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ASYAD SHIPPING SIGNS MOU WITH JAPANESE SHIPPING GIANT



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THE SEVEN VILLAGES THAT INSPIRED A NEW GENERATION OF FRAGRANCES



AL AHSA

OMAN AND SAUDI INK MOU IN FOOD SECURITY

The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of food and water security. The signing of the MoU came on the sidelines of the International Council for Dates, held in Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. The MoU aims to enhance cooperation between the two countries in fields of food and water security within the implemented systems and regulations.

DETAILS ON P2

AMLAQ PLATFORM COVERS 7 SERVICES

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning launched a trial version of Amlak platform for four months, on Wednesday. The new platform provides integrated digital services in a phased manner to assess the efficiency of the e-system. Amlak platform is a comprehensive software system accessible around the clock and on official holidays. It contains services related to lands, real estate registry, urban planning, geographic information systems, social housing schemes and projects. The first phase includes 7 services related to the real estate registry. — ONA



INSIDE



IRAN FOR US 'POLITICAL STATEMENT' ON N-DEAL

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MEASURING POVERTY PROPERLY AMID CRISIS

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CPHL is WHO's collaborative centre for emerging infections

MUSCAT: The Central Public Health Laboratories (CPHL) of the Ministry of Health (MoH) has been designated as a Collaborating Centre for Emerging Infections by the World Health Organization (WHO), the first-of-its-kind in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

The announcement, made

on Wednesday at the Ministry of Health, was attended by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health and a number of officials from the ministry and representatives of the WHO.

Dr Amina bint Khalfan al Jardaniyah, Director, Central Public Health Laboratories (CPHL) at the Ministry of Health,

said the selection of the CPHL in the Sultanate of Oman represents an important achievement for the Sultanate of Oman, affirming that the CPHL will serve the Eastern Mediterranean region and will play a global role among the internationally-accredited collaborating centres.

Dr Al Jardaniyah noted that

the CPHL will support the region and some countries of the world in combating emerging epidemics and will provide services in the training and capacity-building fields.

The designation of a collaborating centre for emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases in the Sultanate of

Oman provides an opportunity for exchanging experiences and enabling countries in the region and the world to benefit from the Sultanate of Oman's experience in the field of public health laboratories such as the provision of technical consultations and the organisation of training events.

TURN TO P2

PRE-REGISTRATION FOR ENTRY INTO BOOK FAIR

27 countries, 715 publishers to attend Muscat Book Fair

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnassri

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, announced that His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the opening ceremony of the Muscat International Book Fair (MIBF) in its 26th edition on February 24.

This was announced during a press conference held at the ministry's building to reveal the details of the MIBF.

The Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah will be the guest of honour for this year's edition. The fair, which will continue until March 5, will host about 114 various cultural events with the participation from 27 countries, 715 publishers and over 361,000 titles.

Dr Al Harrasi mentioned that the decision to hold the book fair was under discussion, especially in the light of the pandemic, which cast a shadow over holding of many events in the Sultanate of Oman and abroad, including book fairs.

"The decision to hold MIBF came as a matter of coexistence with the situation imposed on us by the virus, and there was no other choice but to do



The decision to hold MIBF came as a matter of coexistence with the situation imposed on us by the virus, and there was no other choice, as is the case with many countries which began easing precautions

DR ABDULLAH BIN NASSER AL HARRASI

Minister of Information

so, as is the same with many countries around the world which began easing precautions and gradually regaining their vitality."

He allayed fears that the event would be an environment for the spread of the virus, and assured all precautions will be taken.

"Measures will be there to ensure smooth conduct of the exhibition, besides precautions such as wearing of masks, social distancing, etc., will be followed to ensure that the virus does not spread among visitors or participants," he said.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, said: "The main committee has formed a cultural committee to organise all the accompanying cultural and intellectual events. The committee will organise 13 events, including poetry evenings, lectures and dialogues, besides 62 other events from the participating institutions."

With regard to children's activities, he stated that due to pandemic, such activities are reduced and some selected by the Children's First Association, Sultan Qaboos University and other children bodies would take place.

TURN TO P2

DRONE DELIVERY SERVICES IN MUSCAT



In celebration of Muscat as the Arab Digital Capital 2022, an agreement was signed for a drone delivery service in the Governorate of Muscat. The service, introduced in cooperation with UV Robotics – a firm specialised in 4IR and drones – will enable Muscat inhabitants to make orders for prompt airlifted deliveries and overcome geographic and topographic challenges in residential quarters inaccessible by vehicles.

DETAILS ON P2

'Russia is building up troops near Ukraine'

KYIV: The US and Nato said Russia was still building up troops around Ukraine on Wednesday despite Moscow's insistence it was pulling back, questioning President Vladimir Putin's stated desire to negotiate a solution to the crisis.

In Ukraine, where people raised flags and played the national anthem to show unity against fears of an invasion, the government said a cyber attack that hit the defence ministry was the worst of its kind that the country had seen.

The Russian defence ministry said its forces were pulling back after exercises in southern and western military districts near Ukraine. It published video that it said showed tanks and infantry vehicles leaving the Crimean peninsula.

SEE ALSO P7

New discoveries in Bat to shed light on Bronze Age

IBRI: Archaeological excavations carried out by a joint team from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and archaeological researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and New York University in Abu Dhabi, resulted in discoveries at the archaeological site of Bat in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah.

These discoveries include houses along a slope overlooking a wadi. The other archaeological site is located southeast of the archeological site of Bat around an area where



rainwater has accumulated since a very long time. These houses seem similar at first glance, but in reality they are completely different because they are located in radically different ecological zones.

Ancient stoves, ovens, and burnt seeds were also found within the excavated settlements.

The researchers believe that these finds contain valuable data that can help understand how people lived during the Bronze Age and how they were

able to thrive at the Bat site for nearly 1,000 years.

The archaeological site of Bat, Al Khatm and Al Ain is located in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah in the Wilayat of Ibri. It represents an outstanding model for the settlements of the Third Millennium BC as they include the largest gathering of archaeological towers and tombs from this era.

For its exceptional importance, the site was included on the World Heritage List in 1988.

— ONA



0

MUSCAT BOOK FAIR
THE 26TH EDITION

Under auspices of His Highness Sayyid
THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM AL SAID,
Minister of Culture, Sports, and Youth.

From February 24
to March 5

Oman Exhibition
and Convention Center

27
COUNTRIES
TAKING PART

715
PUBLISHING
HOUSES

33
FOREIGN
PUBLISHERS

114
ACCOMPANIED
ACTIVITIES

361,230
TOTAL
TITLES

معرض مصطفیٰ الصاوي للكتاب
MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

omanobserver.om

27 countries, 715 publishers

FROM PAGE 1

Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of the Muscat International Book Fair, said during the press conference that the momentum of participation in this year's edition is less than the previous edition, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

"Therefore, the number of participating countries this year is 27 compared to 32 in 2020, 715 publishing houses compared to 946, and the official participation locally and abroad 41, compared to 46 in 2020."

Al Rawahi indicated that there would be new and advanced devices to monitor the number of entrants to the exhibition. This will enable the organisers to know the number and organise entry so that there is no crowding.

PRE-REGISTRATION

"According to the decisions of the Supreme Committee, the entry capacity will be only 70 per cent, or 50,000 people per day, based on the total visitors in 2020, which was 700,000 visitors until the last day," he said, stressing that it is preferable to pre-register for entry to the exhibition, especially for school students, for whom continuous visits will be arranged from their schools throughout the days of the cultural event.

He also noted that book signing parties would be held under caution.

As for the 27 countries participating in the 26th MIBF edition, Egypt is the highest in terms of the number of participants with 133, then the Sultanate of Oman with 93 participants, Lebanon with 80 participants, Syria with 66 participants, the UAE with 42, and Mauritania with one participation.

SUPPORT FOR WRITERS

Dr Abdullah al Harrasi

commented on the Omani participation in the book fair saying that "Support for all Omani writers is essential, local publishing houses and Omani cultural initiatives in Muscat Book Fair are basic and this is confirmed by the increase in the number of these publishers and writers every year."

Ali al Jabri, Under-Secretary of Information, said: "The institutions concerned with sorting and selecting the participating books and titles support the cultural orientation of the Sultanate of Oman and the various intellectual paths, as the support is essential for the Omani writer. The growth in Omani publishing houses in the book fair confirms this. We see this year that the Sultanate of Oman ranked second after Egypt in terms of participation, many of which also represent a mediator for other publishing houses."

