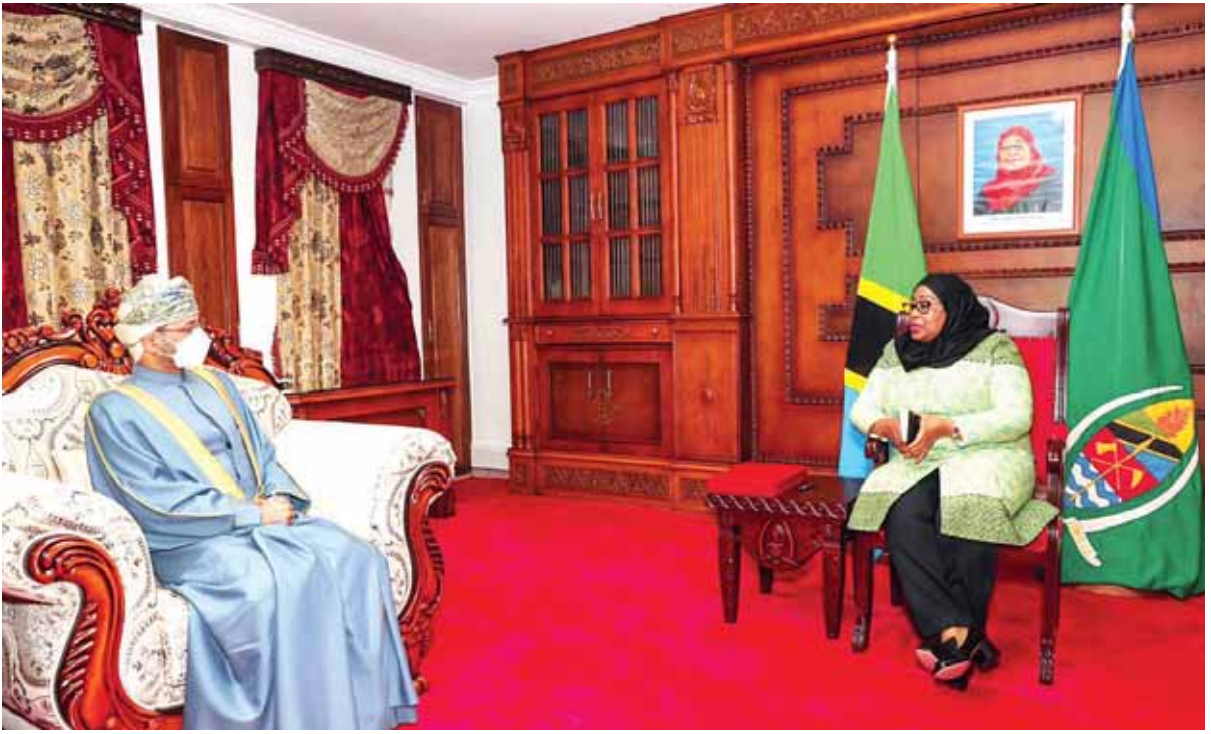
P6



EMPOWERING AFRICAN WOMEN TO SHAPE FUTURE

P9

HM MESSAGE TO TANZANIA PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples. The message was handed over by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he was received by the President of Tanzania at the Presidential Palace in Zanzibar on Tuesday. Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty the Sultan to President Suluhu, along with His Majesty's best wishes of permanent health and happiness to her.

DETAILS ON P2

In nod to Russia, Ukraine says no longer keen on Nato membership

WASHINGTON: President Volodymyr Zelensky said he is no longer pressing for Nato membership for Ukraine, a delicate issue that was one of Russia's stated reasons for its war on its neighbour.

In another apparent nod aimed at placating Moscow, Zelensky said he is open to "compromise" on the status of two breakaway pro-Russian territories that President Vladimir Putin recognised as independent just before the war on February 24.

"I have cooled down regarding this question a long time ago after we understood that... Nato is not prepared to accept Ukraine", Zelensky said in an interview



A woman reacts as her relatives cross a destroyed bridge as they evacuate the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on Tuesday. — AFP

Referring to Nato membership, Zelensky said through an interpreter that he does not want to be president of a "country which is begging something on its knees."

Russia has said it does not want neighbouring Ukraine to join Nato, the transatlantic alliance created at the start of the Cold War to protect Europe from the Soviet Union.

In recent years the alliance has expanded further east to take in former Soviet bloc countries, infuriating the Kremlin. Russia sees Nato enlargement as a threat, as it does the military posture of these new Western allies on its doorstep.

SEE ALSO P7

aired on Monday night on ABC News. "The alliance is afraid of controversial things, and confrontation with Russia", the president added.

45% of Omani diplomats are women

KABEER YOUSUF
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As many as 45 per cent of Omani diplomats representing the country abroad are women, a number that manifests the true attention the Sultanate of Oman is attributing to women empowerment.

The number of female diplomats is increasing as the Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is taking all efforts in educating, training and preparing the young, ambitious women to shoulder greater responsibilities as diplomatic representatives.

"More than 45 per cent of the Omani diplomatic representatives are women, and some are holding very important



Dr Zainab al Qasmi

departments like the Department of North America, while some are employed in many European and other western countries", said Dr Zainab al Qasmi, Head of the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Regardless of the gender, more

Omani youth are coming to the fore in terms of diplomatic representatives, there has been an increasing demand from women candidates to represent the country abroad.

"Although we are recruiting more Omani youth regardless of their gender, more women are expressing their interest to become diplomats and are recruited on the basis of merit. We are in the process of recruiting more women and by and large, Omani women excel in diplomacy and have proven to have recognised at the international level for their merits", Dr Zainab, who is also the first female Arab ambassador, adds.

Speaking at the Women's Day celebrations titled 'Political and Economic Empowerment of Women: Shared Perspectives...



IT'S THE SEASON OF THE MULBERRIES

Locally-called "Fursad", Omani farmers have been growing mulberries along with other wild berries for a long time. The Sultanate of Oman's natural and geographical features are conducive for these berries to grow in abundance and the season is also a big contributing factor that different fruit trees flourish in the country. **DETAILS ON P20**



■ BADR CONVEYS HM GREETINGS TO ZANZIBAR



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister met President Dr Hussein Ali Mwinyi of Zanzibar in Zanzibar on Tuesday. The meeting comes within the framework of Sayyid Badr’s visit to the United Republic of Tanzania. Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes of permanent health and happiness to President Mwinyi. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries further progress and growth. On his turn, President Mwinyi asked Sayyid Badr to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan. He also wished the Omani people continuous progress and prosperity. They reviewed the historic relations between the two countries and constructive cooperation in economic, cultural and investment fields. They also expressed their governments’ joint keenness in promoting business and investment partnership to serve the joint interests of the two countries. – ONA

45% of Omani diplomats are women

FROM PAGE 1
... from Oman and Europe’, at the French Embassy to the Sultanate of Oman, she said that all women are guaranteed equal opportunity along with their male counterparts by the government. Young women are trained by the Diplomatic Institute as part of the Oman youth committee.

The Oman Diplomatic Institute was established under the Royal directives on November 13, 1991, under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This institute helps those interested to carry out diplomatic tasks by conducting internal and external, specialised and academic courses to develop their capabilities in the requirements of diplomatic work in all its political, economic, social and technical aspects and through good preparation to compare theories with practical applications.

The institute currently relies on studies and research rather than being an academic institute which grants academic certificates, and therefore study at the institute depends on a combination of professional and academic nature to prepare the new employees of the ministry.

“The activities of the Diplomatic Institute are divided into general courses, specialised courses, lectures and seminars. Several specialised courses are organised annually which deal with topics that the institute deems necessary for the employee to have in-depth knowledge.”

Global agency to boost tourism

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The government will soon appoint a global communication agency to support its business-to-business (events) and business-to-consumer events, said a top official from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT).

Speaking to the Observer, Saada bint Abdullah al Harthiyah, Director of Business Development, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said the name of the agency will be announced as soon as this month as Oman has eased most of the restrictions related to travel and aims to promote the country as a niche tourism destination.

She said at the annual meeting of tourism representation offices at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday.

This meeting saw the participation of officials from 10 Ministry-affiliated tourism representation offices covering 15 countries, including the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, Nordic Countries, India, the UK, Saudi Arabia and the UAE among others.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Harthy, Director of Business Development, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said, “The number of foreign tourists coming to the country is expected to improve to 50 per cent of the pre-Covid-19 levels in this year. The ministry will be hosting the Global Travel Week, which will be held from March 27 to March 30.”

Tourism representation offices contribute to strengthening the presence of the Sultanate of Oman in the important tourist markets through various promotional activities and plans, including opening offices in non-traditional markets.



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to host Global Tourism Week from March 27 to March 30

The selection of these markets was based on studies carried out by the ministry on the targeted countries through which to promote the Sultanate of Oman as an attractive tourist destination.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism seeks to focus on promotional campaigns on social networking sites.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said. “There are incentives to maximise the economic return from the tourism sector in cooperation with local partners

The name of the agency will be announced as soon as this month as Oman has eased most of the restrictions related to travel and aims to promote the country as a niche tourism destination.

such as airlines, travel offices and companies. Offices in India, UK and Germany and Italy that were closed due Covid-19 pandemic were opened recently.”

HM sends message to President of Tanzania

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples. The message was handed over by Sayyid Badr Hamad Al Busaidi, Foreign Minister when he was received by the President of Tanzania at the Presidential Palace on Tuesday. Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty the Sultan to President Suluhu, along with His Majesty’s best wishes of permanent health and happiness to her. His Majesty also wished the people of Tanzania continuous progress and prosperity.

On her turn, President Suluhu asked Sayyid Badr to convey her greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. They underlined the advanced relations between the two countries and expressed their keenness on the continuation of cooperation in various spheres which serve the peoples of the two countries.

They also discussed regional and international developments of common interest. The meeting was attended by Liberata Mulamula, Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation, the delegation accompanying Sayyid Badr and several Tanzanian officials.

— ONA



Shura panel reviews quality assurance of education

MUSCAT: The Education and Scientific Research Committee of Majlis Ashishura, hosted Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Executive President of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, and a number of specialists at the Authority.

During the sixth regular meeting of the Education and Scientific Research Committee of Majlis Ashishura held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Jamal bin Ahmed al Abri, the committee reviewed the Authority’s role following the expansion of its specialisations in accordance with Royal Decree 9/2021.

During the meeting, Dr Jokha delivered a visual presentation that included an overview of the Authority and its organisational structure, activities and quality assurance processes in the higher education sector. The presentation touched on the quality assurance of school education, the National Qualifications Framework as well as the Authority’s efforts, achievements and the challenges it faces.

Sri Lankan PM meets OCCI delegation

COLOMBO: Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, met with the Omani business delegation headed by Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in Colombo on Tuesday. The meeting discussed the bilateral relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and Sri Lanka and the means of enhancing the volume of trade exchange between



the two countries. The meeting also reviewed the available investment opportunities in the two countries. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Juma bin Hamdan Al Malik al Shehhi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Sri Lanka; Ajith Nivard Cabraal, Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka; and Omar Libby Amir Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Oman ranks 7th best tourist destination

FROM PAGE 1

... including a service facility on the Aten-Hamrir Plain, as well as in Al Mughsayl and Darbat. In Musandam, the zip line project will be inaugurated soon. There is a plan to hold a festival for maritime heritage in the Wilayat of Sur.

The minister announced that the sites registered in the World Heritage List will be put up as part of tenders to establish a visitor centre in Dibba, Qalhat and Bat, so that there will be total services and provide information to the visitors.

The law on tourism will be also revealed soon, as new executive regulations of the law will take into account the requirements of operational and development plans in Oman Vision 2040.



Nation holds strong potential for green hydrogen production

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, in his address to the Council of Ministers recently, has held up before the nation a vision of the Sultanate of Oman becoming a leading producer and exporter of green hydrogen. It will help not only in decarbonising the planet, but also leads to optimal utilisation of abundant solar energy resources in the country.

His Majesty the Sultan has also directed the government to set up a directorate of clean and hydrogen energy under the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and a company to develop this sector.

So, what is green hydrogen and what are its types and uses?

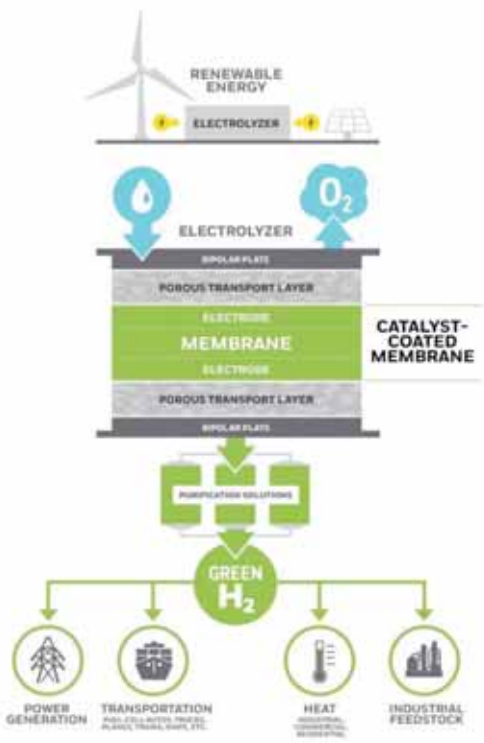
Hydrogen fuel that is created using renewable energy instead of fossil fuels. It has the potential to provide clean power for manufacturing, transportation, and more — and its only byproduct is water.

Electrical engineer Abdullah al Saeedi said that hydrogen is divided into blue, green and gray according to the production methods. Hydrogen produced from renewable energy is called green.

“The use of hydrogen has recently emerged as a clean source of energy as it is produced by electrolysis to separate oxygen atoms from hydrogen and is reused in hydrogen fuel cells. It is also produced from natural gas by separating hydrogen,” Al Saeedi said.

But why this sudden buzz about green hydrogen?

Al Saeedi, who is also interested in smart cities, artificial intelligence and sustainability, said there are two reasons. Firstly, low price of solar power makes its cost effective for producing green hydrogen. Secondly, green hydrogen is increasingly used in transport



operations for trains, trucks and ships as it is a clean fuel without carbon. Hydrogen is easy to store, which allows it to be used subsequently for other purposes and at times other than immediately after its production.

Unlike batteries that are unable to store large quantities of electricity for extended periods of time, hydrogen can be produced from excess renewable energy and stored in large amounts for a long time. And a particular advantage of green hydrogen is that it can be produced wherever there is water and electricity to generate more electricity or heat.

Hydrogen has many uses. Green hydrogen can be used in industry and can be stored in existing gas pipelines to power household appliances. It can transport renewable energy when converted into a carrier such as ammonia, a zero-carbon fuel for shipping, for example.

Hydrogen can also be used with fuel cells to power anything that uses electricity, such as electric vehicles and electronic devices. And unlike batteries, hydrogen fuel cells don't need to be recharged and won't run down, so long as they have hydrogen fuel.

“The process of producing green hydrogen requires the availability of water and electricity produced from renewable energy. Therefore, it needs a large safe infrastructure and a strategic location. This is available specifically in Duqm and this gives the Sultanate of Oman a great advantage,” Al Saeedi said.

Despite all the advantages of hydrogen, it is difficult to use as it is highly flammable because it is light. There are other challenges like transport of hydrogen and cost. But over time research and development across the world will overcome those challenges. Many nations have committed huge investments to develop green hydrogen as fuel of the future.

US President Joe Biden has promised to use renewable energy to produce green hydrogen that costs less than natural gas. The US Department of Energy is putting up to \$100 million into the research and development of hydrogen and fuel cells.

A McKinsey study estimated that by 2030, the US hydrogen economy could generate \$140 billion and support 700,000 jobs.

The European Union will invest \$430 billion in green hydrogen by 2030 to help achieve the goals of its Green Deal. And Chile, Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Australia are all making major investments into green hydrogen.

In December, the UN launched the Green Hydrogen Catapult Initiative, bringing together seven of the biggest global green hydrogen project developers with the goal of cutting the cost of green hydrogen to below \$2 per kilogramme and increasing the production of green hydrogen 50-fold by 2027.

26 women taxi drivers hit the road



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The pink O Taxis have been doing the rounds but the official launch took place on Tuesday coinciding with the International Women's Day held at Muscat Mall.

“The idea was to introduce the concept of taxi service by women operated by O Taxis. Today we were explaining about how it is going to be and the brand. We heard from the female drivers about their experiences,” said the Marketing Director and Project Manager Shaikha Ambuali.

The service is the first woman taxi service in the Sultanate of Oman and was sanctioned to add the new service in January but within a short period of time women have joined the force. On Tuesday, the company announced at the event that 26 female drivers have joined the service.