OMAN, KSA INK MOU IN FOOD, WATER SECURITY

Al Ahsa: The Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of food and water security. The signing of the MoU came on the sidelines of the International Council for Dates, held in Al Ahsa, the KSA. The MoU was signed by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Eng Abdulrahman bin Abdulmohsen al Fadhli, Saudi Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture. The MoU aims to enhance cooperation between the two countries in fields of food and water security within the implemented systems and regulations. It also targets building mutual relations and partnership to achieve the strategic goals of the two countries in food and water security, as well as in integrated water management systems and associated mechanisms of legislation, institutional frameworks and operations. — ONA

CPHL is WHO's collaborative centre

FROM PAGE 1

The WHO collaborating centres aim to enhance countries' readiness and response for timely detection and management of outbreaks and emerging pathogens to facilitate the transfer of safe and appropriate diagnostic techniques, practices and training to laboratories.

The Sultanate of Oman's CPHL is the first entity in the region to be granted the status of a collaborating centre for emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, which proves the leadership of the Sultanate of Oman in many sectors and fields and the extent of its advancement and success in public health programmes whether at the local, regional or international level.

This includes curbing infectious diseases and combating the risk factors that cause them. The selection of the CPHL qualifies it as a model on the international level in the field of public health laboratories and in the areas of pandemic response and control. — ONA

Drones to deliver parcels in Muscat

MUSCAT: A project, to enable drone-based delivery of parcels in Muscat, has been launched in cooperation between the Governorate of Muscat and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

"We hope the signing of the memorandum of understanding will enhance the utilisation of the drone system in the Sultanate of Oman, localise modern technologies for delivery services and enrich the logistics sector by adding new services that contribute to the integration of supply and supply chains in the Governorate of Muscat." Muscat Municipality said in a statement:

The project is part of several initiatives to mark the celebration of Muscat as the Arab digital capital for 2022.

This service, which was carried out in cooperation with Uvi Robotics, a company specialised in the field of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and drones, aims to enable the people who live in the remote areas of Muscat to benefit from fast delivery of products and supplies.

In a race to win, humanity paused for these special kids

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

In a race to win, humanity paused and prevailed, as people witnessed the soft side of Tour of Oman cyclists on its final leg. The cyclists were seen interacting with the special needs children and their parents at Al Mouj before the start of the final race.

Everyone, including Jan Hirt was not sure that he would be the overall winner before the start of the race, but way before the crucial race, he won many hearts by gracefully pausing for the children with special needs and saying "hello" to them.

"To give our students a rare exposure of an international event like the Tour of Oman, we had gathered at the Al Mauj venue before the start of the race with

the permission of the organising authorities. Despite knowing that the race is final and crucial, we took a chance by asking Jan Hirt if he could meet the children," said Mahesh Verma, who helped start Paradise Valley, an inclusive school both for children with special needs along with normal ones.

"Why not, Jan Hirt said gracefully, came towards the children, leaned and wished them," he said.

Sarah Salmon, the mother of Teo Salmon, was overwhelmed with the response of the cyclists for making the moment special not only for the children but for their parents also.

"In fact their rare gesture was towards the whole society, which needs to understand the cause of the children with special needs and their parents. Society needs to

work for them," said Sarah, who is from Belgium.

"A great champion is a true inspiration for our little ones showing that with strong will and a kind heart, one can achieve all the goals! Sport is a great way to promote inclusion, which is the values we defend for our children, in our school, and in the Sultanate of Oman. The cyclists' gesture means a lot for the children with special needs," she said.

Besides Teo, Euan Scott, Brodie Scott, Zein Ayoub al Balushi and their parents Sarah Salmon, Nikita Scott and Ayoob Rahi Janki met the cyclists.

All the parents were overwhelmed over the gesture of the cyclists taking part in the Tour of Oman and its organisers for the opportunity extended to the students.



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THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 17 | 2022

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NEW RECRUITS JOIN RAO



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) celebrated the passing out of a new batch of recruits at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Training Regiment on Wednesday. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Khalifa bin Ali al Siabi, Assistant Inspector-General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of RAO. The ceremony began by performing the military salute to the chief guest who inspected the first column of the graduates. Then, the graduates paraded in a slow march accompanied with the RAO Musical Band. Then, the chief guest handed over appreciation awards to top graduates. At the end of the ceremony, the graduates took the oath of loyalty and proclaimed thrice Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The ceremony was attended by a number of senior officers at the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), as well as RAO officers and parents of the recruits. – ONA

Global warming can impact fish landings

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Climate change and global warming are expected to have a significant impact on the Sultanate of Oman's marine life, especially the two species — yellowfin tuna and sardines that are critical to commercial fisheries.

As per the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change, yellowfin tuna and sardines landings showed a trend of a sharp decline between 1991 and 1997.

Sardines showed a lower decline between 1997 and 2003, while Yellowfin tuna landings increased during 1997-2003 but continued to decline in the subsequent years.

The report, quoting the National Centre for Research in the US, said that reasons include the physical properties of water of the Arabian Sea have become warmer and more saline.

Average sea temperatures in the summer have risen since 1960 by over two degrees Celsius at the surface and above one degree Celsius at a depth of 300 metres.

Average salinity at lower depths has been increasing at a rate of 0.1 parts per thousand per decade



The report said that reasons include the physical properties of water of the Arabian Sea have become warmer and more saline

since 1960.

The Western Arabian Sea has been witnessing changes in the chemical properties — acidity, dissolved oxygen and nitrate concentrate are some of the key chemical properties that underline the productivity of marine diversity and commercial fisheries and significantly changed over the past decades, the report said.

Based on data from local oceanographic stations near the Sultanate of Oman, waters have become more acidic, the concentration of nitrate has declined by 30 per cent over the 30 years.

There has been a decline in dissolved oxygen concentration with levels of 1 milligram per litre now at a depth of 75 metres as opposed to 120 metres in the 1960s.

The chlorophyll concentration has declined by 40 per cent during the period 1950 to 2010.

These chemical changes have all contributed to fish kill incidents and compressing of large and small pelagic fishes over the Omani shelves.

The strategic solutions include knowledge for managing vulnerable marine resources by collecting and analysing data on the impacts of climate variability and trends on marine biology, assessing climate change impact on fisheries by giving priority to threatened and endangered species, monitoring climate change effects on coral reefs as a biological indicator, investigation case studies for the impacts of climate change the social and economic relationships in fisheries and aquaculture.

Around three earth climate models have predicted an increase in temperature for the upper 200 metres of the Indian Ocean, where there is enough sunlight to allow photosynthesis.

HUAWEI P50 Pro | P50 Pocket



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Product color, shape, interface and functions are for reference only. The actual product may vary. (CMF231114P01)

In brief

MUSCAT

1,430 NEW COVID CASES, 5 DEATHS

The Sultanate of Oman reported 1,430 new Covid-19 infections within 24 hours. The total cases reached 370,620. Five deaths were reported in 24 hours. The total number of deaths reported in the country is 4,221. 60 patients were admitted to hospital in the last 24 hours while the total ICU cases touched 78.

MEDICAL EVACUATION BY RAFO

A medical evacuation has been carried out by the Royal Air Force of Oman for an Omani woman who was suffering from a critical health condition. She was transferred from the Wilayat of Masirah in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, to Ibra Hospital in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, for treatment.



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2022/013	Mooring Gears Testing.	RO 105.000
2	SIPC 2022/014	Potential Measurements of Cathodic Protection in Vale, Aggregate & SIP Area.	RO 25.250
3	SIPC 2022/015	Differential Settlement and Survey for Vale & Aggregate Jetties.	RO 25.250

The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%. Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Thursday, 17/02/2022 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 03/03/2022. Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

A request for the electronic tender documents.
Scanned bank transfer.
The firm's commercial registration documents.
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents. The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone
Bid Opening Committee
Tender Reference No. **2021/**
Tender Name:

SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.

All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:

sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

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Caught in the web of fear



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

[@lakshmioman](#)

Being afraid of walking alone at night might have its benefits by keeping you safe but having a fear of going to work might damage future prospects from life to career.

According to a senior psychiatrist, Dr Hamed al Sinawi, some individuals might even mend their lifestyles to accommodate their elements of fear.

The latest phobias to raise its head more prominently is ergophobia — an abnormal and persistent fear of work.

While so many people are trying their best to secure a job, here was a person who was approached by an organisation after they had seen the individual's social media stature and expertise he had gained in a specific field that had attracted an immense following. Young and jobless, the person's family and friends were happy when the aforementioned individual, who was a gamer, received job confirmation.

"He was enjoying it, but very soon, he questioned and wondered to himself whether the anxiety he was going through was worth the job. It was well paid and the family did not want him to lose the opportunity. Yet another person suffered from the fear of flying so much that even the thought made him uncomfortable," explained Dr Al Sinawi.

According to him, the issue is that

when people take longer to seek help, avoidance becomes part of their life.