The concept was launched and the female passengers have also been excited about the new facility in public transportation. The launch event gave a view on how it has been since the concept of the pink O Taxi was announced

and up till now.

“We believe it is a journey, and this is one of the stations. We think it will have a big impact on society whether male or female. We invited the female drivers to join forces with us as it provides a good opportunity to earn money and is a great way to utilise time. The job provides a great amount of flexibility as one does not have to work nine to five. With whatever time you have one can make money by driving and dropping off guests,” explained Shaikha.

Only women and families will be allowed in pink O Taxis.

“Listening to the 26 drivers, it was clear that they are very happy with the services economically and socially as well,” the project manager pointed out.

These are the criteria to be a women taxi driver at O Taxi; the driver must have own car, the car has to be painted white and pink, must have had valid driving licence for at least three years, age range is between 21 to 60 years and the automobile model should not be a hatchback or four wheel.

HARAT AL RAML AWAITS RESTORATION

TEXT& PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Less than 1 km from the centre of the Wilayat of Ibri on the slopes of Al Raml Mountain lies the sprawling ruins of Harat Al Raml. Well-known British explorer James Raymond visited the area in 1836 while touring the interior of the Sultanate of Oman

The area is littered with dilapidated mud houses in between narrow lanes. These houses are fine examples of ancient Omani architecture with balconies, windows and antique wooden doors. The entrances are crowned with arches inspired by Arab and Islamic architecture. Ceilings built with palm trunks are decorated in bright colours.

Harat Al Raml is considered a cultural and tourist landmark that is a snapshot of life in ancient Oman and an amazing testament to Omani civilisation's clever use of natural materials in construction. In many cases, the architectural designs in this village are similar to those in Wilayat Al Hamra (Al Dakhiliyah Governorate), where the intricately carved ceilings can be seen.

Old timers say this Harat was a winter getaway for the Wilayat of Ibri as its mud houses provided the much needed warmth during the harsh weather. It is close to the Al Mafjur falaj, which supplied the fresh water.

This quarter includes three mosques: Sidrat Al Raml Mosque, Al Shariah Mosque and Al Hara Mosque. At the top of the mountain there are two towers, and there is a large cave that reaches the other



side of the old neighbourhood. It also has an ancient Sidra that is more than 400 years old, called (Sidrat Al Raml), where caravans and nomads used for stop over and rest. This neighbourhood's oldest school was called the Al Islah where the Holy Quran used to be taught.

The majority of the residents here are farmers who work in fields and raise livestock. Residents request the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to expedite the restoration of the houses of the neighbourhood and develop it as a tourist destination. They also want to allow the private sector to invest in this historical site in accordance with the regulations of the Sultanate of Oman.

“There is no doubt that the restoration of these houses is tantamount to restoring something of the Omani heritage, but we have not seen any move by



the competent authorities since the date of the issuance of the Royal Decree. With the passage of days this neglect may increase the cost of restoring this historical site,” an heritage expert said.

Many citizens of the Wilayat of Ibri are still hoping for the competent authorities to speed up the restoration. They also seek

appointment of tourist guides, establishment of a tourist office, and public toilets in line with the heritage of this ancient quarter.

“A tourist plan should be developed with its focus on restored homes as heritage inns, and cafes and restaurants that serve delicious Omani food,” they said.





NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THIS MILK



RECENT STUDIES HAVE FOUND THAT BREASTFEEDING WILL REDUCE THE RISK OF BREAST AND OVARIAN CANCER, AND MAY REDUCE THE RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS AS WELL. THE LONGER YOU BREASTFEED, LOWER YOUR RISK OF DEVELOPING BREAST CANCER

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Mother's milk is the perfect food for the newborn as it provides all the nutrients for healthy growth. Breast milk protects babies from infections and allergies. However, there is an increasing trend among lactating mothers in the country to opt for formula milk which poses a big risk to child's health.

The Holy Quran says a newborn should be completely breastfed for two years. This is because of the psychological and biological benefits that breastfeeding brings to the child. Children who are breastfed gain weight naturally and they are not at risk of obesity when they get older. It also reduces risk of diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. Babies who are breastfed have lower incidence of ear infections, respiratory diseases and severe diarrhoea.

UNICEF and WHO remind us that breastfeeding is the cornerstone of a newborn's health and it is the best source of infant nutrition.

The decline in the number of breastfeeding mothers in Oman is

attributed to several factors. Many mothers turn to formula substitutes due to lack of awareness. For others cesarean delivery may be a reason for delaying the start of breastfeeding that may push the mother to give up breastfeeding. The other major reason is the reluctance of many working mothers who have to be out of home to attend office or field work for a long time.

Some mothers attempt to return to their normal weight before pregnancy due to peer or societal pressures that may affect breastfeeding, as they go on a fat loss diet, which sometimes leads to decline in breast milk.

For the lactating mothers, breastfeeding actually burns extra calories, so it can help the mother lose weight gained during pregnancy faster. It also releases the hormone oxytocin, which helps return the uterus to its normal size before pregnancy, and can help reduce uterine bleeding after and childbirth.

Recent studies have found that breastfeeding will reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis as well.

The longer you breastfeed, lower your risk of developing breast cancer.

Mothers may be shy of breastfeeding babies when they are in public where there is no privacy that forces them to opt for milk substitutes.

To ensure healthy growth of newborns and reduce infant mortality, the health authorities in the Sultanate of Oman are launching a national campaign to promote breastfeeding and raise its rate in the Sultanate to 50 per cent by 2025. This comes in line with global nutrition goals of the World Health Organization, and to reduce the rate of disease and death among children aged less than five years in the Sultanate. It focuses on breastfeeding a baby for the first six months which ensures a perfect mixture of vitamins, proteins and fats. Mother's milk is easier to digest than formula milk, and it contains antibodies that help the child fight viruses and bacteria.

In the Sultanate of Oman, a 2017 national survey found that exclusive breastfeeding in the Sultanate was 23 per cent, which is lower than the internationally recommended rate, which is no less than 50 per cent. The

national campaign aims to highlight the importance of breastfeeding through setting up of breastfeeding clinics, workshops, brochures and videos.

Saada al Maamari, a breastfeeding consultant at the Ministry of Health, Department of Nutrition, said, "Recently, the Ministry of Health established a breastfeeding clinic in The Royal Hospital, Khoula Hospital and Bausher Health Centre with the aim of following up on mothers who suffer from breastfeeding difficulties and addressing those difficulties including new mums, working mothers and mothers of premature babies. It would address the child not receiving the necessary breastfeeding and educate mothers about not the consequences of lack of breastfeeding."

The campaign also will also work to curb the influence of formula milk companies to encourage mothers to adopt breastfeeding. Breastfeeding clinics would set up support groups for mothers to encourage breastfeeding and drive home the point that a mother's milk is the optimal food for the newborn child for better immunity and reduce the risks of chronic diseases.



Sri Lankan School Muscat celebrates 33rd anniversary

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Sri Lankan School Muscat celebrated its 33rd anniversary celebrations last month. Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, planted a Sri Lankan fruit sapling along with Al Azhar Bin Saud Bin Salem al Salmi, Assistant Director of the Department of International Schools from the Ministry of Education.

The guest of honour and founder Chairman Anselm Perera, Honorary Chairman of the Board of Directors Anura Shantha Basnayake and other members of BoD and Parents' Committee were part of the Sultanate's initiative to plant 10 million trees.

The Management of SLSM, along with the Ambassador celebrated the anniversary in the School premises in the presence of the senior prefects of the school while acknowledging the contribution of the stakeholders since the inception of the school.

The Ambassador praised the dedication shown by the managements of the school along with all the concerned parties to uphold the level of the school



and suggested to plan more ahead for the future. While the Founder Chairman enlightened

the audience with the arduous journey that the founder members took to establish the

school into the current glory. The guests also took part in the cake cutting ceremony to mark the celebration. The school also paid tributes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and the Government of Oman for the benevolence which enables the growth and the existence of the school and the Ministry of Education of Oman towards its guidance.

The school was established on February 15, 1989, when the Sri Lankan School Muscat embarked its journey in a villa in the Mumtaz area with 27 students and 3 teaching staff headed by the Principal D Lionel Jayasinghe and Chairman of BoM C Gunasekara.

SLSM spread her wings positively since the inception, which resulted in the relocation of the school in Al Wadi Kabir within the first three years of the school due to the increasing number of students. SLSM was endowed with state-of-art facilities and His Highness Sayyid Thuwainy bin Shihab bin Faisal Al Said, the Personal Representative of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said formally opened the current establishment on October 28, 1997.

CPA warns suppliers and traders against price hikes



MAJID AL HATTALI
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) on Tuesday told suppliers and commercial establishments not to hike prices of products and commodities that are currently available in the market and have been affected by the increase in oil prices.

The CPA affirmed that there is a direct coordination with the sub-committees of the directorate-generals in the governorates and the other relevant authorities to follow up the impact of higher oil prices on local markets to ensure that they won't exploit

the situation to increase the prices of commodities.

The Authority explained that it has formed teams to inspect markets in all governorates as well as a team tasked with receiving consumers' complaints. Besides, CPA has activated its social media platforms, website and the free-of-toll consumer contact number.

Hamoud bin Said al Jabri, Director-General of Consumer Services and Market Monitoring at CPA, said the Authority is keen on sternly confronting any practices that breach consumers' rights, calling on all suppliers to commit to the laws and regulations to avoid legal consequences.

Over RO1 m saved after curbs in water wastage

MUSCAT: Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company saved RO 1,030,234 last year through the use of water waste detection techniques, a strategic approach espoused by the company to achieve its annual goals.

The assessment was based on data and statistics collected by specialists, whose efforts also led to the recalibration of meters of major consumers, the modification and repair of defective meters or replacement of the same with electronic meters.

Saleh bin Mohammed al Kindi, Director of Operation and Maintenance in the Wilayat of Muttrah, said that the water waste detection project targets the technical operation of networks to help improve their functioning, cut down commercial waste and update information in the invoicing system. The process involves field surveys and visits of technical teams to areas where high water waste is detected, so that the common causes could be studied and analysed. — ONA

■ DONIZETTI MASTERPIECES TO BE STAGED AT ROHM



The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has announced Donizetti Masterpieces will be performed at the Opera House on Thursday. The concert, held in celebration of the most popular and wonderful arias, duets and overtures by Gaetano Donizetti (1797 - 1848) and will be performed by the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Sergey Smbatyan, with a host of solo artists. The programme explores Donizetti's opera canon, delving into the emotional depth of his more serious work and celebrating the wit and fun of his comic operas. The acclaimed conductor, Sergey Smbatyan, is the Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra and has presented the orchestra throughout Europe, Russia and the United States. This concert is a sophisticated gala for opera fans and new audiences. The Armenian State Symphony Orchestra will take you on a journey through the best of Donizetti.

الأولوية
AL-AWALIA

Invitation to Tender

Tender Number	Subject	Tender Document Fees (Non-refundable)	Tender Bond	Tender Offer	Closing Date
QPMC.EXC.2022.02	Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Dune Sand Materials (CIF) for Qatar Primary Materials Company ("Supplies")	N/A	QAR 1,000,000	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	16 March 2022 01:00 PM

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Tender Documents can be collected from our head office located at Al-Saad, Suhaim bin Hamad St., Qatar First Bank Building, 10th Floor (Sunday, Thursday) between 08:00 to 13:00.
- Bids are to be submitted in two separate and sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to **Excom Committee**. Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is **one o'clock in the afternoon on the closing day**. Any bids submit after this date will not be accepted.
- Tender Documents will be released only after delivery of Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID. Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with Technical bid and a photo copy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- Bids must be valid for 90 days after closing date and are to be submitted in two copies (Original & Duplicate).
- Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by QPMC will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins or Circulars. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such date will be ignored.
- The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period; must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the validity will be according to the terms of the tender.
- The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week from the closing date.
- QPMC has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to **s.committee@qpmc.qa** or visit QPMC website @ **www.qpmc.qa**

Electricity output up 8.1% in Dec

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's production of electricity increased by 8.1 per cent by the end of December 2021 to reach 414,096,0000 GW per hour compared to the end of December 2020, when the total production was 383,414,0000 GW per hour, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah recorded the highest rise in electricity production from 24.5 GW per hour by the end of December 2020 to 389,1000 GW per hour by the end of December 2021. The Governorate of Muscat came second by recording a growth of 24.1 per cent, followed by the Governorate of Al Wusta by 24 per cent. — ONA

Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
12/2022	Design & Implementation Work for Two Halls in MOSD HQ	Companies specialized in building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the Excellent degree	Monday 28-3-2022 02:00 PM	Sunday 17-4-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>**). On Wednesday 9/3/2022.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om



Prominent Sudanese politician detained

KHARTOUM: Prominent Sudanese politician Babiker Faisal, a member of a taskforce working to dismantle the country's previous regime, was detained on Tuesday, his Unionist Association party said in a statement.

Most of the taskforce's most prominent members have been arrested recently on corruption charges following a call by military leaders for a review of its work after an October coup.

PREPARE FOR ELECTIONS

Meanwhile, the United Nations and United States urged the leaders of South Sudan on Monday to do more to prepare for elections due to be held in less than a year or risk "catastrophe."

"As I have stated before, elections have the potential to be a nation-building moment, or a catastrophe," the UN envoy for South Sudan, Nicholas Haysom, told the Security Council. "Much depends on the political will and leadership of the South Sudanese working together," he said.



A Sudanese holds a placard during a rally marking the International Women's Day in Khartoum. — AFP



Babiker Faisal was a member of the taskforce who worked to dismantle the country's previous regime

The US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said that in order to "work toward a true democracy," the South Sudanese government needed to move swiftly to implement the provisions set out in an agreement on revitalising the peace process. "That means an inclusive

constitution drafting process, public financial management reform, transitional security arrangements, and transitional justice mechanisms" she said.

"Unfortunately, the government of South Sudan is behind in meeting key electoral benchmarks" set out in the agreement, she added.

With a Security Council decision expected on March 15 on renewing the peacekeeping mission in South Sudan for a year — one of the most expensive on the UN's books, with an annual budget exceeding \$1 billion — Haysom pleaded for the deployment to remain at current levels of 17,000 troops and 2,100 police.

"We anticipate a mandate flexible enough to support the conduct of free and fair elections, upon the request of the government," he said.

With less than a year until elections, South Sudan, which has been independent since only 2011, risks plunging back into war, the UN warned in February. — Reuters

Iran puts military satellite into orbit

TEHRAN: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has successfully put a second military satellite, the Noor 2, into orbit, the state-media said on Tuesday. The announcement came as talks held in Vienna to revive an agreement restraining Iran's nuclear programme have reached a critical stage.

Noor 2 is orbiting at an altitude of 500 kilometres. The first military satellite, launched by the Islamic Republic in April 2020, placed the Noor, or "light" in Persian, at an orbit of 425km above the earth's surface. Putting a second satellite in space would be a major advance for Iran's military, raising concerns about



the country's nuclear and missile programmes.

Iran will send a series of military satellites into orbit over the coming years, Space Commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Aerospace Force Ali Jafarabadi said on Tuesday, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

"We will launch a series of

Noor satellites in the coming years. The space program of the country, of which we are a part, is to stabilise various scientific, research and defence satellites in low-earth orbit and then reach orbit of 36,000 kilometers above land," Jafarabadi said.

The US military says the same long-range ballistic technology used to put satellites into orbit could also allow Tehran to launch longer-range weapons, possibly including nuclear warheads.

Tehran denies US assertions that such activity is a cover for ballistic missile development and says it has never pursued the development of nuclear weapons.

— Reuters

■ HOPE AMIDST DISASTER



Palestinians gather on the ruins of a Palestinian house demolished by Israeli forces, in the village of Silat al Harithiya near the flashpoint town of Jenin in West Bank. Israel's army said that they had arrested four Palestinian men suspected of shooting dead a Jewish settler and wounding two others in West Bank days before. The four are suspected of firing at least 10 bullets at a car, killing 25-year-old religious student Yehuda Dimentman and wounding two fellow students as they drove out of Homeshe, an illegal outpost in the northern West Bank. — AFP

Tunisia releases ex-justice minister from house arrest

TUNIS: A former justice minister and senior figure in Tunisia's Ennahdha party, under house arrest since December, was released on Tuesday but remains under investigation on "terrorism" charges, the government said. Nouredine Bhiri had been detained by plainclothes police officers on New Year's Eve and placed under house arrest — as was Ennahdha staffer Fethi Baldi.

That came five months after President Kais Saied sacked the Ennahdha-backed government.