"So they learn not to face the illness, and then it becomes a new lifestyle. It becomes difficult for them to change," he pointed out.

A bad experience leaves its impression on the mind, to the point the mind questions each time, "What if?"

"The question, 'What if?' is the reason for ruining everything," he stressed.

All of it except the original incident is imagination in mind, said the senior psychiatrist.

"For some people going through an accident or having a loved one in an accident might stop them from driving again. Probably they might take life adaptation and get a driver for example or they might start cycling if the place is nearby. So once they get used to the new lifestyle, they do not see a need to work on their fears."

So can we just move on in life by sweeping the fears under the carpet?

Sometimes it is to understand what is fearful to you, said Dr Al Sinawi, "Most of the time people know there is no logic behind their fear, so one has to think of 'What could happen?' So breaking it down to small steps such as the person who has fear for flying can start with small journeys, travel with a person who is understanding because that person can talk to you, or read a book or use



Most of the time people know there is no logic behind their fear, so one has to think of 'What could happen?' So breaking it down to small steps such as the person who has fear for flying can start with small journeys, travel with a person who is understanding because that person can talk to you, or read a book or use an iPad, so you are not constantly thinking 'what if?'

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

Senior psychiatrist

an iPad, so you are not constantly thinking 'what if?'

Facing fear is the first step, but most people live in denial.

Ergophobia is when a person feels fear and intimidation from work because it requires commitment, having to deal with people and this can cause them to feel anxious and uncomfortable.

Luckily the young man concerned about suffering from ergophobia was mindful of the fear and his feelings. He acknowledged the fact that it was not the physical part of the work that was difficult, and the environment was peaceful, and he was passionate about the role he was given in the organisation, yet could not accept the commitment part of the job where he was required to be at the workplace at a certain time.

For some people giving up freedom can also develop the other aspect — expectations.

"Workplaces can also cause social phobia as people have to deal with people on a face to face basis, personalities vary and at a time can bring in difficult customers.

"The challenge to learn a new skills set can affect self-esteem and the ability to cope with the situation. It is often perceived as pressure."

Internal conversations are often blamed for the anxiety. And Dr Hamed al Sinawi recommends, along with therapy, mindfulness to overcome anxious thoughts.



1st beach carnival from March 22

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A gamut of activities packed with fun and frolic will be the attraction of the first Beach Carnival to be held at the Seeb Beach from March 22 to 31 after relaxed Covid-19 restrictions.

The 10-day festival, with a large number of sports and other games besides a wide range of infotainment activities that aim to entertain the complete family, is organised by an Omani firm Al Rahi Investment Company under the patronage of the Ministry of Education and will follow strict adherence to the pandemic regulations.

“An event like a beach carnival is one of the most sought after public events because people have been following the Covid restrictions for the past nearly two years. I’m sure people would be visiting the event venue under strict pandemic protocols,” said Dr Abdullah Ambousaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education.

He hoped that all public and private schools under the ministry were requested to send in their children with their parents and experience a festival arranged in Oman’s natural settings. “We encourage



all our staff and students to take part in the activities within the Covid-19 restrictions. All students and staff members have been urged to take part in the various activities meant for different age groups,” he added.

To be open from 3 pm to 10 pm every day, the festival

of families will have beach volleyball, handball, basketball, skating and hockey on one side while vendors from different parts of the Sultanate of Oman will be stationed on the other side offering the visitors a complete range of product range from gastronomic

delights to perfumes and cosmetics.

“With all these attractions aiming to cater to every member of a family, the beach carnival would turn out to be a memorable one replicating the Muscat Festival for every citizen and expatriate in the country,” said Rashid al Jalandani, CEO of Al Rahi Company; Mohammed al Jalandani and Amna Nasser, partners; and Islam Ahmed, legal adviser to the company, promoters of the largest beach event in the country.

“We have got approvals from the Ministry of Education, Muscat Municipality, as well as from the Supreme Committee that regulates the pandemic protocols. We are aiming to give the best for the visitors with this first of its kind complete family entertainment in 2022,” the promoters added.

Entry to the venue for children up to 12 will be free, while visitors from 12-16 years of age will be charged with 500 baisas. For people above the age of 16, there will be a RO 1 ticket to enter the festival area.

The first Beach Carnival is supported by various Omani SMEs and start-ups like Flowart, Happy Moon Land, Arab Sweets and Matar Saeedi Lawyers.

Agreement inked to fund vertical farming project

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) on Wednesday signed an agreement to fund the project of implementing an indoor vertical farming project to produce leafy greens. The agreement was signed within the framework of the ministry in bolstering the food security system in the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary for Agriculture, and Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed Al Fannah al Araiimi, OMIFCO’s Director of Sustainability and Institutional Communication. The project includes the use of Plant Factory technology,



which is a closed agricultural system in which light, temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide concentrations necessary for plant growth are artificially controlled. The plants are grown vertically instead of horizontally as in traditional greenhouses; this method increases crop production.

This system will allow farms in having a stable production of greens, particularly leafy greens, all year round. Moreover, the system will create investment opportunities for job-seekers. — ONA

Oman takes part in Dates Council meet

AL AHSA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, took part in the founding meeting of the International Dates Council, being held in the Governorate of Al Ahsa in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) on Wednesday.

The meeting announced the establishment of the International Dates

Council with its HQs in the KSA, as well as electing KSA a head of the council and the Sultanate of Oman as a representative of the executive body of the GCC region and Yemen. The meeting also approved the council’s strategy and the work plan. Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, head of Oman’s delegation, referred in his

speech during the meeting to the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts in promoting date palm through devising a national strategy document to achieve the goals set towards producing high-quality palm fruits, in addition to marketing the product locally and internationally throughout the year and finding appropriate manufacturing industries. — ONA

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation announces the re-launch of the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
(3/2022)	Supply and installation of Aluminum doors (CD01 and CD02), Aluminum display windows and fixed windows (CD03a, CD03b and CD04) in Innovation Park Muscat	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: Excellent, First and Second	25/= OR	03/03/2022	28/03/2022

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system will starting on Thursday 17/02/2022 at 07:30 am. To purchasing, please visit the following link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation

Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Defence ENGINEERING SERVICES TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tenders.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
001/2022	Construction work- SALALAH	Excellent	3 rd March 2022	4 th April 2022	530/- R.O
002/2022	Construction work- MAM	Excellent	3 rd March 2022	4 th April 2022	500/- R.O
003/2022	Construction work- MAZYONAH CAMP	Second & Above	3 rd March 2022	4 th April 2022	135/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as soft copy (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial (bill 1&2 separated from bill3)
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

Third national obstetric ultrasonography training begins



MUSCAT: The Third National Obstetric Ultrasonography Training course commenced in Muscat on Wednesday. The course is organised by the Women and Child Health Department of the Ministry of Health (MoH) in cooperation with the Royal Hospital, as well as the International Society of Ultrasound in Obstetrics and Gynecology (ISUOG). Twenty six doctors working in the Obstetrics and Gynecology clinics from various governorates participate in the training course.

The training programme includes three phases that covers spectrum of theoretical lectures in the field along with hands-on training. Dr Jamila al Abri, Director of Woman and Child Health, stressed at the inauguration of the course the importance of conducting obstetric ultrasound by a trained doctor in improving the health of mothers and their children. Dr Al Abri also reviewed the efforts made by the Ministry of Health in this field since the launch of the Maternal and Child Care Programme in 1987, including the provision of ultrasound devices in primary healthcare institutions, and adopting training programmes in cooperation with international associations. The opening also provided an overview of the training programme and presented the requirements of completing the training. — ONA

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby re-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)
1/2022	Provision Care Staff for Dispensary for Severe Disabilities, Nutrition Specialist, Care Technician at Dar Al Aman Al Khud	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, which have the activity of hospital services and care homes, and are registered in the excellent or first class	Saturday 26-2-2022 02:00 PM	Tuesday 8-3-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at theTender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Thursday 17/2/2022.
- 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



■ ASEAN FMS MEET IN PHNOM PENH



Foreign ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) from L-R Asean Secretary-General Lim Jock Hoi, Philippines' Teodoro Locsin, Maria Lourdes Locsin and Singapore's Vivian Balakrishnan, during a welcome dinner for Asean Foreign Ministers in Phnom Penh. — AFP

9 killed in Mogadishu terrorist attacks



Women walk next to the wreckage of a car following an explosion provoked by Al Shabaab fighters during an attack on the outskirts of Mogadishu. — AFP

MOGADISHU: At least nine people were killed in a coordinated string of terrorist attacks in the Somali capital Mogadishu, police said on Wednesday. Residents reported hearing a wave of powerful explosions that began shortly before midnight on Tuesday in the city's south-east, followed by hours of gunfire with automatic weapons and shelling with mortar rounds.