The 63-year-old Bhiri, who suffers from diabetes, high BP and a heart condition, had been on a hunger strike since he was detained.

He had agreed to undergo treatment for his hypertension at a hospital in the northern city of Bizerte, where he has been since the second day of his detention.

Ennahdha confirmed he had been released, publishing a video of Bhiri arriving by ambulance at his house in Tunis.

The party, which has repeatedly

Bhiri who suffers from diabetes, high BP and a heart condition, had been on a hunger strike since he was detained

denied Bhiri's involvement in "terrorism", had warned multiple times his life was in danger.

Interior Minister Taoufik



Nouredine Bhiri

Charfeddine said on Tuesday the men's house arrest had "expired", but added the judiciary would "complete the necessary enquiries and judicial measures on their cases".

Their release came a day after Saied inaugurated a "temporary" council of judges, replacing an independent

watchdog he abolished weeks ago, saying it had been "infiltrated" by Ennahdha.

The party has played a central role in Tunisian politics since the

revolution that overthrew ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011.

But it has since become a principal target of Saied, who in July sacked the government and froze the Ennahdha-dominated parliament, later moving to rule by decree.

While some Tunisians, tired of a system seen as corrupt, have backed Saied's moves, his opponents and civil society groups have voiced fears of a slide back to the authoritarianism of Ben Ali. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Iraq's cabinet buys local wheat harvest exclusively

Iraq's cabinet approved buying the whole local wheat harvest exclusively for the current season and the price it will pay for the crop will be according to the global-index price, it said in a statement on Tuesday.

The s announcement comes as Iraq, a major grain importer, takes urgent measures to secure strategic stocks of wheat and support a local food subsidies programme in the light of recent Ukraine-Russia crisis and its impact on food security.



Meanwhile, Egypt does not need additional wheat shipments in short- or medium-term as the supply situation is stable, supply minister Ali Moselhy said on Tuesday. Egypt is often the world's top importer of wheat.

— Reuters

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia to reopen for tourists after Covid closure

Malaysia will re-open to all vaccinated tourists from April 1, authorities said, joining a growing number of countries removing restrictions in an attempt to live with Covid. The tourism-reliant Southeast Asian country, known for its white-sand beaches and lush rainforests, shut its borders in March 2020 but will now require only a negative Covid test to enter. "The government has decided to open its borders on April 1, 2022," Prime Minister Ismail Sabri said in media



briefing. "We believe this decision will boost our economy and help revive our ailing tourism sector." The re-opening comes despite Malaysia reporting more than 25,000 infections a day in recent weeks, though most cases have been mild. — AFP

KANO

Gunmen kill 57 militiamen in Nigeria

Gunmen have killed at least 57 members of a local self-defence vigilante group in clashes in northwestern Nigeria, a security source and local residents said. President Muhammadu Buhari condemned the "brutal murder of tens of vigilante members" in the latest violence involving heavily armed gangs known locally as bandits, who raid and loot villages across northwest Nigeria.

Police confirmed Monday's clashes in Zuru district of



Kebbi State, without giving a casualty figure. But the security source said 57 bodies had been recovered while two local residents said 62 people were killed. Local residents often form informal vigilante units.

— AFP

LITTLE PROGRESS MADE AT UKRAINE TALKS

LVIV/IRPIN: A Western ban on Russian oil imports may more than double the price to \$300 a barrel and prompt the closure of the main gas pipeline to Germany, Moscow warned on Monday, as talks on Ukraine hardly advanced amid efforts to agree on civilian safe passage.

Russia's attack, the biggest attack on a European state since World War Two, has created 1.7 million refugees, a raft of sanctions on Moscow, and fears of wider conflict in the West unthought-of for decades.

Sieges and the bombing continued as Kyiv rejected possible humanitarian corridors to Russia and Belarus, but said some limited progress had been made on agreeing logistics for the evacuation of civilians.

Moscow would give the residents of the Ukrainian cities of Sumy and Mariupol the choice of moving elsewhere in Ukraine on Tuesday, setting a deadline in the early hours for Kyiv to agree, Russian news agencies reported.

Seeking to ratchet up the pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin, the United States said Washington and its European allies were considering banning Russian oil imports. Oil prices spiked to their highest levels since 2008.

"A rejection of Russian oil would lead to catastrophic consequences for the global market," said Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, saying the price could more than double to over \$300 per barrel.

US President Joe Biden held a video conference call with the leaders of France,



Foreign ministry officials pose prior the talks between delegations from Ukraine and Russia in Belarus' Brest region. --AFP

Germany and Britain as he pushed for their support on the ban.

But if need be the United States is willing to move ahead without allies in Europe, two people familiar with the matter said. Many countries on the continent are heavily reliant on Russian energy.

Germany last month froze the certification of Nord Stream 2 that was due to pipe gas from Russia to Germany. "We have every right to take a matching decision and impose an embargo on gas pumping through the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline," said Novak.

The Russian economy, banking system,

and currency have been under intense pressure as punishment for the assault on Ukraine. The country will be excluded from all of JP Morgan's fixed income indexes, the bank said in the latest such development on Monday.

More than 1.7 million Ukrainians have fled to Central Europe since the conflict began on February 24, the United Nations refugee agency said on Monday.

Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation" that it says is not designed to occupy territory but to destroy its southern neighbour's military capabilities and capture what it regards as

dangerous nationalists.

After the third attempt to ease the bloodshed at talks in Belarus, a Ukrainian negotiator said that although small progress on agreeing logistics for the evacuation of civilians had been made, things remained largely unchanged.

"As of now, there are no results that significantly improve the situation," Mykhailo Podolyak said.

Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky told journalists the talks were "not easy".

"We hope that from tomorrow these corridors will finally work," he said. Russia has proposed two corridors inside of

Ukraine, according to Interfax. Escape routes to Russia and Belarus, its close ally, were earlier called "completely immoral" by a spokesperson for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

A fourth round of talks are due soon, Russian negotiator Leonid Slutsky told Russian state television.

"Our president is not scared of anything, including a direct meeting with Putin," said Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba late on Monday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow would halt operations if Ukraine ceased fighting, amended its constitution to declare neutrality, and recognised Russia's annexation of Crimea and the independence of regions held by Russian-backed separatists.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who spoke with Putin multiple times last month in the run-up to the invasion, said he saw no impending breakthrough. "I don't think that in the coming days and weeks, there will be a real negotiated solution", he said.

The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said Russian forces were "beginning to accumulate resources for the storming of Kyiv", a city of more than 3 million, after days of slow progress in their main advance south from Belarus.

Outside the capital, attacks continued.

A Russian strike on a bread factory killed 13 in the town of Makariv in the Kyiv region, Ukrainian officials said. Reuters could not verify the details. Russia denies targeting civilians.

— Reuters

شركة المطاحن العمانية (ش.م.ع.)
Oman Flour Mills Company (S.A.O.G.)
P.O. Box 566, P.C 112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

omanflourmills.com

Consolidated and Separate Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

RESPECTED SHAREHOLDERS,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present Oman Flour Mills Company SAOG (the Parent Company) along with its subsidiaries (The Group's) financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2021.

GROUP PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS:

Revenue: The total revenue recorded is RO 97.34m as compared to RO 94.05m recorded in the previous year i.e. an increase of 3.5%. All sectors achieved an increase in the revenues, except flour sector, which has witnessed a decrease of (17.3%).

Expenses: The group total expenses (COGS, selling and admin) have increased by 7.6% as compared to the previous year's same period. The main reason for its increase is attributed to the increase in the purchase prices of raw material compared to last year.

Investment income: The group earned total investment income of RO 1.04k as compared to RO 2.4m which included a onetime profit of RO 1.9 million from the sale of the Company's stake in MPF in 2020. If we exclude the one-time income of MPF, group's investment income has increased by almost RO 550k in 2021 mainly due to an increase of RO 514k in the value of the company's investment in the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Net Profit: The net profit after the tax recorded for the year is RO 4.7m as compared to RO 9.1m in 2020. The group's net profit has reduced by 33.5% compared to the previous year, after excluding the onetime gain of RO 1.9 million from the sale of the Company's stake in MPF.

PARENT, SUBSIDIARY AND ASSOCIATES COMPANIES:

The parent company performance (before tax) along with our subsidiaries and associates is as follows:

1. **Oman Flour Mills SAOG (OFM)** (60%): OFM recorded a profit (before tax) of RO 6.3m as compared to previous year's profit (before tax) of RO 11.4m. Sales revenue has decreased by RO 1.4 million (-1.8%) as compared to last year mainly due to decline in sales volume by 12.6% which is compensated by increase in sales prices by 10.8%. Further, Raw material cost has increased by RO 2.7 million (4.5%) mainly due to an overall increase in the prices of raw materials (grains) by 17% which is compensated by 12.6% decline in cost of sales due to volume mix. This has led to an overall decrease in the operating profit by RO 3.8 million (-38.8%) as compared to last year.

2. **Aiyab Food Industries LLC (AFI)** (100%): AFI made a profit (before tax) of RO 1,010k as compared to previous year's profit of RO 865k. The bakery has increased its profitability, even under the current down trend in demand attributable mainly to the recent circumstances (COVID-19).

3. **Aiyab International Services LLC (formerly Aiyab FoodTech LLC) (AIS)** (100%): AIS made a profit (before tax) of RO 354k as compared to the previous year's profit (before tax) of RO 410k. The decrease in profit is due to increase in G&A expenses for the year 2021.

4. **Aiyab Technical Services LLC (ATS)** (100%): ATS earned a net sponsorship fee (before tax) of RO 310k as compared to RO 212k in the previous year's same period.

5. **Sohar Flour Mills LLC (SFM)** (60%): The Company has reported a net loss of RO 1,429k as compared to loss of RO 1,960k for the same period last year. The decline in loss for the period is mainly due to change in product mix with increase in the average sales price in 2021. The main reasons for the loss are still due to the slow build-up of the sale book and capacity utilization (linked to the Silos limitation).

6. **Oman Oilseeds Crushing Company (30%)**: The share of AI's in the company was sold and an amount of RO 389k have been recovered in the month of February 2021. The carrying value of the investment was RO 323k. Accordingly, a gains of RO 65k was recorded from the sale of the investment.

7. **Oman Fisheries Company SAOG (OFC)**: The share of OFM amounted to 25.16% of the Company's capital as of 31 December 2021. OFC reported a loss of RO 1.7 million in 2021.

8. **Food Techno Park LLC (FTP)** (50%): AIS holds 50% stake in FTP. There is a loss of RO 7k reported in 2021. FTP has not yet commenced its commercial operations.

9. **Bio Product Oman LLC (BPO)** (33.33%): Aiyab Investment LLC holds 33.33% share of BPO and Nakheel Development holds 66.67% shares. BPO has not yet commenced its commercial operations.

10. **Aiyab IFFCO Poultry** (50%):

a. **Sohar Poultry Co SAOC (SPC)**: SPC has reported a loss of RO 443k as compared to a profit of RO 230k for the last year. The main reason for the decrease in profitability is due to a one-time provision of RO 652k in relation to an ongoing legal case. Otherwise, the Company's operations have remained stable as compared to last year.

b. **Osool Poultry Co. SAOC**: The share of Aiyab IFFCO amounted to 9.9% of the Company's capital as of 31 December 2021. The project commenced commercial activities in the second quarter of 2021 and reported a net loss of RO 409k mainly due finance cost and depreciation charge.

11. **Arabian Food Production Company SAOC (AFPC)** (33.33%):

a. **Modern Poultry Farms SAOC (MPF)**: MPF has reported a net loss of RO 387k as compared to a profit of RO 309k in last year 2020. The decline in profits is primarily due to decrease in revenue by RO 316k (-3.7%) and increase in cost of sales by RO 550k (8.9%) as compared to last year.

b. **Emirates Poultry Farms (EPF)**: The Company achieved revenues of OMR 3.5 million during the year 2021 as compared to RO 2 million in 2020. EPF has incurred a net loss of RO 202k in 2021 mainly due to significant increase in raw material prices.

c. **Gulf Poultry Farms (GPF)**: The project is progressing as per schedule. GIF has incurred pre-operating loss of RO 225k in the current period.

AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

Oman Flour Mills in early 2021 has been awarded the HM cup for industrial excellence in the Category of Corporate social responsibility. The company in Feb 2021 commissioned a barley flaking line. This has enabled the company offer value added flaked barley products to its customers.

To support local growers in Oman, the company has signed an agreement to procure wheat from growers at harvest. The company will add value to this wheat and offer 100% Omani wheat bur flour, to customers. Omani bur flour sale was started in last quarter 2021.

To ensure plant availability, The Company also successfully succeeded in shutting down the mill for maintenance as per the specified schedule.

Oman Flour Mills has been awarded with the Economic Vision award under the category of private company's large association by Al Roya Economic Awards.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR):

In the last AGM held on 31-March-2021, the shareholders have approved a budget of RO 200,000 for CSR activities.

Appropriate projects covering a wide range of activities/beneficiaries such as sponsoring schools, youth training, sporting events, SME development, Ramadan initiatives, and other humanitarian aids will be taken up to achieve the objectives of the shareholders.

OFM being a responsible member of the society has supported generously during the Cyclone Shaheen. The Company allocated an amount of RO 200,000 which is provided for the rehabilitation of the affected areas due to cyclone. Further, OFM CSR committee has organized various visits of the most affected regions and donated livelihoods to the families.

FUTURE OUTLOOK:

Multiple projects are being evaluated across the group. The projects focus on integration across the value chain as well diversification into new ventures.

OFM FUTURE PLANS ARE:

- Currently OFM is exploring the opportunity of working directly with grain growers. OFM has received legal advice for its direct sourcing initiatives. In Q1 2022 the company will appoint an accounting firm who would assist with the company formation;
- Various go to market studies were commissioned in Q3 of 2021, OFM is currently evaluating the findings from these studies and shall formulate an action plan for execution in Q1 2022;
- Pre-Mix and New Feed mill expansion – Currently design consultation and terms of reference has been floated. Machinery supplier has also been finalized for these projects;
- To develop an industrial cluster for various Mini factories; Shortlisting of ideas has been completed. Currently technical and market studies for the shortlisted segments is on the verge of completion. An action plan for execution based on these findings shall be formulated in Q1 2022; and
- OFM is working on implementing best practices for agent management and is also looking to change its incentive schemes in H1 2022.

OTHER GROUP COMPANIES

AIS is progressing in the setting up a fully integrated laboratory in Uzbekistan, Agriculture is one of the main sectors in Uzbekistan. The Company is established and pre-operative activities are in progress.

Further, an investment is made in a project namely Food Techno park. The aim of the project is to develop an innovation Centre for food related activities.

Aiyab Food Industries (AFI) have appointed a consultant to develop long term strategies to capitalize on the growth opportunities available in the market and region.

Sohar Flour Mills construction of Sohar Silos is expected to be completed in Q2 2022.

Bio Product Oman is a new venture which aims to make Long Fiber Pellets for animal Feed and Aqua Feed. The project is currently in pre-operative execution phase.

THANKS AND APPRECIATIONS:

The Members of the Board of Directors would like to extend their most sincere appreciation and gratitude to the wise government for the continuous support under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, may God protect and preserve him.