"What we saw last night in Mogadishu shows that the fighter group Al Shabaab is still a potential threat to peace there after its military ejection from the capital in 2011", former intelligence chief Ahmed Fiki said.

The attackers briefly took control of a police station in

the city, according to a police spokesperson. Numerous buildings were destroyed in the violence. "Our home collapsed completely because of the blast and we have lost an elderly brother", father-of-three Mohamud Ibrahim said. Two children have been confirmed among the dead. According to the police, the attackers overran various checkpoints in order to enter Mogadishu. Car bombs were also used.

The hunt for the attackers is still ongoing, a police spokesman said early on Wednesday.

Speaking via its mouthpiece Radio Andalus, the terrorist group Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the multi pronged attack, considered one of the worst in recent years. — dpa

Iran calls for US ‘political statement’ on nuclear deal

TEHRAN: Iran urged the US Congress on Wednesday to issue a "political statement" that Washington will stay committed to a possible agreement in Vienna talks to restore the 2015 nuclear deal.

The accord offered Tehran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme, but then US president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed heavy sanctions.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian urged the US guarantee on the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in an interview with the *Financial Times* published on his ministry's website.

"As a matter of principle, public opinion in Iran cannot accept as a guarantee the words of a head of state, let alone the United States, due to the withdrawal of Americans from the JCPOA", he said.

He stressed he had asked Iranian negotiators to propose to the Western parties that "at least their parliaments or parliament speakers, including the US Congress, can declare in the form of a political statement their commitment to the agreement



The US should take some ‘practical and tangible steps on the ground before any direct talks and contacts can take place’

HOSSEIN AMIR-ABDOLLAHIAN
Iran Foreign Minister

and return to the JCPOA implementation".

The Vienna talks involve Iran as well as Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly. They aim to return the US to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to ensure Tehran's full compliance with its commitments.

"Iran's commitments are as clear as a mathematical formula", said Amir-Abdollahian.

The talks in the Austrian capital resumed in late November after a pause following the June election of President Ebrahim Raisi.

The US had announced its readiness to hold direct talks with Iran to resolve the remaining issues, but Tehran has said preconditions must be met before the two countries can sit at the negotiating table.

"We are not ready to enter into the process of direct talks with the US if we do not have a clear and promising outlook to reach a good agreement with sustainable guarantees in front of us", said the Iranian top diplomat.

If the intentions of the US are "genuine" they should take some "practical and tangible steps on the ground before any direct talks and contacts can take place", he added.

Amir-Abdollahian said any direct dialogue, contact and negotiations with Washington would have "very huge costs for my government".

US-Iran relations have been severed since April 1980, just months after the fall of the shah and the occupation of the American embassy and following hostage crisis. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Yemen aid cuts to deepen as funds dry up: UN

Yemenis face more cuts in humanitarian aid in coming months because of funding shortages that could reduce food rations in a country where millions face starvation, the UN aid chief warned, as the war sees its biggest escalation in years. Martin Griffiths told the UN SC that by the end of January nearly two thirds of major UN aid programmes had already scaled back or closed.

"Aid agencies are quickly running out of money, forcing



them to slash life-saving programmes." The UN's 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan received only 58 per cent of the requested funds from donors, UN data shows. — AFP

BEIRUT

Lebanon approves \$18m to hold May election

Lebanon's government has approved the allocation of 360 billion Lebanese pound to hold a parliamentary election, Telecoms Minister Johnny Corm said. Speaking after the cabinet session, acting Information Minister Abbas Halabi quoted Prime Minister Najib Mikati as saying the last vote in 2018 had cost the state \$54 million, but only a much smaller amount was available now. The United Nations and Western governments have repeatedly urged Lebanese leaders to hold



elections on time and allocate the appropriate funding, amid fears that powerful political parties could seek to use the financial crisis as a pretext to postpone the vote. — Reuters

DANA

Shelling by Syrian forces kills 3 civilians

Shelling by Syrian government forces of a fuel depot in Idlib region killed three civilians and started a huge fire, a war monitor said. The bombardment struck a building in farmland near the town of Dana used as a supply station for diesel fuel, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Large numbers of first responders were attempting to extinguish flames that sent massive plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky, correspondents reported. The



depot is owned by a fuel company affiliated to the authorities in Idlib, who are backed by the Hayat Tahrir al Sham, the Britain-based Observatory said. — AFP



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In brief

■ MUMBAI



INDIA'S 'DISCO KING' BAPPI LAHIRI, 69, DIES

Indian singer-composer and "Disco King" Bappi Lahiri, who collaborated with the likes of Snoop Dogg and Samantha Fox, has died aged 69, his family said, prompting tributes from the world of politics and Bollywood. Born in West Bengal to a musical family, the larger-than-life Lahiri was renowned for his trademark gold chain and sunglasses and was credited with popularising disco music in India.

He had several collaborations with international stars, including English model and singer Fox in the 1995 Hindi film "Rock Dancer" and with Snoop Dogg on Punjabi song "Patiala Peg" in 2015.

■ VIENNA



AUSTRIA TO LIFT ALL COVID RESTRICTIONS ON MARCH 5

Austria will lift almost all coronavirus restrictions from March 5, with the exception of face mask requirements in certain areas, the government said. Early closing times for bars and restaurants will be scrapped, nightclubs allowed to reopen, and restrictions on large events dropped, Chancellor Karl Nehammer said.

"We have not yet overcome the pandemic," Nehammer warned, but he said the situation had improved enough — especially at the hospitals — to warrant the dramatic relaxation of Covid-19 curbs on public life. The change is due to come into effect as early as Saturday, Health Minister Wolfgang Mückstein said.

■ OUAGADOUGOU



BURKINA FASO COUP LEADER SWORN IN AS PRESIDENT

Burkina Faso's military leader Paul-Henri Damiba was sworn in as president, weeks after leading a successful coup, and he promised to deal with the mounting insecurity that helped oust his predecessor.

Damiba led a military junta that on January 24 overthrew President Roch Kaboré, citing Kaboré's inability to curb an insurgency that has killed thousands of people and forced more than one million people to flee their homes in the West African country. The lieutenant colonel opened his speech at the ceremony with a moment of silence for the civilians and soldiers killed.

Ukraine marks 'Day of Unity', Nato warns on Russia pullback

KYIV: Ukraine staged military drills and defiant displays of flag-waving patriotism on Wednesday as Nato warned Russia is continuing to mass forces for a possible invasion. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky watched troops training with some of their new Western-supplied anti-tank weapons on a range near Rivne, west of the capital.

The demonstration of Ukrainian firepower contrasted with images on Russian state media that were said to show Moscow's forces bringing an end to a major exercise in occupied Crimea.

In Rivne, a row of vehicles was destroyed by simultaneous missile test strikes and armoured vehicles manoeuvred and fired on the yellowing moorland, while in Kyiv hundreds of civilians marched in a stadium with an enormous national banner.

The "Day of Unity" displays came as the Kremlin called for "serious negotiations" with Washington and European leaders pushed hard for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg, hosting the alliance's defence ministers in Brussels, dismissed suggestions that the threat on the border had diminished. "It remains to be seen whether there is a Russian withdrawal," he said.

"We are of course monitoring very closely what Russia does in and around Ukraine. What we see is that they have increased the number of troops and more troops are on their way."



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrives to attend a military drill outside the city of Rivne, northern Ukraine. - AFP

Russia's huge build-up of troops, missiles and warships around Ukraine — which US intelligence warns could turn quickly into an invasion — has been called Europe's worst security crisis since the Cold War.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has demanded Ukraine be forbidden from pursuing its ambition to join Nato and wants to redraw the security map of eastern Europe, rolling back Western influence.

But, backed by a threat of crippling US and EU economic sanctions, Western leaders have launched a drive to seek a negotiated settlement, and Moscow has

The 'Day of Unity' displays came as the Kremlin called for 'serious negotiations' with US, and European leaders pushed hard for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis

signalled it will start to pull forces back. In the latest such move, on Wednesday the Russian defence ministry said military drills in Crimea — a Ukrainian region Moscow annexed in 2014 — had ended and that troops were re-

turning to their garrisons.

Washington has demanded more verifiable evidence of de-escalation, but US President Joe Biden on Tuesday nevertheless vowed to push for a diplomatic solution. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters: "It is positive that the US president is also noting his readiness to start serious negotiations."

German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht, arriving at the Nato talks, said reports of a partial Russian pullback "are signals that at least give us hope. But it is important to observe closely whether these words are followed by deeds." — AFP

Kremlin denies Russia behind Ukraine cyberattack

MOSCOW: The Kremlin on Wednesday denied responsibility for a cyber-attack on Ukraine a day earlier that hit websites at the country's defence ministry and armed forces as well as two state banks.