Best Regards,

Salah Hilal Al Maawali
Chairman, Board of Directors

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME - GROUP AND PARENT COMPANY

	2021	Group	Parent Company	2020
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
INCOME				
Revenue from contract with customers	97,337	94,051	77,574	78,987
Cost of sales	(81,110)	(75,046)	(67,834)	(65,547)
Gross profit	16,227	19,005	9,740	13,440
EXPENSES				
Selling and distribution	(3,971)	(3,792)	(498)	(444)
General and administration	(5,527)	(5,367)	(3,330)	(3,331)
Profit from operations	6,729	9,846	5,912	9,665
Investment, finance and other income (net)	146	(146)	950	415
Net gain on disposal of investment in a subsidiary	--	1,881	--	2,034
Share of results in a subsidiary	--	--	(153)	(56)
Share of results in associates	(928)	(813)	(420)	(719)
Profit before taxation	5,947	10,768	6,289	11,339
Taxation	(1,205)	(1,759)	(975)	(1,536)
Net profit for the year from operations	4,742	9,009	5,314	9,803
Net profit and total comprehensive income				
for the year attributable to:				
Shareholders of the Parent Company	5,314	9,647	5,314	9,803
Non-controlling interest in the subsidiary	(572)	(638)	--	--
	4,742	9,009	5,314	9,803
Earnings per share	0.034	0.061	0.034	0.062
Dividend per share	0.060	0.050	0.060	0.050

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION - GROUP AND PARENT COMPANY

	Group	Parent Company	2021	2020
	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000	RO '000
ASSETS				
Non current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	50,782	44,041	11,509	11,948
Investment property	37	37	37	37
Intangible assets	37	16	--	--
Investment in subsidiaries	--	--	19,119	18,240
Investment in associates	9,953	9,484	1,395	1,749
Investment at fair value through				
Other comprehensive income	355	355	355	355
Right-of-use assets	3,507	3,662	56	65
Total non-current assets	64,671	57,595	32,471	32,394
Current assets				
Inventories	33,244	17,102	30,578	14,401
Trade and other receivables	21,365	19,602	14,316	12,977
Due from subsidiaries and related parties	3,469	2,688	11,468	10,325
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	1,519	1,533	1,519	1,533
Short term deposits	5,500	6,352	5,000	6,000
Bank balances and cash	10,071	9,604	7,937	7,275
Total current assets	75,168	56,881	70,818	52,511
Total assets	139,839	114,476	103,289	84,905
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	15,750	15,750	15,750	15,750
Legal reserve	6,626	6,540	5,250	5,250
General reserve	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
Retained earnings	49,046	53,268	50,443	54,579
Fair value reserve	105	105	105	105
Equity attributable to Shareholders of the Parent Company	74,027	78,163	74,048	78,184
Non-controlling interest	(76)	257	--	--
Total equity and non-controlling interest	73,951	78,420	74,048	78,184
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Non-current portion of term loans	21,950	18,273	--	--
Deferred taxation	756	843	210	373
Employees' end of service benefits	543	628	33	115
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	3,881	3,915	52	60
Total non-current liabilities	27,130	23,659	295	548
Current liabilities				
Current portion of term loans	3,048	2,209	--	--
Bank borrowings	20,305	596	17,370	--
Trade and other payables	13,919	7,320	10,359	4,118
Contract liabilities	39	421	18	369
Current portion of lease liabilities	80	76	11	11
Taxation	1,367	1,775	1,188	1,675
Total current liabilities	38,758	12,397	28,946	6,173
Total liabilities	65,888	36,056	29,241	6,721
Total Shareholders' equity and liabilities	139,839	114,476	103,289	84,905
Net assets per share	0.470	0.496	0.470	0.496

NOTE: The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be sent by mail within 7 days to any shareholder who requests for them.

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The magical world of children’s stories



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

One of the most endearing images of the Muscat International Book Fair which concluded last week was the enthusiastic, sometimes raucous participation of children in what can only be called a literary carnival.

Interspersed with daunting looking encyclopaedias and dictionaries were some of the brightest, most colourful and vibrant picture books to which people of all ages gravitated.

This is always a good reminder that, packaged in the right way, children can be encouraged to be engaged with books, whether reading them, listening to them or even colouring them. It’s a life-long relationship that needs nurturing but rewards rich dividends when done right.

Whether it is the ‘Dairy of a Wimpy kid’ (one of the most popular), the ever famous Harry Potter series or the goosebumps, children’s literature in all languages has really evolved. Igniting the imagination of the child, books transform them to a world of superheroes, magical games of quidditch, or help them to spend time with a socially awkward child trying to belong.

Going back thousands of years when stories were orally narrated and passed on through generations to having dedicated publication houses devoted to this niche market, children’s literature has come a long way.

The Chinese perfected the art of storytelling during the Song dynasty and the Panchatantra had

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN THE ARAB WORLD HAS SEEN A HUGE RISE IN VARIETY, BOTH IN TERMS OF THE RANGE OF WRITERS AS WELL AS THE TOPICS WHICH THEY ARE DEALING WITH

already been a popular collection of fables in India a thousand years before that. The culmination of centuries of such stories in the Middle East was, of course, Alf Laylah wa-Laylah, or ‘one thousand and one nights.’

It was only after the Industrial Revolution in Europe, when children no longer needed to dig for coal or clean chimneys, that they were recognised as a separate group of people who needed to be

taught, cared for and entertained.

Illustrated children’s books became popular and coloured fairy tales and books on magic swept the market soon after. By the 20th century, there was no looking back and children’s stories took on a whole new face, with comic books, magazines and pop up books inhabiting new spaces to kindle the child’s curiosity and empathy.

Children’s literature in the Arab world has seen a huge rise in variety, both in terms of the range of writers as well as the topics which they are dealing with.

Inspired by the Arabian Gulf tradition of storytelling, the ‘hakawati’, writers in the Gulf are exploring heritage and digging deep into cultural traditions, lullabies, folktales and tales of magic to find

ways to connect children with their cultural and spatial history.

‘Majid’ is the ever popular children’s magazine that all adolescents fondly remember from their childhood. Azhaar Ahmed’s ‘Tales from Jabal Akhdar: The Mountain That Touches the Stars’, Hassan Al Marashi’s ‘Kameel’s little secret’, Asma al Ketbi’s ‘The Pengouins’ and Hatim Al Tai’e’s ‘Omani Folktales’ all add to the rich growing world of children’s stories in the Arab world.

Creating more opportunities for good quality books with rich illustrations and entertaining stories with teaching moments will go a long way in enriching children’s imagination and make books an important companion in their journey of life.

Georgia, a bleak new home for Russian exiles

IRAKLI METREVELI

Sitting at a windswept terrace of a tiny shop in Georgia’s capital Tbilisi, Russian exile Roman Mikhailov said he had no choice but to leave his country “immediately” when Moscow attacked Ukraine. The 25-year-old logistics manager said the attack which shocked the world, was a point of no return for some Russians who oppose President Vladimir Putin’s longtime rule.

He is among those Russians who fled in large numbers to Georgia within days -- or even hours -- of Moscow’s attack, to escape asphyxiating Western sanctions and a feared escalation in repression by the authorities.

“The majority of Russians support Putin and it’s very hard to be even politically neutral,” he said from the Russian expats’ favourite bar, deep in the labyrinth of Tbilisi’s narrow streets. “I am against Putin and the only prospect I have in Russia is to end up in prison -- like Navalny.”

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who led the biggest protests against Putin that Russia has seen in recent years, has been jailed and his political organisations banned. There are few routes out of Russia for those wishing to leave now. Western airspace is largely closed to Russian carriers.

But Tbilisi has for years served as a hub for Russian opposition circles, and Georgia is one of the few countries where Russians can stay for a year without a visa. Sipping tea at a nearby table, computer programmer Marina Boldyreva said she was on holiday in the Black Sea country when Putin announced the attack.

Hearing the news, she decided not to return home to Saint Petersburg, Russia’s second city, and turned her break into “an immigration”.

It will be “impossible to live in Russia”, the 26-year-old said. “It will face a terrible economic crisis.” The new wave of Russian emigres vividly remember what they were doing when they heard news of the attack, launched by Putin in the early hours of February 24.

“I will remember forever how I learned the war had begun,” said Denys Sinyakov, a 44-year-old who works in cinema.

That day he was filming the timeless frescoes of the Dormition Cathedral in the city of Vladimir outside Moscow, regarded as the mother church of Mediaeval Russia. “I was looking at those frescoes and it was such a surreal feeling. You are in the cradle of Russian civilisation -- those icons that depict darkness and light -- but all I could think of was Ukraine.”

His sense of shock was worsened by the fact that his wife is Ukrainian. “My country attacked my wife’s country. I have no moral right to stay in Russia,” he said. — AFP



Maria Varenikova

The writer is a Kyiv-based journalist and producer

Frustrations hit Russian society

Trapped in his apartment on the outskirts of Kyiv during fierce battles over the weekend, the well-known Ukrainian poet Oleksandr Irvanets composed a few lines that encapsulated the national mood.

“I shout out to the whole world”, he wrote in a short poem published online by his fans, who have since lost touch with the writer and were worried that he may have fallen behind Russian lines. “I won’t forgive anyone!” If there is one overriding emotion gripping Ukraine right now, it is hate.

It is a deep, seething bitterness for President Vladimir Putin, his military and his government. But Ukrainians are not giving a pass to ordinary Russians, either, calling them complicit through years of political passivity. The hatred is vented by mothers in bomb shelters, by volunteers preparing to fight on the front lines, by intellectuals and by artists.

The emotion is so powerful it could not be assuaged even by an Orthodox religious holiday on Sunday intended to foster forgiveness before Lent. Called Forgiveness Sunday, the holiday is recognised in both the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches.

And this hatred has overwhelmed the close personal ties between two Slavic nations, where many people have family living in both countries.

Billboards have gone up along roadsides in gigantic block letters, telling Russians in profanity-laced language to get out. Social media posts in spaces often shared by Russians and Ukrainians have been awash in furious comments.

Some Ukrainians have posted pictures of people killed in the military assault in Russian chat rooms on the Telegram app. They have vented by writing on the reviews pages for websites of Moscow restaurants.

And they have been mocking Russians in scathing terms for complaining about hardships with banking transactions or the collapsing ruble currency because of international sanctions.

“Damn, what’s wrong with Apple Pay?” Stanislav Bobrytsky, a Ukrainian computer programmer also trapped in the fighting around the capital, Kyiv, wrote sarcastically about how Russians are responding to the war. “I cannot pay for a latte in my favourite coffee shop.”

Putin is the target of much of the Ukrainians’ unbridled resentment. The authoritarian leader is to blame, almost all Ukrainians agree. But the frustration

is also directed more broadly at Russian society.

Many Ukrainians chastise Russians for increasingly accepting middle-class comforts afforded by the country’s oil wealth in exchange for declining to resist limits on their freedoms. They blame millions of Russians, who Ukrainians say gave up on the post-Soviet dreams of freedom and openness to the West, for enabling the war. “Are your iPhones all right?” another Ukrainian writer, Andriy Bondar, asked Russians on his Facebook page, after a thinly attended anti-war rally in Moscow that was broken up by the riot police. “We are very worried about you. It’s so cruel they use rubber sticks, those terrible riot police.”

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine also appealed to Russians on Sunday to protest for their own sakes as much as for the Ukrainians.

“Don’t miss this opportunity”, he said in comments directed at Russians. “Citizens of Russia, for you this is a

struggle not only for peace in Ukraine, it is a struggle for your country, for the best that was in it, for the freedom that you saw, for the prosperity that you felt”, he added. “If you keep silent now, then only your poverty will speak for you later, and only repression will answer. Do not be silent!”

Zelenskyy did not hold back on how he felt about the Russian military. There were virtually no anti-war protests in Russia before the conflict began, though small demonstrations have been staged in recent days. Most participants were arrested.

Yuri Makarov, the Chief Editor of the Ukrainian national broadcasting company and the head of a national literature and arts award committee, said the war had driven a deep wedge between the Ukrainian and Russian societies that will be hard to heal. Russians, he said, have become Ukrainians’ “collective enemies.”

— *The New York Times*



Members of the Red Cross help people who flee the city of Irpin, west of Kyiv. – AFP

Amazon nears climate ‘tipping point’

MARLOWE HOOD

Hammered by climate change and relentless deforestation, the Amazon rainforest is losing its capacity to recover and could irretrievably transition into savannah, with dire consequences for the region and the world, according to a study published on Monday.

Researchers warned that the results mean the Amazon could be approaching a so-called “tipping point” faster than previously understood. Analysing 25 years of satellite data, researchers measured for the first time the Amazon’s resilience against shocks such as droughts and fires, a key indicator of overall health.

This has declined across more than three-quarters of the Amazon basin, home to half the world’s rainforest, they reported in Nature Climate Change.

In areas hit hardest by destruction or drought, the forest’s ability to bounce back was reduced by approximately half, co-author Tim Lenton, director of the University of Exeter’s Global Systems Institute, said.

“Our resilience measure changed by more than a factor of two in the places nearer to human activity and in places that are driest,” he said in an interview.

Climate models have suggested that global heating -- which has on average warmed Earth’s surface 1.1 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels -- could by itself push the Amazon past a point of no return into a far drier savannah-like state.

If carbon pollution continues unabated, that scenario could be locked in by mid-century, according to some models.

“But of course it’s not just climate change -- people are busy chopping or burning the forest down, which is a second pressure point,” said Lenton.

“Those two things interact, so there are concerns the transition could happen even earlier.”

Besides the Amazon, ice sheets on Greenland and the West Antarctic, Siberian permafrost loaded with CO2 and methane, monsoon rains in South Asia, coral reef ecosystems, and the Atlantic ocean current are all are vulnerable to tipping points that could radically alter the world as we know it.

Deforestation in Brazil has surged since far-right President Jair Bolsonaro took office in 2019, hitting a 15-year high last year. Scientists reported recently that Brazil’s rainforest -- 60 per cent of the Amazon basin’s total -- has shifted from a “sink” to a “source” of CO2, releasing 20 per cent more of the greenhouse gas into the atmosphere over the last decade than it absorbed.

Terrestrial ecosystems worldwide have been a crucial ally as the world struggles to curb CO2 emissions. Vegetation and soil globally have consistently absorbed about 30 per cent of carbon pollution since 1960, even as emissions increased by half.

“Savannification” of the Amazon would be hugely disruptive, in South America and across the globe.

Some 90 billion tonnes of CO2 stored in its rainforest -- twice worldwide annual emissions from all sources -- could be released into the atmosphere, pushing global temperatures up even faster.

Regionally, “it’s not just the forests that take a hit”, said Lenton. “If you lose the recycling of rainfall from the Amazon, you get knock-on effects in central Brazil, the country’s agricultural heartland.”

Ominously, the new findings marshall data pointing in the same direction.

“Many researchers have theorised that a tipping point could be reached,” said co-author Niklas Boers, a professor at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

“Our study provides vital empirical evidence that we are approaching that threshold.”

To assess change in the resilience of the rainforest, Lenton, Boers and lead author Chris Boulton from Exeter University analysed two satellite data sets, one measuring biomass and the other the “greenness” of the canopy. — AFP



WOMEN POWER

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) personnel from women’s motorcycle team ‘Sema Bhawani’ ride their Royal Enfield Enfield motorcycles during the BSF Seema Bhawani Shaurya Expedition Empowerment Ride at India Gate in New Delhi on Tuesday on the occasion of International Women’s Day. —AFP

Empowering African women to shape the continent’s future

RUTH OKOWA AND MUNSHI
SULAIMAN

With the right opportunities, women can play a critical role in the social and economic development of Africa. But what interventions are most effective at empowering more African women to seize such opportunities?

When women have more say in their own social and economic choices, their well-being and that of their households and communities improves. Their families show progress on nearly all development indicators.

For example, a study by the African Economic Research Consortium in Kenya examining the impact of policies to empower women on household nutritional outcomes found that the percentage of underweight children under five years old dropped from 19 per cent to 12 per cent between 2003 and 2014. In Nigeria, a survey of farming households revealed that gender parity significantly reduced household food insecurity. And an analysis of data from nine African countries linked women’s empowerment with improvements in children’s cognitive development, growth, and nutrition.

These household-level benefits trickle up. A 2018 report by the International Monetary Fund associated greater gender equality with increased economic resilience, higher GDP per capita, lower income inequality and higher labor productivity.

An investment in effective, evidence-based policies that empower women thus is an investment in a country’s overall economic future. But when African governments and their partners commit to invest in women’s empowerment, they first must understand which approaches produce sustained results. Recent evaluations of several programmes provide some insights into the best way to set women on a path to long-term self-reliance and improved well-being.

The Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) model offers young women a combination of life skills and vocational training. It uses peer mentors to provide information on reproduction and sexual health and instruction in financial literacy and business management. So far, ELA has reached over 200,000 adolescent girls and young women across Uganda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Nepal, Liberia, and Tanzania.

A randomised controlled trial in Uganda found that young girls in communities with ELA programmes were “48 per cent more likely to engage

in income generating activity,” primarily self-employment. These villages also benefited from a 34-per cent reduction in teen pregnancy and a 62-per cent reduction in early marriage or cohabitation.

Another model is Graduation, which takes a multi-pronged approach to addressing extreme poverty. The programme meets participants’ basic needs, often through connecting them to existing safety net schemes, and then provides assets for income generation and instruction on how to manage them. Participants also receive instruction on financial literacy and life skills training. And all programme components are adapted to the local context and implemented through in-person coaching.

A growing body of evidence suggests that this model, by combining support such as cash transfers with more comprehensive initiatives, can have broader and longer-lasting effects than cash transfers alone. Research in South Sudan found that both cash transfers and Graduation had positive effects on consumption, but Graduation also had a longer-term effect on participants’ overall wealth. Similarly, a study in Uganda showed that Graduation led to greater improvement in income, consumption, nutrition, and subjective well-being compared to cash alone.