Kyiv had suggested the attack came from Russia as fears persist that Moscow is planning to invade its Western-backed neighbour Ukraine.

"We do not know anything. As expected, Ukraine continues blaming Russia for everything," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "Russia has nothing to do with any DDOS attacks," Peskov added.

The affected sites included the Oschadbank state savings bank and Privat — two of the country's largest financial institutions.

Both resumed service later on Tuesday but the military sites remained inaccessible hours after the initial reports of the attack emerged.

Ukraine's communications watchdog pointed the finger at Moscow.

"It cannot be excluded that the aggressor is resorting to dirty tricks," the watchdog said in reference to Russia. — AFP

38 dead in flash floods near Rio de Janeiro

PETROPOLIS: At least 38 people were killed in devastating flash floods that swept through the picturesque Brazilian city of Petropolis, turning streets into torrential rivers, officials said on Wednesday. Heavy storms on Tuesday dumped 258 millimetres of rain on the city in three hours, nearly equal to all the rainfall from the previous month, said the mayor's office for the scenic town in the hills north of Rio de Janeiro.

Some 80 homes were damaged, and around 300 people were being housed in shelters, mostly in schools, officials said. Wendel Pio Lourenco, a 24-year-old resident, was walking through the streets with a television in his arms, heading to a local church in search of shelter.

He said he was trying to save a few possessions, after spending a sleepless night helping search for victims of the disaster.

"I found a girl who was buried alive," he said. Officials said there had been multiple landslides. Journalists saw the remains of wrecked houses strewn across a ravine by a torrent of mud in an impoverished hillside slum.

Videos posted on social media from Tuesday's rains showed streets in Petropolis, the 19th-century summer capital of the Brazilian empire, fill with gushing floods that swept away cars, trees and nearly everything else in their



A man observes damaged public buses at a river after pouring rains in Petropolis, Brazil. - Reuters

More than 180 firefighters and rescue workers were responding to the emergency

path. Officials said more than 180 firefighters and other rescue workers were responding to the emergency.

City hall declared a "state of disaster" in the city of 300,000 people, which sits 68 kilometres north of the city of Rio.

Many shops were completely inundated by the rising waters, which gushed down the streets of the historic city center.

Officials said 400 soldiers had

been sent in to reinforce rescue teams, which were using four-wheel-drive vehicles, rescue boats and a dozen planes to search for victims.

Tuesday's rainfall was more than was expected for the whole month of February, according to the meteorological agency MetSul.

The heaviest downpour had passed, but more moderate rainfall was expected to continue for several days, authorities said.

President Jair Bolsonaro, on an official trip to Russia, said on Twitter that he was keeping abreast of "the tragedy" and asked his ministers to provide "immediate aid to the victims."

— AFP

Towards a knowledge-based manufacturing industry



DR ANCHAN C K

The writer is an international adviser — Business, Economy and Investments

Multinational companies are looking to diversify their supply chains, with the Sultanate of Oman, serving as an alternative or complementary production locations in their global manufacturing footprints.

Many factors go into finding the best country for mass manufacturing. Countries with relatively stable political and economic environments, modern infrastructure and a compatible legal system are ideal for sourcing.

Product companies are buzzing about the labour costs, capital costs, and productivity and efficiency of manufacturing.

With the aim of providing a perfect investment climate in the country, the government has been undertaking comprehensive investment approaches over the last five decades.

The Sultanate of Oman is characterised by its sustainable economic environment, excellent infrastructure and competent human resources.

The nation enjoys investment components that facilitate, encour-

age and attract local and foreign investments. Its strategic location and world-wide commercial linkages play a major role in opening up the horizons of investment and free trade opportunities.

Moreover, the government is undertaking constant efforts to develop sound legal framework that support and encourage local and foreign investments. The Sultanate of Oman represents a dynamic investment destination that is well connected to the markets in the Gulf, the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

In recent years, the growing pace of industrialisation, digitisation across the subcontinent has also made production processes more efficient, particularly through the adoption of latest industry technologies coupled with Internet of Things, in areas such as supply chain monitoring and asset maintenance.

The country typically has comparative advantages in certain resource-based and a few capital-intensive industries. However, to

THE GOVERNMENT IS UNDERTAKING CONSTANT EFFORTS TO DEVELOP SOUND LEGAL FRAMEWORK THAT SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE LOCAL AND FOREIGN INVESTMENTS

achieve successful diversification, it is necessary for other capital intensive and knowledge-based industries to emerge.

The nation is aiming at reflecting a more complex production structure. It signals industrial maturity, research and knowledge-based manufacturing industry and the ability to compete internationally through innovation.

Manufacturing industries with a higher R&D intensity which are considered high-technology industries.

The potential of its manufacturing industries are classified into four different areas. The first area was the country's production ca-

capacity or its ability to create value added, generate employment and improve labour productivity.

Second is its export potential, namely the basket of manufactured products that the Sultanate of Oman has potential to export.

Third is the dynamism or possibility of sustaining high growth and a set of dynamics industries, particularly in connection with rising global demand at current and future stages of development.

Lastly, it is the potential for import substitution, meaning emerging opportunities to develop promising yet nascent industries by producing locally.

The Sultanate of Oman's manufacturing industry is on the right path on "building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation".

Specifically, the target of significantly raising industry's share of employment and GDP in line with national circumstances. Since the Sultanate of Oman's medium-and high-tech industries already ac-

count for 20 per cent of manufacturing value added, an additional 10 per cent was considered feasible, particularly in the light of expected greenfield investments.

Since non-priority industries are expected to grow at 6 per cent annually, a 9.4-per cent annual growth rate of medium- and high-tech industries would have to be achieved if medium- and high-tech manufacturing value added is to reach a 30-per cent share in total manufacturing value added by 2040.

Manufacturing in the Sultanate of Oman has emerged as one of the high growth sectors within the country. The 'Made in Oman' programme to place the country on the world map as a manufacturing hub and give global recognition to the economy. The move, which started some years back, has been gaining momentum sharply.

Keeping in view to connect globally and to adopt best international practices it is signatory of Manufacturing for Wellbeing which is linked to 'Sustainable development growth' with local sectoral strategies.

Wheat and corn prices ride the Ukrainian rollercoaster

THOMAS URBAIN & SOFIA BOUDERBALA

The crisis between Ukraine and Russia, two of the world's biggest wheat and corn producers, has sent the commodities' prices on a wild ride — with anything from a diplomatic statement to rumour of a maritime blockade roiling markets.

Usually much less volatile than stocks or oil, agricultural commodities are now often subject to spectacular spikes and drops.

"The market doesn't know nuance: Either it's war and it goes up, or it's peace and it goes down," said Gautier Le Molgat, an analyst at Agritel.

The grains' markets turned around three times in less than 24 hours this week: First on the Russian foreign minister's optimistic tone, then on news of the US relocating its Ukrainian Embassy, and finally on Moscow's claims of a military pullback.

The stakes are especially high for wheat, with Russia being the world's top exporter and Ukraine the fourth, according to estimates by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Together, the two countries account for almost a third of wheat's world trade.

On the corn side, Ukraine ranks fourth among exporters and accounts for approximately 22 per cent of trade. To date, however, the Russian army's movements have had little effect on Russian or Ukrainian exports.

While global wheat prices surge, Ukraine has seen its own rates fall by four per cent over the last month, according to S&P Global Platts.

"If we remain in a latent conflict, volatility will remain in place and Russia and Ukraine will be losers in this," Le Molgat said.

"Their currencies will depreciate and few will risk buying from a distant origin without guaranteed delivery." Ukraine is also the top sunflower oil exporter, with Russia a close second.

"We did see some customers that were pulling back buying sunflower oil from Ukraine, because they had worries about whether they would be able to deliver if they're involved in a military conflict with Russia," said Arlan Suderman, chief commodities economist at StoneX Financial.

However, according to Scheve, "over time, (such a latent crisis) would just be accepted as it's the risk that you face." — AFP



JULIE WEED

The author is a contributing writer for *The New York Times*

How frequent flyer programmes are changing in a changed world

The pandemic made an oxymoron of the term 'frequent flyer,' as the number of airline passengers plummeted in the early days of the lockdown. Leisure travel has recovered somewhat, but the more lucrative business travel market is still way off, with recovery not expected until 2023 and perhaps not even then.

It's a challenging time to keep flyers loyal. Many are not travelling because of coronavirus concerns, and those who are can be enticed to try out other airlines because they are not flying enough to earn status. Others may be disenchanted with airline loyalty programmes, which, in the years leading up to the pandemic, had made upgrades and free tickets more elusive.