In Ghana, researchers studied the long-term effects of Graduation by comparing programme participants to others who received only a transfer of assets (goats, in this case). The Graduation programme provided agricultural jobs and training, health and nutrition information,

enrollment in national health insurance, savings accounts, and weekly coaching by programme staff, in addition to cash transfers. After three years, the value of Graduation participants’ assets, consumption, and income was higher than those who received only the goats.

Through the Graduation approach, women in Kenya have been able to participate in the economy, send their children to school, improve gender relations and become leaders in their communities. And in Uganda, young people have learned to increase their savings, boost their productivity and improve food security for their entire households.

Partnerships between non-governmental organisations, researchers and governments are critical to bring innovative projects from the pilot stage to full implementation. In the case of Graduation, research partnerships were crucial to the programme’s expansion. Researchers monitored the programme in various contexts to ensure that government officials understood its effectiveness. Internal and external evaluations also helped improve Graduation over time, as programme staff used the data to adapt its design.

The education, social inclusion, and economic integration of African women will shape the future of the continent. NGOs, researchers and governments must work together to expand programmes that have been shown to work and to develop new ways to encourage women’s empowerment and self-reliance. Africa’s future depends on it.

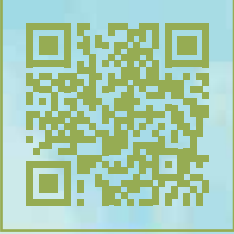
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A woman puts flowers at an installation of women’s red shoes displayed on a staircase, as a symbol to denounce violence against women, at Tirana’s main square, on International Women’s Day, on Tuesday. —AFP

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FUTURE ON HOLD AS REAL AWAIT PSG BLOCKBUSTER



MADRID: Carlo Ancelotti has been around long enough to know these are the games that really matter at Real Madrid. A Champions League last-16 tie against Paris Saint-Germain, with all the noise, the drama and the intrigue, will carry greater significance for Madrid's president Florentino Perez than any of their other 39 fixtures so far this term. In 2018, Zinedine Zidane launched his entire coaching career off winning titanic battles like these. No matter that Real Madrid finished almost 20 points behind Barcelona in La Liga. Zidane marched his team past four European heavyweights in the knock-out stages - PSG, Juventus, Bayern Munich and, in the final, Liverpool - and was instantly hailed a genius. If success in Europe can excuse domestic failure at Real Madrid, the reverse is also true. Winning La Liga this season however may not be enough to prevent serious questions being asked about the direction of the club if it is PSG celebrating at the Santiago Bernabeu. Ancelotti knows the demands better than anyone. He experienced them in 2015, after leading Madrid to the yearned-for 'La Decima' — the club's 10th Champions League crown — only to be sacked the following season. "Madrid is not a club where you put down roots", he wrote in his book 'Quiet Leadership' in 2017. "You are only ever a piece of the project." Even when Real Madrid appointed Ancelotti last summer, it felt more like a marriage of convenience, Perez finding a trusted

guardian to smoothen out a period of transition after Zidane's departure and the financial uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Ancelotti, meanwhile, grabbed an unexpected chance to manage at the very highest level again. It has worked out better than perhaps either imagined. Real Madrid's 4-1 win over Real Sociedad on Saturday sent them eight points clear at the top of La Liga, which they will surely now win from here. A commanding performance certainly suggested they can overturn their 1-0 deficit against PSG. But for as long as Madrid continue to rely on a core of players in their thirties and coaches that manage rather than build, familiar questions remain: How long can it last? And then, what comes next? Two figures at PSG throw those questions into even sharper focus. Kylian Mbappe's scintillating late winner in the first leg in Paris appeared to be both deflating and thrilling for Madrid supporters in equal measure. Many felt they were getting an up-close preview of a player that will be theirs in the summer. Such is Mbappe's quality and appeal, his arrival at Real Madrid would grant the club a generational shift in one move, a 23-year-old superstar to instantly build a team around. Mbappe would update their style and restore their status, Real Madrid once again with a side not just to be respected, but feared. The other pertinent figure is PSG's coach Mauricio



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Pochettino, whom Madrid have coveted for the last five years and strongly considered to replace Zidane in 2018. "I take it as something positive that Madrid think highly of me", Pochettino said the following year. Pochettino's time might at Madrid yet come but he is also symptomatic of the kind of modern, intense, hands-on coach they have steered clear of, in favour of more conservative appointments like Zidane, Julen Lopetegui and Ancelotti. Others have been bolder. PSG have gone for Pochettino, Bayern Munich for Julian Nagelsmann, Chelsea for Thomas Tuchel and Barcelona for Xavi Hernandez. Manchester City and Liverpool are still the teams to beat with Pep Guardiola and Jurgen Klopp. Juventus have reverted to Max Allegri - but not before they tried Andre Pirlo. Ancelotti has looked a good fit to prolong the likes of Luka Modric, Karim Benzema, Toni Kroos and Casemiro, who have been key to Madrid's dominance in La Liga. Modric and Benzema, in particular, have been outstanding. And there is no doubt Madrid's veterans can find a different gear when the Champions League music plays. Few would be surprised to see them find a way to prevail on Wednesday. This is the challenge this week for Real Madrid against PSG; for Ancelotti and his players to prove they are still relevant, not just in Spain, but at the highest level, a force for the present rather than relics of the past. — AFP





Pakistan's Imam-ul-Haq plays a shot during the fifth day of the first Test against Australia at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. — AFP

HAQ, SHAFIQUE HITTONS

PAKISTAN'S FIRST HOME TEST AGAINST AUSTRALIA IN 24 YEARS END IN DRAW

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan: Imam-ul-Haq cracked a century in each innings and his opening partner Abdullah Shafique hit a maiden hundred as Pakistan's first home Test against Australia in 24 years ended in a tame draw in Rawalpindi on Tuesday.

Haq made an unbeaten 111 following up his 157 in the first innings, while Shafique finished on 136 as Pakistan were 252 without loss when the match ended without a result.

Australia scored 459 in reply to Pakistan's first innings score of 476-4 declared.

Australia's first Test on Pakistan soil since 1998 — they previously declined to visit on security grounds — was ultimately spoiled by a flat Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium pitch.

A combined total of 1,187 runs were scored for just 14 wickets over five days as the famed Australian pace trio of Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood — with 674 Test wickets between them

before this match — got just one more.

With a draw assured, the Pakistan openers took the opportunity for batting practice ahead of the second Test in Karachi starting on Saturday.

In doing so, they became the first Pakistan pair to put on a century opening stand in both innings of a Test against Australia after teaming up for 105 on Friday.

Shafique was the first to reach his century, pushing seamer

Cameron Green for a single to reach the mark in 209 minutes. In all, he hit 15 boundaries and a six.

Haq, who was playing his first Test since December 2019, pushed part-timer Travis Head for two to complete his century in 276 minutes.

Their stand is Pakistan's highest for the first wicket against Australia in all Tests, bettering the 149 set by Khalid Ibadullah and Abdul Kadir in Karachi in 1964.

So dominating were the two

openers that it became only the first instance in 51 years when Australia conceded 100-plus opening stands in both innings of a Test. Geoff Boycott and John Edrich of England were the last pair to achieve the feat against Australia, in Adelaide in 1971.

Earlier, left-arm spinner Nauman Ali bowled a nagging line and length to mop up the Australian tail and finished with career-best figures of 6-107 in 38.1 overs — his third five-wicket haul in eight Tests.

His effort enabled Pakistan to get the last three wickets with the addition of just 10 runs after Australia resumed on 449-7.

Nauman — whose previous best of 5-35 came on his debut against South Africa in Karachi last year — dismissed Australian skipper Pat Cummins for eight and Nathan Lyon for three in quick succession. Left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi got rid of Starc to finish with figures of 2-88 in 30 overs. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Pakistan 1st innings 476-4 dec	
Australia 1st innings	
U Khawaja c Haq b Nauman	97
D Warner b Sajid	68
M Labuschagne c Shafique b Shaheen	90
S Smith c Rizwan b Nauman	78
T Head c Rizwan b Nauman	8
C Green c Iftikhar b Nauman	48
A Carey b Naseem	19
M Starc lbw Shaheen	13
P Cummins c Haq b Nauman	8
N Lyon lbw Nauman	3
J Hazlewood not out	0
Extras (b6, lb13, nb8)	27
Total (all out, 140.1 overs)	459
Fall of wickets: 1-156, 2-203, 3-311, 4-326, 5-407, 6-422, 7-444, 8-455, 9-459	
Bowling: Sajid 45-9-122-1, Naseem 21-2-89-1, Shaheen 30-5-88-2, Nauman 38.1-9-107-6, Iftikhar 3-0-20-0, Haq 2-0-9-0, Azam 1-0-5-0	
Pakistan 2nd innings	
Abdullah Shafique not out	136
Imam-ul-Haq not out	111
Extras: (lb2, nb3)	5
Total (no wickets, 77 overs)	252
Bowling: Starc 7-1-29-0, Hazlewood 5-0-8-0, Lyon 26-5-75-0, Cummins 4-0-15-0, Labuschagne 15-0-56-0, Head 13-1-35-0, Smith 2-0-15-0, Green 4-0-14-0, Khawaja 1-0-3-0	

Young Narayana powers LC Tech to easy win

MUSCAT: Young Lakshmi Narayana powered LC Tech to a comfortable 7-wicket win over Orient Travels/Aby Amin Metal in a T20 A Division game at Oman Cricket Turf 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Narayana picked up 3 for 23 along with Abdul Rauf who bagged 3 for 17, leading to Orient Travels' dismissal for 111 in 19.1 overs. The youngster then struck an unbeaten 49 to lead the chase. LC Tech sealed the win in 16.1 overs, scoring 114 for 3. Rahul Rajeev was the other notable scorer with 31.

OCT Ruwi beat Ideal

Ali Akbar's 3 for 25 helped OCT Ruwi to trounce Ideal International by 5 wickets in a Senior Division T20 Knockout match at Muscat Municipality ground 3 on Friday.

Ideal were bundled out for 94 in 16.3 overs. Apart from Ali Akbar's superb spell, Najeeb Qader, Mohammed al Balushi and Zubair

VICTORIES FOR RUWI, KCA DEUTAG, ISRAR GHALA TOO

Ali all claimed two wickets each. Ruban Durai was its top scorer with 24 off 16.

OCT Ruwi surpassed the total in 15.5 overs, scoring 96 for 5, Shuaib Ismail leading the way with a brisk 22 off 14.

Mubeen stars in KCA Deutag victory

Mubeen Ullah's excellent all-round performance steered KCA Deutag to an exciting 4-wicket victory against Pitspot in a Junior Division T20 Knockout clash at Muscat Municipality ground on Friday. Pitspot posted 162 for 7 on the board with notable scores from Mohazin Moosa (40), Wajid Ali (34) and Aneesh Chaziyottill (31). Mubeen and Irtaza Ahmed took two wickets each.

KCA fought hard and sealed the win in the 19th over, scoring 164 for 6 thanks to brilliant batting

by Mubeen (54), Irtaza (34) and Mujtaba Ahmed (31). Jitkumar and Fahad Hamsa bagged two wickets each.

Amir helps Israr Ghala beat MDC

In another Junior Division T20 Knockout game, Amir Munir's sparkling 50 helped Israr Ghala to a 5-wicket win over Mazoon Dairy Company (MDC) on Friday.

Batting first, Mazoon Dairy collected 145 for 6 in 20 overs thanks to top knocks from Ali Asger (61) and Yusuf Patanwala (22).

Amir's solid half century and Ali Gul's vital 39 helped Israr Ghala to victory as it reached 146 for 5 in 15 overs. Khalid Mazhoor claimed 3 for 39.

Brief Scores
A Division T20
Orient Travels / Abu Amin Metal 111

all out in 19.1 overs (Ibrar Hussain 30 – 4x4, Abdul Rauf 3-17, Lakshmi Narayana – 3-23, Shihab Said 2-14) lost to LC Tech 114 for 3 in 16.1 overs (Lakshmi Narayana 49 not out – 6x4, 1x6, Rahul Rajeev 31 – 7x4) by 7 wickets.

Senior Knockout T20

Ideal International 94 all out in 16.3 overs (Ruban Durai 24 – 2x4, 1x6, Ali Akbar 3-25, Najeeb Qader 2-3, Mohammed al Balushi 2-9, Zubair Ali 2-19) lost to OCT Ruwi 96 for 5 in 15.5 overs (Shuaib Ismail 22 – 3x4) by 5 wickets.

Junior Knockout T20

Pitspot 162 for 7 in 20 overs (Mohazin Moosa 40 – 4x4, Wajid Ali 34 – 4x4, Aneesh Chaziyottill 31 – 3x4. Mubeen Ullah 2-22, Irtaza Ahmed 2-39) lost to KCA Deutag 164 for 6 in 18.5 overs (Mubeen Ullah 54 – 6x4, Irtaza Ahmed 34 – 4x4, Mujtaba Ahmed 31 – 4x4, 1x6, Ajithkumar Krishna 2-22, Fahad T Hamsa 2-35) by 4 wickets.

Junior Knockout T20

Mazoon Dairy Company 145 for 6 in 20 overs (Ali Asger 61 – 6x4, Yusuf Patanwala 22 – 2x4. Mohammed Sufyan 2-28) lost to Israr Ghala 146 for 5 in 15 overs (Amir Munir 50 – 5x4, Ali Gul 39 -7x4, Sagheer Mohammed 21 – 1x6, Khalid Mazhoor 3-39) by 5 wickets.

Oman Mountain Bike Endurance event on March 12



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Oman Cycling Association (OCA) will organise the Oman Mountain Bike Endurance Championship on March 12 with cyclists from nine countries in the fray.

It will be the first time the event taking place in the Middle East and West Asia.

This championship is considered as a qualifier for the World Mountain Bike Endurance Championship series, which is already in the calendar of the International Cycling Union.

Its classification times are within the second level 'out of 3 levels', in Al Wadi Al Kabir in Muttrah, with participation of Oman national cycling team and the race will include 5 stages suitable for intermediate and advanced riders, as endurance races are designed to be a real test for mountain bikers with competition and challenge in one of the most beautiful terrains of the Omani mountains.

Regarding this championship, OCA Chairman Saif bin Sebaa al Rashidi said: The Oman Mountain Bike Endurance Championship will be an international event. The national championship was registered with the International Cycling Union, where the event determines Oman's champion in mountain bike endurance races for men

and women, and the winners of the top places will get UCI rating points plus cash prize.

Al Rashidi added at the press conference on Tuesday at the Oman Olympic Committee headquarters in Al Ghubra, that the championship consists of 5 transitional stages.

"It is with a time calculation for 20 km, and the beginning and the end at Hamriya Street 'Yeti', Muscat is often characterised by rocky terrain, with a technical level of medium to low according to the standards of the World Mountain Bike Championship. All obstacles on the track are suitable for different levels, this race requires a reasonable level of fitness with more than 600 metres of climb."

International men and women cyclists representing nine countries will take part.

The OCA chief said the Oman cycling body has proved its expertise in hosting such international events.

"Our goal is to be on the international cycling map, as this type of mountain racing is the first of its kind to be organised in the Middle East and West Asia. It gives the Omani youth the opportunity to compete and highlight their abilities in challenging cycling races with top cyclists."

All the referees officiating in the championship are Omanis with international referees Sultan al Rawahi and Saud al Rawahi leading the technical team.

Zverev handed suspended eight-week ban by ATP for Acapulco outburst



LONDON: Men's tennis governing body has handed world number three Alexander Zverev a suspended eight-week ban for smashing his racket against the umpire's chair at last month's ATP 500 event in Acapulco, for which he was expelled from the tournament.

Zverev was fined \$20,000 for verbal abuse, \$20,000 for unsportsmanlike conduct and forfeited more than \$31,000 in prize money and all rankings points earned from singles and doubles action at the Abierto Mexicano tournament.

Following a review, the ATP found the 24-year-old German had committed "aggravated behaviour" and issued an additional fine of \$25,000 and an

eight-week ban from any ATP-sanctioned event.

The ATP said, however, the ban and the additional fine were suspended, providing that over a probation period ending one year after the incident, Zverev does not incur any more fines for unsportsmanlike conduct.

After losing in doubles at Acapulco and upset over a line call in the match, Zverev approached umpire Alessandro Germani's chair and came perilously close to hitting him as he swung at the official's stand before heading towards his courtside seat.