In the meantime, airlines are also facing pressure on the climate front, and while evidence suggests loyalty programmes aren't large contributors to climate change, they do encourage flying, which feels out of step with the current moment.

Here are some ways airlines are changing their loyalty programmes in the face of the new realities presented by the pandemic and the pressures of climate change.

Over the past 18 months, each airline has taken a different approach to hanging on to its biggest spenders, but their goal is the same: to make it easier for customers who have achieved status to keep it. Alaska Airlines, for example, is giving a 50-per cent mileage bonus to its customers for all flights they take in 2021. United Airlines has lowered the required number of flights and spending needed to get to each level of its loyalty programme. For instance, Premier Silver, the lowest tier, can be reached with 12 flights, along with 3,000 points (related to dollars spent) rather than 16 flights and 4,000 points. United has also been hosting dinners with Premier flyers to understand their priorities as they return to flying.

"We're committed to being flexible," said Michael Covey, Managing Director of United's Mileage Plus programme. "We are monitoring demand and making adjustments."



AIRLINES ARE CHANGING THEIR LOYALTY PROGRAMMES IN THE FACE OF THE NEW REALITIES PRESENTED BY THE PANDEMIC AND THE PRESSURES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

American Airlines has reduced its minimum requirements for 2021 and vastly streamlined its programme for 2022. Currently, Gold, the lowest level, can be had for 20,000 miles or 20 flight segments, along with \$2,000 in spending, down from 25,000 miles or 30 flight segments, plus \$3,000 in spending. Beginning in 2022, the airline recently announced, it will simplify its AAdvantage programme so that branded credit card spending and flights would contribute to a single sum of "Loyalty Points," rather than asking flyers to reach separate

spending and flying thresholds. Delta Air Lines is extending all frequent flyers' status an additional year, through January 2023, and counting any miles flown in 2021 or 2022 toward status in 2023.

Travellers get bonus miles when they fly, and for the first time, earn miles on "award" flights — those purchased with miles. Travellers who flew and spent enough to meet status requirements will be prioritised ahead of those flyers who kept their status through an extension, when it comes to free upgrades.

All major airlines offer branded credit cards that allow customers to accrue points or miles that can be used to buy flights, and during the pandemic, they continued the practice of dangling tens of thousands of points as incentives to buy in. Alaska Airlines offers 50,000 bonus miles and a low-priced companion fare ticket after the credit card holder makes \$2,000 of purchases in the first three months of use.

A recent Delta Sky Miles Platinum American Express Card offer promised 90,000 miles that could be used to purchase flights and 10,000 Medallion Qualification Miles that could be used to reach status levels after \$3,000 of spending in the first three months, and with an annual card fee of \$250.

— *The New York Times*

Despite welcome, Afghan refugees struggle away from home

JORIS FIORITI

Hanifa has no complaints about the welcome she has received in France since her arrival six months ago as a refugee from the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Her youngest son Osman, three, and his sister Bahar, eight, are with her in eastern France but not their six-year-old brother Mustafa. The mere mention of his name has her break down in tears. “My heart still weeps”, she says.

Hanifa is one of a few hundred Afghans evacuated by France from Kabul on August 17, just two days after the country was taken over by the Taliban. In the chaotic scenes that followed the ousting of the previous government, Hanifa managed to get on a bus heading from the French Embassy to the airport with Osman and Bahar.

But Mustafa, who was travelling separately with his aunt, did not make the flight. He only got out of Afghanistan a few days later by road with his father, a former high-ranking official in the deposed government. They are both now in Uzbekistan.

“I really thank France very much. It gave me an apartment, social security. When I was sick, I didn’t have to pay for the medicine”, Hanifa said, casting around her sparsely-furnished flat. She proudly brandishes a 10-year residence permit and a debit card topped up by the French state.

“But my problem is Mustafa”, she weeps. An official procedure has begun to bring the family together but there is no guarantee of success.

France evacuated over 2,600 Afghans from the country in the second half of August, a section of the 123,000 civilians who were airlifted out of Kabul in that period.

The United States took in 70,000 Afghans, Britain more than 15,000 and Italy nearly 5,000. Germany identified some 10,000 Afghans at risk but has only brought some 4,000 out so far.

France has evacuated nearly 400 more Afghans since

September and says it has received many new applications. The foreign ministry said this week the country was fully mobilised for new airlifts “when it is possible”.

For those already in France, there is only praise for their new homeland.

But half a year after their arrival, they fear for the security of loved ones living in Afghanistan under the fundamentalist Taliban regime while the country falls further into financial crisis and endures a devastating famine.

Hanifa, filmed by AFP, refused to allow her face to appear on the screen for fear of reprisals against her family back home. She even wanted her place of residence in eastern France kept secret, fearing the Taliban would find her there, however unlikely that may seem. “Usman”, 28, insisted that his real name be withheld.

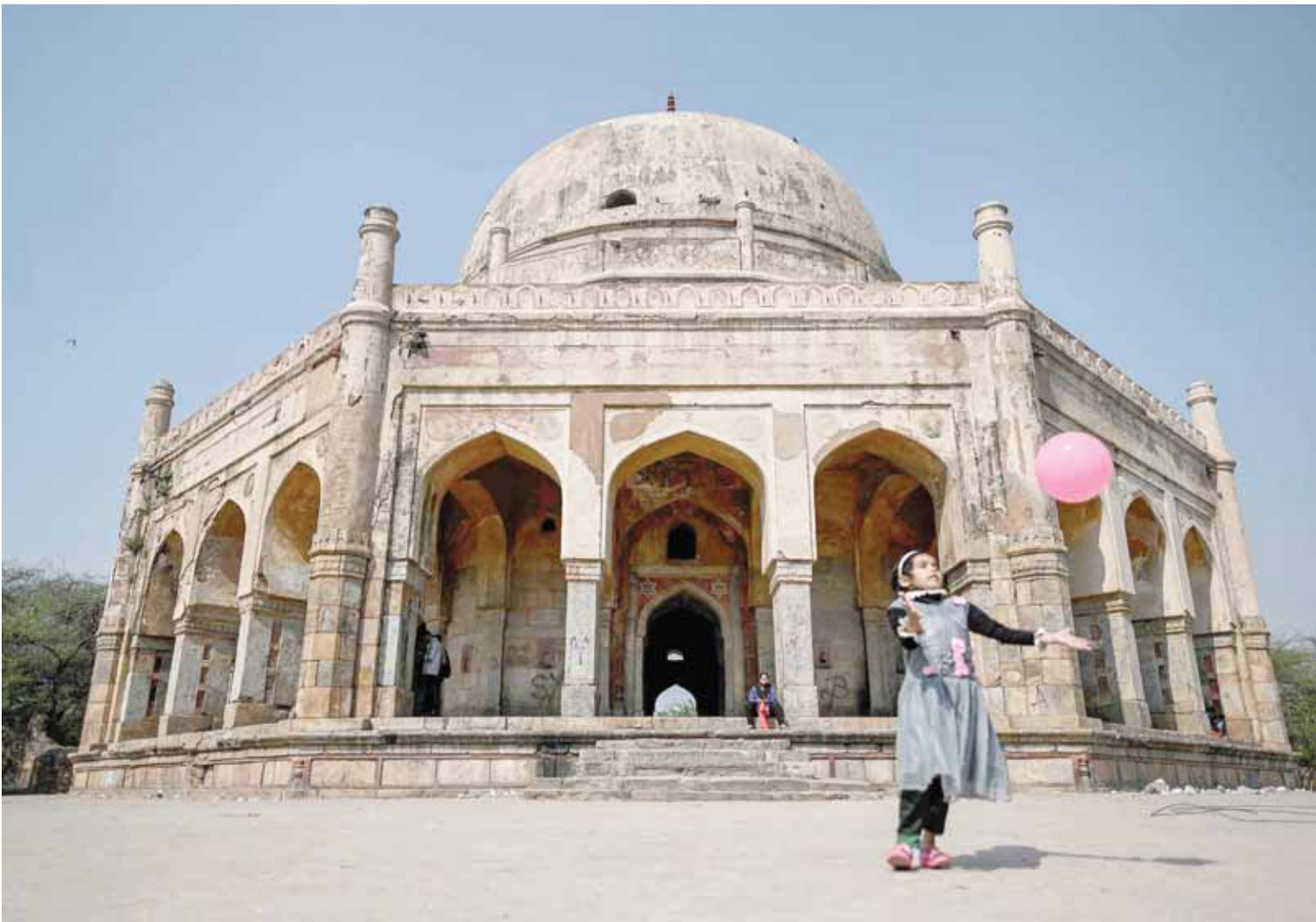
The former Afghan civil servant — who now lives in a rundown building in the suburbs of Strasbourg with his wife and three children, one of whom is barely a month old — finds his mood swings wildly. He hails the French system and its “extraordinary services”. His eldest daughter is already at school, where the teacher “organises special classes” so that she and other newcomers can learn French faster.