The 2020 US Open runner-up then approached the chair a second time and again hit it while shouting expletives. — Reuters



FC Barcelona's Memphis Depay celebrates scoring their second goal against Elche in the La Liga match. – Reuters

Barca, Atletico return to top 4

MADRID: Barcelona and Atletico Madrid rejoined La Liga's top four on Sunday after Barca needed a late penalty to beat Elche 2-1 before Atletico defeated Real Betis 3-1, Joao Felix scoring twice at the Benito Villamarin.

It is the first time Barcelona and Atletico have both been in La Liga's Champions League qualification spots since August.

Atletico have struggled for solidity and consistency since winning the title last season while Barca are still recovering from a financial crisis and the departure of Lionel Messi.

Yet both teams will be growing in confidence that they can now achieve their minimum objective,

which is to avoid missing out on the Champions League next season and the further financial damage that would cause.

Barca are now third, level on points with Atletico in fourth, but having played a game fewer. They might both fancy their chances of finishing second, with stuttering Sevilla only seven points in front.

Atletico's win over Betis was particularly significant given Betis started the day in third and have looked the mostly likely candidates to upset the established top four. Felix, who was again preferred to Luis Suarez, has four goals in his last four games.

"Everyone needs time. We ask everything from Joao and he is

doing it," Diego Simeone said.

Barcelona, meanwhile, had to come from behind at the Martinez Valero after Fidel capitalised on a Pedri error, only for Barca to come storming back thanks to two substitutes.

Ferran Torres diverted in from close range on the hour before Memphis Depay scored an 84th-minute penalty after the striker had drawn Elche's Antonio Barragan into a handball.

"It seemed we were going to lose a game we did not deserve to lose," said Barca coach Xavi Hernandez. "We deserved to win by more than one goal."

Victory continues an impressive run of form for Xavi's side, who

have not lost in the league since December and came into this game on the back of scoring four times in three consecutive games for the first time since 2017.

When Xavi was appointed in November, Barcelona sat ninth.

'ON RIGHT PATH'

"We have four wins in a row, this has not happened for a long time, it's a good sign," said Xavi. "The players believe in what we are doing. We are on the right path."

Barcelona equalised on the hour as Dembele drove to the line and hung up a cross. Jordi Alba was unable to catch the ball cleanly but Torres was perfectly placed to steer in. — AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Hamed takes on 560 km 'Border to Coast' challenge

MUSCAT: Hamed al Harthy, one of Oman's best and most experienced long-distance runners, has set himself the daunting challenge of running 560 km in seven days as he takes on the 'Border to Coast' challenge. Starting from Um Zumail, the border town where Oman meets Saudi Arabia and the UAE on March 13, he aims to arrive in Sur by March 19, all in aid of Donate.om, Oman's donations portal for charitable organisations.

The route he has chosen will pass through the village of Al Khuwair in the Al Dhahirah Governorate, 'Uwayfiah and Adam – the halfway point of the journey. From there, he will head to Al Mudhaibi and Al Qabil in the North Al Sharqiyah Governorate and then through to Sur. The journey offers a varied challenge of different terrains, landscapes and temperatures to contend with.

Hamed said, "I have always been passionate about challenging myself and inspiring others through running. The Border to Coast event is an opportunity to engage with runners from across the country and raise awareness of the sport in each governorate, while raising funds



for charitable causes within Oman. It is a unique challenge across the entire width of our nation, covering a variety of different surfaces and communities, and I hope to see many more runners along the way as they come together to share this journey with me."

Hamed, 63, has dedicated his entire life to running and has conquered some of the most challenging races in the world. In 2018, he competed in OMAN by UTMB and Ushuaia by UTMB in Argentina in 2019, UTMB Mont-Blanc 2021 and reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro the same year.

He will be accompanied by a community of running enthusiasts in each governorate along the way, as well as a technical and logistics team to ensure his safety and maintain the correct course. The Border to Coast challenge is also supported by Dhofar Insurance, Hamed's personal sponsors for the endeavour.

ISM crowned U16 champions



MUSCAT: ISM U-16 beat MCCC Yellow U16 by 32 runs in the final of their OC Junior Season 2021-22 on March 5.

Choosing to bat first after winning the toss, ISM made 198-6 in their 30 overs, turbocharged by Loya Devansh's outstanding century. The player of the match occupied the crease from the first ball till the second-last, finishing on a 106-ball 128. Shah Jeet Vrajesh was the other ISM batter to cross 30 runs. Prathiesh Hema Ramesh picked up 3 wickets in 6 overs and was his side's star performer with the ball.

In response, the MCCC fell short and were bundled out for 166 in 28.4 overs.

Harshil Dinesh Shetty was their top scorer, falling 7 runs short of a fifty.

A handful of MCCC batsmen did get starts, but none of them were able to follow Devansh's first innings lead and convert them into substantial totals. Mahesh Mukul, Shah Jeet Vrajesh and Girish Aditya

claimed two wickets each for ISM.

After the final, Nizar Al Ghatrifi, the Depot Operations Head of Mazoon Dairy, handed out the postseason awards. Lakshmi Narayana Satish of Indian School Seeb bagged the best batsman award, Harshil Dinesh Shetty of MCCC collected the best bowler award and Loya Devansh of Indian School Muscat took home the best All-rounder award. The consolation bowling award went to Madhav Manish Saki of Indian School Ghubrah.

Lakshmi Narayana Satish was the top scorer in the league, making 459 runs in 5 matches. Harshal Dinesh Shetty took 8 wickets in the same period.

BRIEF SCORES:
ISM U16 198/6 in 30 overs (Loya Devansh 128(106) 12 x 4, 1 x 6; Prathiesh Hema Ramesh 22/3) beat MCCC U16 166/10 in 28.4 overs (Harshil Dinesh Shetty 43(59) 2 x 4; Girish Aditya 18/2) by 32 runs.

Favourites Australia beat Pakistan by seven wickets

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand: Australia underlined their status as Women's Cricket World Cup favourites on Tuesday with a convincing seven-wicket win over Pakistan in Mount Maunganui.

In-form opening batter Alyssa Healy led the way for the six-time champions with 72 off 79 balls, supported by 35 from skipper Meg Lanning and 34 from Rachel Haynes.

Pakistan captain Bismah Maroof scored 78 as her team made 190-6 after losing the toss and being put into bat.

Despite a much-improved performance on their first-round loss to India, Pakistan paid the price for a sluggish run rate.

Allrounder Aliya Riaz made a creditable 53 but it came off 109 balls, while Australia's top order scored at almost a run a ball.

The result puts Australia top of the tournament's eight-team leaderboard but leaves Pakistan

bottom with a struggle to make the final four after two losses.

"Everyone's in really good form, we all got starts and I guess we're all feeling in good nick," Lanning said.

"Pakistan did extremely well and made it hard for us to take wickets so we were disciplined and kept that run rate in check."

Pakistan's total never looked enough against Australia's formidable big hitters, who overhauled the target with 15.2 overs to spare, finishing on 193-3.

Maroof said Pakistan were unable to exert pressure in the field.

"We could have stopped them, they gave us chances but we didn't capitalise," she said.

"In fielding we could have done much better."

Defeat left Pakistan without a win against Australia in 13 ODI matches.

Pakistan face South Africa on Friday while Australia's next



Australia's Ellyse Perry plays a shot during the Round 1 World Cup match against Pakistan at Bay Oval in Tauranga. – AFP

challenge is against hosts New Zealand on Sunday.

NZ CRUISE TO 9-WICKET WIN
On Monday, New Zealand

cruised to a nine-wicket win over Bangladesh in a rain-affected match to put their campaign back on track.

The New Zealanders, who suffered a shock loss to the West

Indies in their opening match, looked totally in control in a fixture where the innings were reduced to 27 overs due to heavy rain.

Set a target of 141, they

finished on 144-1 with seven overs to spare as Suzie Bates smashed 79 off 69 balls and Amelia Kerr made 47 off 37.

Captain Sophie Devine said New Zealand needed to "move on quickly" from the West Indies defeat but admitted she feared the match against Bangladesh would be washed out, in a potentially disastrous blow to their hopes of making the knockouts.

"We know that this competition's going to be tight so we're certainly happy we managed to get a win," she said. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
PAK vs AUS
Pakistan 190-6 in 50 overs (B Maroof 78 not out, A Riaz 53; A King 2-24) lost to Australia 193-3 in 34.4 overs (A Healy 72, M Lanning 35, R Haynes 34; O Sohail 2-39).

BANG vs NZ
Bangladesh 140-8 in 27 overs (F Hoque 52, S Sultana 33; A Satterthwaite 3-25) lost to New Zealand 144-1 in 20 overs (S Bates 79, A Kerr 47)

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
4,223.04



CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$122.93
Brent Crude \$126.76
Light Crude \$122.21



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Oman crude slips from 12-year high to \$122/b



Grim warning: Oil prices could climb to over \$300 dollars per barrel, warns Russia

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Oman crude traded at \$122.93 per barrel on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Tuesday, slipping marginally from a 12-year peak that was scaled a day earlier.

Most international benchmarks lost a bit of their steam after powering to new highs on Monday, spurred by supply concerns following US-led threats to ban Russian oil exports over its assault against Ukraine.

Oman crude has risen to \$125.16 per barrel on Monday – approaching a level last seen

in 2008. It lost \$2.23 a barrel on Tuesday in trends with marginal declines reported globally.

Benchmark Brent crude futures for May climbed \$3.56, or 2.9 per cent, to \$126.77 a barrel at 11:03 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures for April delivery rose \$3.12, or 2.6 per cent, to \$122.52 a barrel.

Prices were supported after sources told Reuters the United States, the world's biggest oil consumer, may ban Russian oil imports in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24. The US is willing to take this step without the involvement of European allies, the sources said.

British oil major Shell said on Tuesday it plans to withdraw from Russian oil and gas and stop all spot purchases of Russian crude oil as a first immediate step.

Oil prices could climb to over \$300 dollars per barrel if the US and European Union ban imports of oil from Russia, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Monday. Fears that Russia would respond to sanctions already imposed by halting energy exports pushed prices higher.

Goldman Sachs hiked its Brent price forecast for 2022 to \$135 per barrel from \$98, and its 2023 outlook to \$115 a barrel from \$105, reasoning that the world economy could face the "largest energy supply shocks ever", given Russia's key role.

An apparent slowdown in talks with Iran over its nuclear programme, which would end sanctions against its oil sales, added further price support. The European Union envoy in the talks said it was up to Iran and the US to make political decisions to

reach a deal.

Furthermore, Iranian oil could take months to flow after a nuclear deal. Even if Iran alleviates current supply tightness with crude from floating storage, "the drop in free spare capacity and strategic oil reserves would likely keep energy investors uneasy and prices at elevated levels," Swiss bank UBS said on Tuesday.

Oil supply disruptions come as inventories continue to fall worldwide. Five analysts polled by Reuters estimated on average that US crude stockpiles decreased by about 800,000 barrels in the week to March 4. The poll was conducted ahead of weekly inventory reports from the American Petroleum Institute, an industry group, on Tuesday and the US Energy Information Administration on Wednesday.

(With inputs from Reuters)



JV progresses copper-gold project

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, a partnership of Al Hadeetha Investment of the Sultanate of Oman and Alara Resources Limited, an Australian mining firm, has reported continued progress in its construction and procurement activities at the Wash-hi Majaza copper-gold project in Al Mudhaibi Wilayat in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate. Alara owns a 51 per cent equity interest in the joint venture developing the project.

After formal commissioning of pre-stripping of Wash-hi Majaza pit in February 2022, pre-production activities at mine site during the month continued to focus on the following: Topsoil over the first cut area of pit stockpiled and stored for post mine rehabilitation; First blast carried out under the supervision of Royal Oman Police; Excavation and transport of overburden and construction of waste rock dump platforms; Extraction of top copper oxide ore and separate storage; Excavation of 1200m long water diversion channel; and Construction of haul roads from the pit to waste dumping areas.

Total cumulative capex stands

at \$53.6 million in February 2022 which accounts for about 70 per cent of total procurement packages, the company said in a statement. Contracts for equipment and services have been awarded to companies in as far afield as China and India to Finland and Italy and also Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Manufacturing of all major items has commenced and inspections have been completed for many key electrical components, such as crushers and several more which are in the pipeline in March. Additionally, general construction contracts have now been awarded and site preparatory works have begun, it further noted.

Atmavieshwar Sthapak, Managing Director – Alara Resources, said: "We are very pleased to report the progress we are making across all fronts in Oman. While we have continued to achieve major milestones at Al Wash-hi Majaza project's construction, operations of Alara Resources LLC are also expanding via the securing of external drilling contracts. We look forward to keeping the market updated on our construction of what will be a world-class copper-gold mining project."

Historic year for MENA markets with 21 IPOs in 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region saw 21 IPOs raise proceeds of \$7.9 billion in 2021, an increase of 133 per cent in total issuances and 325 per cent in total proceeds when compared to 2020, EY said in its latest report.

The year's biggest IPOs in value in MENA were in the utilities, energy and financial services sectors, with Saudi Arabia's International Company for Water and Power Projects (ACWA Power Company) leading with proceeds of \$1,211.4 million on the Tadawul. The Tadawul main market saw five IPOs in Q4 alone, with a further two on the Nomu-

Parallel Market. The region's second largest IPO in value in 2021 was in the energy sector, with the ADNOC Drilling Company securing proceeds of \$1.1 billion in Q4 on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX).

Major market activity returned to the MENA region, with thirteen issuances raising \$5.6 billion in proceeds for the year. Globally, 2021 was the most active year for the IPO market for over 20 years, with a total of 2,388 deals raising \$453.3 billion in proceeds - a 64-per cent and 67 per cent respective increase Y-O-Y. Europe, the Middle East and Africa exchanges produced the highest growth seeing a 158-per cent increase in the number of IPOs (724) and a



214-per cent increase by proceeds (\$109.4bn).

In the Sultanate of Oman, two IPOs raised a total of \$20m during

2021 - as compared to one IPO in 2020, which raised \$53 million. In Bahrain, the Bahrain Bourse and ADX signed a strategic

partnership agreement aimed at implementing a cross-border plan in trading and post-trading environments.

Brad Watson, EY MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, says: "MENA IPOs had a record year in 2021, with an unprecedented surge in issuances, which was driven by a combination of supportive regional regulatory actions as well as a shift in investor sentiment back towards MENA markets. IPO activity was particularly encouraging during the fourth quarter when Saudi Arabia's ACWA POWER became the region's largest IPO in the year, followed closely by the listing of ADNOC Drilling Company."

MENA equity markets had a

stellar performance during 2021, with the observed markets all generating double-digit returns. The top performer for 2021 in the MENA equity markets was Abu Dhabi, with a return of 68 per cent, followed by the Tadawul, with its index up by 30 per cent for the year.

The Dubai Financial Market was up by 28 per cent, followed by the Boursa Kuwait Premier Market Index, which grew by 26.2 per cent. The Bahrain All Share Index increased by 21 per cent, while in the Sultanate of Oman, the MSX 30 Index returned 13 per cent. The index performance in Qatar reached 11 per cent, and in Egypt, the EGX 30 Index was up by 10 per cent.

Lexus announces
six finalists for
Lexus Design
Award

MUSCAT: Lexus has recently announced the six finalists for the tenth edition of the Lexus Design Award 2022, a global platform to support and nurture the next generation of up-and-coming creators from around the world. Each of the finalists will gain the extraordinary privilege of mentorship by international creative stars as they prototype their ideas with a budget of up to 3,000,000 yen (approx \$25,000) per project. The finalists were selected by a distinguished jury from among 1,726 entries submitted by creators in 57 countries.

The Lexus Design Award was established to support fresh design talent and showcase their innovations on a prominent and respected international platform. This year's six finalists were chosen for their original solutions that contribute to a better tomorrow, while articulating the Lexus brand's three core principles, anticipate, innovate and captivate, while seamlessly enhancing the happiness of all.