His wife gave birth in hospital — “like any other French woman” — even though her asylum application had not yet been processed and she did not have social security.

A neighbour in his 70s helped with the paperwork and has even been teaching him the art of petanque, the French national pastime akin to lawn bowling. Refugees from Afghanistan have benefitted from fast-tracked asylum application procedures, a French social security employee, who asked not to be named, said.

“We used to travel inside Afghanistan in bulletproof cars, with bodyguards and guns, because we were not safe”, said Usman.

“Here, we live in an ordinary apartment, in an ordinary building, with social benefits. It is far better.” — AFP



VISIT TO A TOMB

A young girl plays with a balloon as she visits the 16th century Adham Khan's Tomb, also known as (Bhool Bhulaiya), in New Delhi, India, on Wednesday. — AFP



Nurul Izzah Anwar

The author is a member of the Malaysian parliament

Measuring poverty properly amid Covid-19 and climate

The 2019 Oscar-winning film *Parasite* attracted a global audience for its arresting portrayal of South Korea’s stark income inequality. The movie’s rendering of a low-income household’s acute sense of alienation resonated widely, no doubt because similar sentiments are palpable in many other countries. And the gap between the haves and have-nots is growing, thanks to the dual challenges of Covid-19 and climate change.

The poor suffer the most in times of crisis because they lack the social capital that protects those who are better off. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr, the arc of inequality bends towards more inequality. That makes it imperative for policymakers to address the widening divide between rich and poor and craft adequate safety nets for those most in need.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which tracks non-income measures of deprivation like education, health and living standards, is an essential tool in mapping the scope of the problem. My country, Malaysia, joined the global network of countries that use the MPI in 2013, after years of using outdated methods to measure poverty.

In 2019, a scathing critique by then-UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston finally led the government to revise its definition.

The MPI continues to play a role in Malaysia’s response to income inequality. In April 2021, Fatimah Kari, an economics professor specialising in poverty at the University of Malaya, led an MPI survey among the bottom 40 per cent of income earners in my constituency of Permatang Pauh in Penang. The goal of the survey was to reflect the impact of the pandemic on impoverished households.

Along with the usual measurements, the survey assessed income loss due to the pandemic, relative access to online education for children, and overall well-being in relation to home confinement during lockdowns. The pilot project aimed to test a “Covid-adjusted” blueprint to measure poverty that could be adopted by Malaysia’s federal government for use at the national level.

Six months later, Mustapa Mohamed, a minister in the Prime Minister’s Department for Economic Affairs, announced the government’s intention to revamp the national MPI methodology in response to the study. The new methodology would complement the design of more robust safety net programmes — news that was welcomed by legislators who have been urging the government to use the MPI to understand

and meet the needs of lower-income households.

The change also was timely: In addition to the economic difficulties brought about by the pandemic, the country has been devastated by heavy rains. Officials repeatedly referred to the recent floods as a once-in-a-century phenomenon, but the last major flood happened only eight years ago, displacing almost 300,000 people. The latest disaster affected an estimated 80,000 people across nine states.

THE POOR SUFFER THE MOST IN TIMES OF CRISIS BECAUSE THEY LACK THE SOCIAL CAPITAL THAT PROTECTS THOSE WHO ARE BETTER OFF. TO PARAPHRASE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR, THE ARC OF INEQUALITY BENDS TOWARDS MORE INEQUALITY

In the immediate aftermath, NGOs and community groups stepped in to organise aid distribution. Ordinary Malaysian men and women risked their lives to rescue victims stranded in flood-stricken areas. These efforts contrasted sharply with the government’s relative unpreparedness.

The current administration has turned to quick-fix schemes to stave off the economic impact of the pandemic, with profound consequences for the

entire budget. One programme allows citizens to withdraw funds early from their retirement savings. It has been reported that a total of RM101 billion (\$24.1 billion) has been withdrawn from Malaysia’s Employees Provident Fund (EPF). Over six million members now have less than RM10,000 in their EPF accounts, and more than half of these have less than RM1,000.

In fact, some 22 per cent of the government’s total pandemic economic stimulus consisted of withdrawals by Malaysians from their own retirement funds. But with more than 15 per cent of Malaysia’s population expected to be 60 years or above by 2030, the scheme is a formula for disaster. Its loudest proponents include the former prime minister, Najib Razak, whose conviction for corruption last year has not deterred him from brazen Facebook posts that encourage cash-strapped retirees to deplete their savings further.

As Malaysia tries to recover from the pandemic and the floods, it has a chance to adopt effective policies to improve living standards in vulnerable communities. The development of a realistic MPI is a necessary first step, because it would enable the government to comprehend in detail the main challenges — from lack of sanitation and access to clean water to internet coverage for online education — confronting the poorest Malaysians.

Well-designed MPI studies can bring these important facets of people’s lives to policymakers’ attention, in addition to measuring the overall gap between the richest and poorest. Equipped with this knowledge, governments, including Malaysia’s, can begin to mitigate the social tensions so brilliantly rendered in *Parasite*. @Project Syndicate, 2021



The poor suffer the most in times of crisis because they lack the social capital that protects those who are better off. — Reuters file photo

sport

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ICC MEN’S T20 WORLD CUP QUALIFIER A TO BEGIN IN MUSCAT FROM FRIDAY

Eight teams to battle it out for two spots

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 16

The Sultanate of Oman will host the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup Qualifier A at Oman Cricket Academy grounds in Al Amerat here from February 18 to 24.

Eight teams will lock horns for the available two slots for the ICC T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia.

Hosts Oman, who featured in the T20 World Cup 2021 in Muscat last October, will want to repeat the same in Australia.

In the quadrangular series, which concluded at the OCA grounds on Monday, Oman managed a single win against series toppers UAE. Other teams Ireland and Nepal also feature in the qualifiers and these teams look like major contenders for the World Cup qualifiers.

A strong Ireland team posted two wins like the UAE in the series but missed top rank only on net run-rate.

Nepal started with a resounding win against Oman but couldn’t carry on the momentum as they ended fourth with two straight losses.

UAE looked in good form and are expected to be on their best in the World Cup qualifiers.

Canada, Bahrain, debutants Germany and Philippines will also be on their toes to spring a surprise in the eight-team tournament.

OMAN POOLED WITH NEPAL
Oman are pooled with Nepal in Group A with Canada and the Philippines.



Group B features Ireland, UAE, Germany and Bahrain.
In Group A, Oman and Nepal will be put to test by Canada. Newcomers Philippines will be eager to make an impact at this level.
The hosts will desperately want to address their loop holes during the quadrangular series, while Nepal will target their second appearance in ICC T20 World Cup after qualifying in 2014.
Oman will meet Nepal in the opener on February 18.
In Group B, Ireland and UAE

remain the top guns. Bahrain also are an experienced side to reckon with and Germany would want a memorable debut at their first major global event.
The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.
The winners of the semifinals will seal their spots in the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup in Australia.
The matches will be streamed live on FanCode in the Indian sub-continent and on ICC.tv across the world.
Nepal and the UAE sealed their

places in the Qualifiers based on their latest T20I rankings.
The other four teams — Germany, Canada, Bahrain and the Philippines — advanced through their regional qualifying tournaments held through the course of last year.
The opening day’s fixtures also feature Ireland vs UAE in a high-octane game on the main Oman Academy 1 ground while Germany take on Bahrain in the second match of the afternoon session.

ROAD TO T20 WORLD CUP 2022
A total of 16 teams will be vying for the four spots during the two Qualifiers – A and B – with Qualifier B to be held in Harare, Zimbabwe, from July 11-17. The teams in fray for the two remaining seats in Harare are hosts Zimbabwe, Hong Kong, Jersey, the Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Uganda and the United States of America (USA).

Seventy teams started the qualification process, and the two global qualifiers will decide the final four teams that will be part of the World Cup.
This will be second major ICC tournament for Oman after a successful hosting of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2021 first round matches last year.
It will be an exciting battle for the two qualification spots as the quadrangular series gave the sides a peek into the rivals armouries. The rest of the teams played out few practice games as well.

PARTICIPATING SQUADS

BAHRAIN
Shahbaz Badar, Junaid Aziz Mohd Aziz, Waseeq Ahmed, Imran Javed Anwar, Prashant Kurup, Muhammad Younis, David Keelan Mathias, Umer Imtiaz, Sarfraz Ali (captain), Veerapathiran Sathaiyah, George Aaron Aaxtel, Haider Ali, Shahid Mahmood, Faiz Ahmed.