LEXUS DESIGN AWARD 2022
FINALISTS:

- Chitofoam by Charlotte Böhning and Mary Lempres (Dual USA-Germany and Dual USA-Norway/Based in USA)
- A biodegradable packaging solution derived from the exoskeletons of mealworms that have digested polystyrene foam waste. Hammock Wheelchair by Wondaleaf (Malaysia)
- A combination wheelchair, forklift and hammock for reducing the manual lifting of patients by caregivers. Ina Vibe by Team Dunamis (Nigeria)
- A sustainable cooking, charging and lighting product. Rewind by Poh Yun Ru (Singapore)
- A platform that leverages multi-sensory stimulation to prompt meaningful recollection for seniors with dementia. Sound Eclipse by Kristil and Shamina (Russia)
- A noise-cancelling device that reduces noise from outside when placed near an open window. Tacomotive by Kou Mikuni (Japan)

be'ah to showcase successes during
Oman Sustainability Week

Sustainable future: OWS
is a national platform
that reflects the nation's
commitment to the UN
Sustainable Development
Goals

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Oman Environmental Service Holding Company SAOC (be'ah) has announced its participation in the upcoming Oman Sustainability Week which will be held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. The event will be hosted by the Petroleum Development Oman under the support of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Through its strategic partnership with a group of leading companies in Oman, be'ah aims to showcase its most notable achievements that support Oman's drive for sustainable development to enhance economic growth. It also looks to highlight its strategy



Shaikh Mohammed al Harthy

that keeps pace with Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Emphasising the company's commitment to keeping pace with the objectives of the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) for a sustainable future, Shaikh Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Harthy (pictured), Executive Vice-President, Strategic Development, be'ah, said, "Our strategic vision at be'ah aims to diversify processes of waste management, promote the concept of a circular economy and build a culture of environmental sustainability in the society. Our participation in the Oman Sustainability Week events and awards underscores our commitment to supporting

local and global efforts to achieve a better economic future within a sustainable environment."

Oman Sustainability Week will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre and is scheduled to run for a week from March 1 -17, 2022. It will include an exhibition, conference, intellectual leadership summit and field visits. This event will be a national platform that aims at highlighting Oman's commitment to achieving leadership in sustainability by developing innovative strategies in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It will also involve national development entities to present Oman as a new example for sustainable development. The event brings together key policymakers, sustainability experts and industry leaders, to support the core message of sustainability as a national goal.

During the past period, be'ah has been able to demonstrate its diligent efforts to achieve sustainability by launching a number of programmes, initiatives and projects related to the management of the waste



sector in Oman. It has recently announced the closure of the first cell in Engineering Forum dump in Al Amerat, the first operation of its kind in the region, with the aim of controlling any future environmental pollution.

The company revealed its intention to use new machinery to reduce green trash and huge lumber into small components to help with management and usage. These components are used to make organic fertilisers, animal

feed, and other things. This aids in creating financial benefits through the sale of cutting green trash, which is one of the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and has led to the circular economy. The organisation continued to offer the be'ah Academy's online environmental management accreditation programme in the field of sustainability, which was created to improve young knowledge and motivate them to innovate.

Al Mouj Muscat signs
agreement with Thawani Pay

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Al Mouj Muscat signed an agreement on Tuesday with Thawani Pay, the Sultanate of Oman's leading digital payment company, to enable residents to start paying for services by smartphone. This announcement is the latest strategic partnership where digital innovation is transforming life at the nation's leading lifestyle destination and is creating opportunities for enterprise.

A local start-up success story, Thawani Pay is the Sultanate of Oman's first non-banking financial company (NFBC) to be granted a Payment Service Provider (PSP) licence by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The fintech's payment app can now be used by Al Mouj Muscat residents to securely and easily pay for services such as service charges and cooling charges. Through the application, they will be able to navigate and find Al Mouj Muscat's tab and be able to enter their residential details to settle their



outstanding payments.

As Al Mouj Muscat's CEO Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani says, this new agreement with Al Mouj Muscat is set to elevate its customer service further: "We are delighted to have entered into a partnership with Thawani demonstrating how we continue to innovate at Al Mouj Muscat. Thawani's impressive solutions will greatly enhance and add value to the customer experience of our 7,000 residents.

"The agreement also demonstrates our commitment to SMEs, which are critical to the successful diversification of our economy and so it is extremely rewarding to be able to support Thawani Pay by providing them with a platform for increased visibility."

Pact with Omani Association
for Intellectual Property signed

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) signed a cooperation programme with the Omani Association for Intellectual Property (OAIP) to strengthen cooperation in different fields, mainly training and promoting awareness of the importance of protecting intellectual property.

Other aspects include supporting and encouraging talents, promoting scientific research and exchanging knowledge and experiences that contribute enhancing investment opportunities and addressing the challenges faced by projects, operating in the special economic zones and free zones.

The agreement was signed by Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and Dr Ali bin Khamis al Alawi, Chairman of the Omani Association for Intellectual Property.



The programme constitutes the cooperation in finding projects and initiatives in intellectual property. Urging projects operating in the special economic zones and free zones to participate in the events and activities organised by the Association, such as innovation acceleration programmes and World Intellectual Property Day.

"The programme signed with the Omani Association for Intellectual Property aims to spread awareness of the significance of innovation and intellectual property rights among projects operating in the special economic zones and free zones and their role in addressing the challenges facing companies operating in these zones," Ahmed al Dheeb remarked.

Toyota GAZOO racing celebrates victory in Rally Sweden

The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) recently celebrated the first win this season for its new GR YARIS Rally1 vehicle when Kalle Rovanperä secured victory at Rally Sweden in round two of the 2022 FIA World Rally Championship. Rovanperä's fellow Finnish driver Esapekka Lappi claimed third place to complete a double podium finish during his first start for the team since 2018.

All three of the team's drivers were part of a close fight for victory for most of the rally on the unfamiliar, high-speed, snow-covered roads around the event's new base in Umeå. As the highest-placed driver in the championship, Rovanperä was disadvantaged by

having to run first on the road in the No 69 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1, however, he concluded the second day leading team-mate Elfyn Evans by 8.3 seconds.

Rovanperä won the first of the final day's four stages to add to his lead and finished 22 seconds clear as he and co-driver Jonne Halttunen secured the third win of their WRC career in the No 69 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1. The win places Rovanperä 14 points clear at the top of the Drivers' Championship.

Lappi was in a close fight for second position throughout the last day, and ultimately finished just 8.6 seconds behind in the No 4 Toyota GR YARIS Rally1 as he and co-driver Janne Ferm



completed a fantastic comeback weekend with the team. The result saw Toyota take the lead in the Manufacturers' Championship with a 24-point advantage.

Akio Toyoda, President and CEO of Toyota Motor

Corporation, commented: "Kalle, Jonne, congratulations on your victory! Also, I would like to thank them for bringing the first WRC victory to the GR YARIS Rally1. The team started working immediately after Monte Carlo,

testing on snow to prepare for this rally. We were able to gain precious data on how to improve the hybrid-electric system in the harsh cold environment. I hope we use this experience effectively not only to win next year, but also to provide data to suppliers so that we can continue competing in motorsport while working towards carbon neutrality. For the fans, I appreciate your continued support throughout the season until the last round, Rally Japan."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's

participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsport's activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure and joy of driving to everyone.



Pact signed to privatise environmental inspection services in oilfield areas



The agreement will ease operational pressure on establishments, allowing specialists at the Environment Authority to be in regular contact with the establishments' operating teams and ensuring that all tasks are properly aligned with environment standards

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Environment Authority signed on Tuesday an agreement to privatise the environmental inspection service in concession areas.

The pact was inked by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services

Regulation, supervisor general of the National Employment Programme. Al Amri told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the agreement seeks to induct the first phase of a privatisation initiative in environmental inspection, notably in the oil and gas sector, so that the mission can be delegated to a small and medium enterprise to offer an opportunity for specialists in environmental affairs.

Al Amri explained that the agreement will ease operational pressure on establishments, allowing specialists at the Environment Authority to be in regular contact with the establishments' operating teams and ensuring that all tasks are properly aligned with environment standards.

The step goes in line with Oman 2040 Vision for corporate governance and performance.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman Air inks deal with European MRO



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

After signing a CFM56-7B engine support contract by the hour in 2016 with Air France Industries KLM Engineering & Maintenance (AFI KLM E&M), Oman Air is expanding its relationship with the MRO to perform shop visits on nine additional engines.

In order to be able to take care of these visits scheduled over the whole year 2022, AFI KLM E&M has adapted its production schedule to free up slots and take these engines into account.

As a result of their established cooperation, Oman Air has developed a fruitful relationship with AFI KLM E&M and is familiar with the level of service delivered by the MRO Group, as well as its ability to deliver on its performance and TAT commitments. Beyond the trusting relationship between the two groups, AFI KLM E&M has developed a commercially and technically competitive solution to outperform its competitors at the finish line.

AFI KLM E&M has also

worked to ensure that the workscope meets Oman Air's operational requirements, including deadlines, by adapting its production schedule to accommodate the engines on time.

According to Captain Nasser al Salmi, Oman Air's Chief Operating Officer, "The quality and reliability of the services offered by AFI KLM E&M, as well as the professionalism and availability of their teams, have given our company complete satisfaction. All this know-how is once again expressed in their response to our request to take charge of these nine new engines and AFI KLM E&M is the natural choice for us."

Pierre Teboul, SVP Commercial at AFI KLM E&M, commented: "It is always a source of pride and satisfaction to have a long-standing customer like Oman Air renew its trust in us. It illustrates the ability of our teams to develop mutually beneficial relationships with customers over the long term and to remain constantly mobilised to meet new needs."

VisitOman.om open for business ahead of busy 2022 season

STIMULATING BUSINESS:

Oman's first integrated digital platform to serve the regional and international B2B travel and tourism sector with instant confirmation on bookings

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

VisitOman.om, the Sultanate of Oman's online travel booking gateway for trade partners, has officially launched its booking engine commercially. As the global travel and tourism sector prepares to return to full strength in 2022, VisitOman.om aims to connect the world with Oman's beauty by offering a full Omani travel experience through sustainable partnerships.

VisitOman.om is the country's first authorised integrated digital platform designed specifically to serve the international travel industry. The advanced digital platform offers Business to Business (B2B) partners an innovative solution for inbound travel trade, making it easier to plan, book, and build packages to showcase the full potential of Oman to the world.

Shabib al Maamari (pictured), Visit Oman Managing Director, said, "Our goal is to set uniform standards for regulated routes, trip package inclusions, pricing, clear terms and conditions, and well-defined customer service agreements. The platform offers stimulating business opportunities for our network of partners, while delivering on our aim to drive tourism to Oman and support



Oman's position among global travel and tourism markets in line with the National Tourism Strategy 2040."

Featuring advanced digital technology, the platform brings all tourism suppliers together for trade partners in key markets around the world to guarantee instant confirmations for all bookings and create a seamless travel experience, building a complete itinerary from the moment guests board the plane to Oman to the moment they leave.

The VisitOman.om team visits operators and suppliers across the country to be able to recommend unique experiences to clients. Whether it is a traditional cooking lesson on a remote mountain, a custom tour or an exclusive



Shabib al Maamari, Managing Director, Visit Oman.om

experience, the platform offers users the flexibility to access prebuilt packages or create a dynamic trip of a lifetime for their guests. In view of the development of the meetings, incentives and conferences sector, the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre

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Shell abandons Russian oil

LONDON: Shell stopped buying Russian crude on Tuesday and said it would phase out its involvement in all Russian hydrocarbons from oil to natural gas over Ukraine, becoming one of the first major Western oil companies to abandon Russia entirely.

While Russian crude and gas has been exempt so far from Western sanctions, oil soared above \$139 a barrel on Monday to its highest since July 2008 as the United States and European allies began to consider banning Russian oil imports.

US lawmakers have called for bans but President Joe Biden's administration has only sanctioned Russian oil tankers. Britain and Canada have also barred Russian vessels from landing at their ports in protest at Moscow's attack on Ukraine.

Shell apologised on Tuesday for buying Russian oil last week after it had said it would pull out of its Russian operations, including the Sakhalin 2 LNG plant in which it holds a 27.5 per cent stake and which is operated by Gazprom.

"We are acutely aware that our decision last week to purchase a cargo of Russian crude oil ... was not the right one and we are sorry," Chief Executive Officer Ben van Beurden said. Shell bought a cargo of Russian crude oil from Swiss trader Trafifigura at a record low of dated Brent minus \$28.50 a barrel, traders said on Friday.

British rival BP said last month



FILE PHOTO: Illustration shows Shell logo and natural gas pipeline

it was abandoning its 19.75 per cent stake in Russian oil giant Rosneft in an abrupt move that could cost it up to \$25 billion.

TotalEnergies Chief Executive Patrick Pouyanne said on Monday that the French company had stopped buying oil from Russia, although one its landlocked refineries in Germany continued to receive Russian crude by pipeline. Shell said it would change its crude oil supply chain to remove volumes from Russia "as fast as possible" and shut its service stations in Russia, as well

We are acutely aware that our decision last week to purchase a cargo of Russian crude oil ... was not the right one and we are sorry

BEN VAN BEURDEN

Chief Executive Officer

as its aviation fuels and lubricants operations in the country. The company said the supply chain change could take weeks to complete and would lead to reduced output from some of its refineries while its withdrawal from Russian petroleum products, pipeline gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) would be phased. The company also plans to end its involvement in the Nord Stream 2 Baltic gas pipeline linking Russia to Germany, which it helped finance as a part of a consortium.

— Reuters

Carmakers face soaring metal costs with supplies at risk

LONDON: Saving up for a new ride? Better start putting more cash aside. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is ramping up the price of metals used in cars, from aluminium in the bodywork to palladium in catalytic converters to the high-grade nickel in electric vehicle batteries and drivers are likely to foot the bill.

While metals have not been the target of Western sanctions yet, some shippers and autoparts suppliers are already steering clear of Russian goods, putting more pressure on carmakers already reeling from a chip shortage and higher energy prices.

"So what happens from here?" asked Carlos Tavares, Chief Executive of Stellantis, the world's fourth-biggest automaker, when speaking to reporters last week.

"First, what happens is that we have an escalation of cost that comes from raw materials and energy that is going to put more pressure on the business model", he said.

Aluminium and palladium both hit record highs on Monday while nickel, which is also used to make stainless steel, surged to its highest since 2007.

Andreas Weller, Chief Executive of Aludyne, which makes aluminium and magnesium die-cast parts for automakers, said his European business has seen a 60 per cent rise in the cost of aluminium over the past four months, as well as soaring energy bills.

With annual sales of \$1.2 billion and a surge of costs in the "hundreds of millions of dollars", Weller, whose company is based in Southfield, Michigan, said he has been forced to ask customers to pay more than the prices already agreed.

"Some are more understanding and cooperative than others, but we cannot survive without that", Weller, who has four foundries and one machining plant in Europe, said.

Stellantis Chief Executive Tavares said an end to the chip shortage could help carmakers offset higher metal and energy prices, but he did not expect any resolution to the semiconductor issues this year.

Consumers are already paying for the chip shortage as it has pushed car inventories down and prices up — even before higher metals prices feed through to the forecourt.

According to consultancies LMC and JD Power, the average transaction price for a new vehicle in the United States was \$44,460 in February, up 18.5 per cent from the same month in 2021. — AFP

First, what happens is that we have an escalation of cost that comes from raw materials and energy that is going to put more pressure on the business model

CARLOS TAVARES
Chief Executive of Stellantis



BOOST TO WOMEN BIZ LEADERS

French President Emmanuel Macron and France's Junior Minister of Gender Equality Elisabeth Moreno (C, right) pose with women business leaders during a meeting focusing on gender equality at work as part of International Women's Day at the Elysee palace in Paris. — AFP

Russian oligarchs' wealth is threatened



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

For decades, Russia's wealthiest have flocked to London once called 'Moscow-on-Thames', snapping up mansions, sending their children to top private schools and taking advantage of the capital's status as a global financial hub. The UK has now threatened to ratchet up pressure on the Kremlin thousands of miles away in the up-market enclaves of London.

In response to Russian action in Ukraine, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had no alternative than to impose severe sanctions against Russian banks, businesses and oligarchs, especially those with ties to President Vladimir Putin. He told parliament the sanctions would be "the largest and most severe package of economic sanctions that Russia has ever seen".

It's a little unclear at present how far the government will go or what further sanctions could possibly be imposed amid fears it will damage London's attractiveness as a financial centre. For the sanctions to have any effect the government would have to be prepared to sanction around 100 powerful Russians, including their wider families, according to Thomas Mayne, an expert in corruption studies at the think-tank Chatham House.

He said: "What kind of pressure that exerts on Putin, who knows? Perhaps nothing. But it is something that should be tried". Campaign group Transparency International UK says Russians accused of corruption or with links to the Kremlin

have bought £1.5 bn in property since 2016.

Russian companies have long used London to tap funds. Russian companies continue to raise money from foreign investors, often through London-based arms of investment banks. Last year, Russian companies and financial institutions raised 17.6 bn abroad, the highest in four years, according to Dealogic.

There are 24 Russian companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, including the bank Sberbank and JSV VTB bank, Russian state-controlled energy giant Gazprom and oil company PJSC Lukoil. Recently toughened rules now allow sanctions to be placed against anyone doing business of "economic significance to the government of Russia", including owners, directors and trustees of businesses.

In practice, sanctioned individuals could be barred from selling property, as banks wouldn't be able to process the transactions. UK companies would be barred from transacting with sanctioned entities anywhere in the world.

Last month, the UK shut down its investor visa programme, which had been popular with wealthy Russians as a way to get residency. The government says it will publish a register of who owns property and businesses through offshore shell companies.

"It remains to be seen how aggressively

the UK government uses these powers", said Alexandra Melia, a partner at the law firm Steptoe & Johnson. The sanctions could, for instance, be applied to British offshore locations including the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands, she said, potentially freezing a chunk of offshore Russian wealth.

The threat of sanctions spurred a flurry of activity, with UK-based businesses reviewing loans and derivatives contracts with Russian clients, to insert clauses to better allow them to claw money back if those Russians are suddenly frozen out of the financial system, said Bruce Johnston, a partner at law firm Morgan Lewis.

Since Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014, the number of Russians getting UK investor visas has fallen sharply. The number of Russians in private schools is down by more than a third since its peak in 2015, according to a study by the Independent Schools Association.

While Russian companies continue to raise money through London, the amount has declined somewhat since 2014. Critics may say Russians came to London because of a lack of regulation and political will to scrutinise the origin of foreign funds.

In a 2015 report, Deutsche Bank analysed unrecorded financial inflows into the UK through balance-of-payment data and concluded that a "good chunk" of the £93 bn in hidden capital coming into Britain between 2006 and 2015 was related to Russia.

Greening African cooking



BRIAN MALIKA

The writer is a social worker, reproductive health counsellor, and Founder of One More Per cent, a nonprofit organisation that works to improve the health of young women and girls

NAIROBI: As the world races to meet the goal of net-zero carbon emissions, most regions are focusing on the energy sector. But in Sub-Saharan Africa, cooking fuel poses a bigger challenge. If Africa is to achieve its emissions-reduction goals, Africans must find a clean, affordable way to prepare food.

More than 80 per cent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa use charcoal, kerosene, or firewood to cook. These fuels produce black carbon, one of the biggest contributors to climate change after carbon dioxide.

And they do more than harm the planet.

The household pollution caused by traditional cooking fuels

contributes to more than 500,000 premature deaths annually in the region. It also leads to stunted growth and increased risk of respiratory infections in children under five.

And, with Sub-Saharan Africa's population growing 2.7 per cent annually, the problems associated with cooking fuel will worsen until a safer, cleaner option is found.

Several new fuels have been proposed, from bioethanol to electricity produced from solar panels.

But to determine the best alternative, those who use the fuel must be part of the discussion. People will not use a greener

cooking fuel unless it is affordable and easy to access.

So-called design thinking is one way to include their views.

This approach, used successfully in many developing-country contexts, relies on collaboration between project managers, engineers, and local communities to find the right solution for a particular problem.

In Brazil, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) used design thinking to create jobs in remote villages that are on the front line in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

WWF team members engaged local leaders to determine how

residents could be employed to conserve endangered forests through the use of traditional resource-management techniques. Likewise, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization coordinated with indigenous peoples on a white paper that describes how traditional production methods offer a platform for sustainable food systems.

Leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa can draw on these cases to engage communities in the search for cleaner sources of cooking fuel. Some experiments already are taking place.

A youth group in Kibera, Africa's

largest slum, recycles biodegradable food waste to make a form of cooking fuel that produces no carbon-dioxide emissions.

But residents noted that the biogas production produces a foul smell during the fermentation process — a serious problem in this heavily populated area. The residents suggested putting natural odor eliminators like vinegar around fermentation areas.

The Africa Biogas Partnership Programme shows how a good idea could be made better through design thinking. This programme offered rural household's biodigesters to turn waste into cooking fuel.

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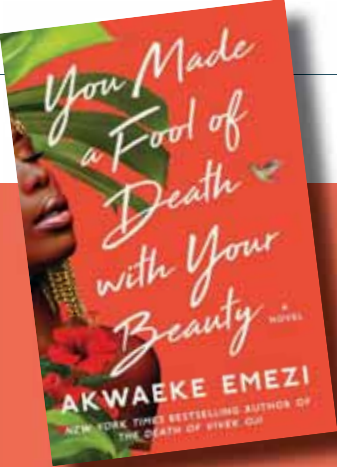
features



It's the season of the mulberries

Because of its unique topographical landscape, Oman produces some of the most diverse agricultural crops in the Middle East and almost every month of the year is a season for a specific crop. The beginning of March is also the season of mulberries. Here's what you should know about it...**P20**

READ



YOU MADE A FOOL OF DEATH WITH YOUR BEAUTY

BY AKWAEKE EMEZI

Ian artist with her own studio and sharing a brownstone apartment with her ride-or-die best friend, Joy, who insists it's time for Feyi to ease back into the dating scene.

CONSERVATION

An Indonesian woman bonds with endangered silvery gibbons

TINI KASMAWATI uses a crude pulley system to raise a bucket of bananas into the canopy of an Indonesian rainforest. Within minutes, a silvery gibbon, a baby clinging to its chest, swings through the trees and grabs a few.

For nearly eight years, Tini, 49, has been on a self-funded mis-

sion to care for the endangered animals, which are native to the jungles of West Java, spending at least two hours a day with them.

Also known as the "Javan gibbon" or "owa jawa" locally, populations of the silver-haired primates are declining because of illegal animal trafficking and deforestation. Only about 4,000



remain in the wild, according to Conservation International and about 24 in this area, according to a local wildlife conservation group.

When Tini met a Dutch student, who travelled to the tropical country to study gibbons in 2014, she felt ashamed of her own ignorance. That spurred her to

care for at least six of the creatures, which she has come to regard as family.

"It's an honour that I'm able to do this, not many people out there want to or can do this," Tini said in an interview.

Animal welfare activist Budiharto, who runs Cikananga Wildlife Centre, which monitors endangered species in West Java province, said Tini's work has made little difference to gibbon populations, but she has helped provide much needed food for the primates.

There are plans to convert Lengkon forest into a protected area, but the fate of these scrunch-faced monkeys remains precarious as they are plagued by inbreeding, Budiharto said.

Tini hopes her work can help conserve the remaining gibbons and allow researchers to educate the public about them.

"If God is willing, as long as I can still walk, I will not stop," she said. — **Reuters**



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Gyllenhaal's 'Lost Daughter' triumphs at indie Spirit Awards



MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL'S "The Lost Daughter," a drama about the challenges and taboos surrounding motherhood, was named the year's best indie film at the Spirit Awards on Sunday.

Gyllenhaal — until now primarily known as an actress in films such as "The Dark Knight" and "Secretary" — also won prizes for best screenplay and best director, for her debut effort in both fields.

The Film Independent Spirit Awards honour low- and mid-budget movies, and the glitzy gala held at Santa Monica beach near Los Angeles could provide a much-needed boost for smaller films like Gyllenhaal's ahead of this month's Oscars.

"The Lost Daughter," based on Elena Ferrante's novel, is in the running for three Academy Awards including best actress for Olivia Colman, who plays a mother estranged from her children and harbouring guilt for her failings in raising them.

"My film is in an unusual language — it's the language of the minds of women," said Gyllenhaal, before dedicating her final prize for best feature to "women in film."

While only films made for less than \$22.5 million can compete for Spirit Awards, some of Hollywood's biggest stars turned out for the event, and streaming giant Netflix emerged as the day's big winner with six awards.

Beyond the honours for "The Lost Daughter," Netflix earned two prizes for 1920s race drama "Passing," including best supporting actress for Ruth Negga, and one for South Korean smash hit series "Squid Game."

Stars Kristen Stewart and Javier Bardem were among several who used the event to speak out against Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Taylor Paige won best actress for her portrayal of a stripper who becomes embroiled with a prostitution scam in "Zola," a black comedy based on a viral Twitter thread.

Simon Rex — a former MTV host who began his career by appearing in adult films — won best actor for "Red Rocket," about a washed-up star.

"This movie was made for \$1 million with a 10-person crew with no permits," he added.

"We were hiding from police. We were hiding from neighbours. I was running down the street.

"If this doesn't embody the spirit... of independent film, I don't know what does."

Free this film

The Spirit Awards are typically held the day before the Oscars, but this year were held three weeks prior, meaning voting for the season-concluding Academy Awards has not yet taken place.

Deaf actor Troy Kotsur cemented his Oscar frontrunner status by earning another best supporting actor prize for his role in "CODA."

The film follows high school teen Ruby as she juggles her musical ambitions with her deaf family's dependence on her to communicate with the "hearing" world.

"Summer of Soul (..Or, When The Revolution Could Not Be Televised)" — musician Questlove's first movie about the huge "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem — won best documentary.

The film brings to light long-lost and never-before-seen footage of the star-studded concert, which was attended by 300,000 people and featured Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone and Mahalia Jackson. — **AFP**

FASHION

Virgil Abloh's Last Show



THOSE WORDS, written in block letters, were a motto for Virgil Abloh, the barrier-breaking designer, artist, DJ, furniture maker and conversationalist; founder of Off-White and artistic director of Louis Vuitton menswear; a man who once described himself as a "cultural Robin Hood — steal from the snobs and give it back to some kids"; who died unexpectedly in November at age 41.

Those words were at the heart of his first retrospective, "Figures of Speech," held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2019. And they were borne aloft on a fluttering flag, the first day of Paris Fashion Week, in the last Off-White show Abloh ideated before his death.

Which was itself both a retrospective — a tour through the foundational "codes" (as a voice-over called them) that he had established for the brand, and an argument for their ability to power it onward — and a leap into the future, with a new high fashion collection and beauty line.

After all, Abloh meant those words as words not just to remember, but to live by: Yeah, why can't a brand go on even when its founder, a man many considered not just its heart and mind but its personification, is gone? And who says a guy who started out aiming to create a wearable dialogue between streetwear and ready-to-wear shouldn't try his hand at couture too?

That's why the event hadn't been billed as a memorial, but as a celebration. And despite the somberness of the global situation, it was.

Rihanna and ASAP Rocky were there. So was Pharrell Williams. Carla Bruni, the former first lady of France. Idris Elba. Designers Olivier Rousteing of Balmain, Jonathan Anderson of Loewe and Tremaine Emory of Supreme. Michael Burke, the CEO of Louis Vuitton, and José Neves, CEO of Farfetch, which owns New Guards Group, the Italian manufacturer that helped create and nurture Off-White.

All sitting on chairs set out along the perimeter of a big white room, with a giant crystal chandelier and an equally elaborate amplifier arrangement arrayed in the centre, watching as a parade of Abloh-isms appeared: looks for both men and women born from different traditions in animated conversation with each other. Black sweaters and body-con dresses came with asteroid-shaped cut-outs; mohair harnesses topped tailored suiting; slouchy leather cargos were adorned with perfectly geometric patch pockets.

Thong straps were pulled up and over the hipbones under micro miniskirts. Jacquard was made with a graffiti print.

There were giant fuzzy backpacks and big puffer chunky-heel Alpine boots with appliquéd pot leaves. Quoted phrases. At one point, Serena Williams sauntered out, in a stretch net dress over a tie-dyed bodysuit. — **NYT**



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Are you still wearing a face mask?

WITH THE LIFTING of many precautionary measures related to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, as is the case with the wearing of masks in some countries and the spread of the new coronavirus infection, there is a lot of confusion about whether and when to wear a mask?

This is undoubtedly the most confusing and difficult thing now because not only do we have to think about the risks and benefits of not wearing it, but we also have to worry about the risks and benefits from people around us.

Thus, a question has to be framed and asked this way: Who is the most vulnerable person in your immediate circle?

There is one thing clear about this "to wear or not wear a mask" dilemma. If your immunity has been compromised or weakened or you're living with a person who has weak immunity due to age or other health factors, then it is advisable to continue wearing the mask and maintaining the required distance when out and about. This is mandatory especially if you are indoors as uncirculated air is a fertile environment for the virus.

Masks are also important if an individual has not been vaccinated against this virus or if that person is spending time with others who are not immunised. Not to mention that these people who are not immunised are at high risk of hospitalisation, deterioration of their health condition and subsequent death as a result of infection.

So, if you are healthy and receive the vaccine and its boosters, your risk of getting seriously ill with the coronavirus is very small. Perhaps then we can say that it is in line with other risks that people are exposed to every day, such as driving a car. However, many people want or may want to get back to normal and are even willing to accept a little risk to gain a level of simplicity they knew in 2019.

As such, here I may remind everyone that there is also always a long-term risk of someone contracting the coronavirus, if I may say

so, even if vaccinated, as much about this case is still unknown! I think that simply, if the infection rates in the place where you live are high, which was pretty much everywhere during a variant wave (Omicron), it is better to continue and recommend wearing masks in most closed places. However, in many situations, the decision to wear a mask becomes a personal one.

It is more likely that if you are close to people and crowded somewhere — shoulder to shoulder for instance — then wearing a mask here may be inevitable, at least for the time being. What I want to point out here, if we take the example of smoking, and someone is smoking, surely the smell and taste of cigarettes fill the air quickly? Then if you agreed with me on that and your answer was yes, then be sure that the virus will be as well. Then you will undoubtedly be smart to wear a mask. If not, you are unlikely to get infected!

Of course on planes, for instance, you should wear a face mask for sure. So far, some countries do not require airline passengers to be vaccinated, so even if you have been vaccinated, you don't know the condition of the people around you. Also, you don't want to spoil your vacation or business trip by getting infected and having to quarantine, even if your risk of getting seriously ill remains low.

In the end, the coronavirus is not the only one that floats among us, nor is it the only one that can be harmful to people with weak immunity, for example, influenza and colds virus may be transmitted in the same way as Covid-19. If you get a little sick, you can release the virus into the air and pass it on to other people. Even better if you stay at home, or wear a mask if you have to go out. And always keep in mind where and when you can take one off safely!

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.



It's the season of the mulberries

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Locally called "fursad", Omani farmers had been growing mulberries along with other wild berries for as long as many people can remember.

Oman's natural and geographical features have allowed for these berries to grow in abundance and the season is also a big contributing factor that different fruit trees and crops thrive in different parts of the country.

Fursad is a distinct summer fruit that has become popular among the local population both young and old alike. Available in large quantities, the fruits had made it into local supermarkets all around Oman.

The berry size varies from one place to another depending on the weather and soil condition. In Jabal Akhdhar, the berries are known to grow larger than in other areas of Oman because of the unique temperature that is mostly cold throughout the year.

Some farmers shared that they'd been seeing the fruits grown in the last 50 years. Almost every house in Oman located in the mountains has one or more mulberry trees. Other than the fruit, it has also become an ornamental plant prized for its beautiful colours and lush shade.

Mulberries are distinguished by their colours "black, red and white." They usually start white, then become red as they mature and turn black when ripe and ready for eating. The flavour profile also varies. Some are very sour while others are sweet as honey. Whether big or small is not an indicator of what the taste would be like.

Surprisingly, most Omanis like to eat the fruit when it is half-ripe as they like the mixed sweetness and sourness.

Mulberries are bred and propagated by cutting during January and February

or by grafting during October to November or February to March. It is preferable to plant berries in medium soil with low salinity. Additionally, the mulberry tree does not prefer excessive moisture. Although its root system is strong and deep in the soil, it is affected by drought. Summer parcels remain short and low humidity causes curling of the leaves. And the most successful varieties of it are jumbo berries (red-white). Additionally, berries bloom in March and watering should be reduced as much as possible to prevent flowers from dropping.

Berries are pruned in December and January. At the beginning of the tree's life, it must go through pruning. Pruning must take place during the fruiting stage. Medium pruning includes the removal of knots and diseased wood. The infection of berries is usually limited to spiders or smut that affects the stem and must be combated with a special type of pesticide.

The berries are fertilised with compost during December and January at a rate of 20 kg per tree. They are also fertilised with a batch of chemical fertiliser at a rate of 15 kg per tree during February, NPK 15 - 15 - 15 which means that the fertiliser used has equal parts of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Berries need moderate irrigation, especially in summer, and it must be reduced during winter so that the leaves do not fall.

When the berries are ready to be picked, people gather under the trees before sunrise. They spread old mats and carpets on the ground to prevent the berries from mixing with dirt. Farmers will spend the early morning hours harvesting by shaking the trees.

Mulberries have many health benefits that have been known since ancient times, as they were used as anti-inflammatories and used to cure rheumatism and acts as diuretics and laxatives for the intestines, in addition to their use as treatments for stomach disorders and urinary problems.

Many Omanis have pleasant memories of mulberry trees and their fruits. In summary, they love it for its delightful taste, the ample shade it provides that's a lifesaver in summer and the amazing effects it has on health when eaten.