CANADA
Navneet Dhaliwal (captain), Rayyan Pathan, Matt Spoors, Harsh Thaker, Ravinderpal Singh, Saad Zafar, Hamza Tariq, Shreyaas Movva, Salman Nazar, Junaid Siddiqui, Rishiv Joshi, Dilon Heyliger, Jatinderpal Matharu, Kaleem Sana.



GERMANY
Venkat Ganesan (captain), Michael Richardson, Dieter Klein, Fayaz Nasser, Dylan Blignaut, Justin Broad, Nooruddin Mujadady, Vijay Shankar, Faisal Mubashir, Shoaib Azam Khan, Muslim Yar Ashraf, Sri Vishnu Baratheon, Talha Khan, Rasul Ahmadi.



IRELAND
Andrew Balbirnie (captain), Mark Adair, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Shane Getkate, Josh Little, Andy McBrine, Barry McCarthy, Simi Singh, Paul Stirling, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker, Craig Young.



NEPAL
Sandeep Lamichhane (captain), Sharad Vesawkar, Gyanendra Malla, Dipendra Airee, Kushal Bhurtel, Arif Sheikh, Asif Sheikh, Abinash Bohara, Jitendra Mukhiya, Kamal Airee, Bibek Yadav, Lokesh Bam, Sagar Dhakal, Gulshan Jha.



OMAN
Zeeshan Maqsood (captain), Syed Amir Kaleem, Muhammad Naseem, Jatinder Singh, Khawar Ali, Muhammad Nadeem, Ayaan Khan, Sandeep Goud, Kashyupkumar Prajapati, Kaleemullah, Bilal Khan, Ahmed Fayyaz Butt, Shoaib Khan, Khurram Khan.



PHILIPPINES
Jonathan Hill (captain), Dan Smith, Henry Tyler, Grant Russ, Richie Goodwin, Jordan Alegria, Sachin Biddappa, Vimal Kumar, Siva Mohan, Huzaifa Mohammed, Gurbhupinder Chohan, Muzammil Shahzad, Miggy Podosky, Hern Isorena.



UAE
Muhammad Waseem, Chirag Suri, Vriitya Aravind, Rohan Mustafa, Kashif Daud, Ahmed Raza (captain), Zohoor Khan, Alishan Sharafu, Raja Akifullah, Karthik Meiyappan, Junaid Siddique, Basil Hameed, Zafar Farid, Muhammad Boota, Muhammad Usman, Rahul Bhatia.



FIXTURES

- FEBRUARY 18:** 10:00 (local time start): OC Academy 1: Oman v Nepal, OC Academy 2: Canada v Philippines; 14:00: OC Academy 1: Ireland v UAE, OC Academy 2: Germany v Bahrain.
- FEBRUARY 19:** 10:00: OC Academy 1: Oman v Canada, OC Academy 2: Nepal v Philippines; 14:00: OC Academy 1: UAE v Germany, Oman Academy 2: Ireland v Bahrain.
- FEBRUARY 21:** 10:00: OC Academy 1: Ireland v Germany, OC Academy 2: UAE v Bahrain; 14:00: OC Academy 1: Nepal vs Canada, OC Academy 2: Oman vs Philippines.
- FEBRUARY 22:** 10:00: OC Academy 1: A3 vs B4 (3rd in Group A v 4th in Group B), OC Academy 2: B3 v A4 (3rd in Group B v 4th in Group A); 14:00: OC Academy 1: **Semifinal 1** (Winner Group A v Runner-up Group B), OC Academy 2: **Semifinal 2** (Winner Group B v Runner-up Group A).
- FEBRUARY 24:** OC Academy 1: 10:00: 5th and 6th Play off (Winner of A3 v B4 v Winner of B3 v A4), OC Academy 2: 7th and 8th Play off (Loser of A3 v A4 v Loser of B3 v B4); 14:00: OC Academy 1: **Final** (Winner of A1 v B2 v Winner of B1 v A2), OC Academy 2: 3rd and 4th Play off (Loser of A1 v B2 v Loser of B2 v A1).

MBAPPE STRIKES LATE TO GIVE PSG EDGE OVER REAL

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe struck in the fourth minute of injury time to give Paris Saint-Germain a precious 1-0 win over Real Madrid in the first leg of their heavyweight Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday.

It looked as though Real would escape with a draw after weathering a first-half onslaught from PSG before Lionel Messi had a penalty saved by Thibaut Courtois

ter the hour mark at the Parc des Princes.

Then, in the last minute of stoppage time, Mbappe burst into the box from the left and between two defenders before finishing past Courtois for his 22nd goal this season.

"I got myself into some space and then it was one against two in the box, and in the box the attacker is always in control," Mbappe told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"The defenders were going back and I could decide where I

wanted to go, and then I managed to put it between the legs of Courtois."

Tipped to move to Madrid when his contract in Paris expires at the end of the season, Mbappe's last-gasp strike means his current club have the edge heading into the return at the Santiago Bernabeu on March 9.

He added: "We are very pleased to have this slight advantage but there is a return leg to come and we need to make sure we prepare well in our upcoming league matches."

The France World Cup-winning striker may have focused much of the attention coming into this tie amid the speculation about his future but the array of attacking talent elsewhere could not be overlooked.

Messi was coming up against Madrid for the first time since leaving Barcelona, for whom he scored a record 26 goals in the 'Clasico' over his years at the Camp Nou.

Real also knew all about the threat of Angel Di Maria, who won the Champions League with the Spanish giants in 2014.

He started because Neymar was only deemed fit enough for a place on the bench having not played since late November due to an ankle injury.

The fragile Brazilian may have wondered how he might fit back into Mauricio Pochettino's team as he watched the way they played without him in

the first half.

PSG showed a hunger that has been lacking for most of the campaign in Ligue 1 even as they built a huge lead at the top of the table.

PSG's pressing game suffocated their opponents, although Real were seemingly quite happy to defend deep and give up possession, aware that a 0-0 draw would do just fine with the away goals rule scrapped from this season.

MESSI PENALTY SAVED

That meant Karim Benzema, Real's top scorer making his return after a three-game spell out injured, saw practically none of the ball along with the two players flanking him, Vinicius Junior and Marco Asensio.

For most of the first half, PSG played perhaps their best football since the arrival of Messi last August. Yet Courtois only really had to make one save of note in that time, to deny Mbappe in the 18th minute.

The visitors would have tried to regroup at half-time, but less than five minutes after the restart Mbappe forced Courtois into an excellent save low to his right.

Courtois then topped that by

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE LAST 16 FIRST LEG RESULTS ON TUESDAY:

Paris Saint-Germain (FRA) 1 (Mbappe 90+4) Real Madrid (ESP) 0
Sporting Lisbon (POR) 0 Man City (ENG) 5 (Mahrez 7, Silva 17, 44, Foden 32, Sterling 58)

diving to his left to keep out Messi's 62nd-minute penalty, awarded after Mbappe was chopped down by Dani Carvajal, who he had tormented all evening.

The French club failed to score when on top in the first half and had now squandered a glorious chance to go in front. The miss summed up Messi's underwhelming PSG career so far.

Pochettino sent on Neymar, the world's most expensive player unmistakable with his peroxide blonde hair.

However, Mbappe had scored a last-minute winner for his team against Rennes in the league last weekend and he again had the last word, leaving the side he might be representing next season up against it in the return in three weeks.

"We are confident because we will be playing at home so we will have the stadium behind us," Ancelotti told Canal Plus.

"Paris have a stronger chance but our hopes of going through are not lost." — AFP

Silva is the perfect player, says Guardiola after rampant win



Manchester City's Bernardo Silva. — Reuters

LISBON: Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola said Bernardo Silva was the "perfect player" after the Portuguese midfielder's double helped his side to secure a 5-0 win over Sporting Lisbon in their Champions League last-16 first leg on Tuesday.

Manchester City were dominant from start to finish in the Portuguese capital to all but seal their spot in the quarterfinals, with the five-goal victory the joint-biggest winning margin in a Champions League knockout game.

Silva scored his first-ever Champions League brace and his first goals in the competition in almost a year in a vintage display, a performance all the sweeter given that he came through the academy at Sporting's rivals Benfica.

"I always tell him 'you are the perfect player,'" Guardiola said.

"With the ball he is more than exceptional, but I always say to him you have to go and win games, you have to have the ability to do it. He has the technique, everything.

"This was his home town, and he loves coming back here. Of course he is a former Benfica player, so this was special for him tonight."

"We defended well and got an incredible result," he added. "We have a duty to look at the performance too, even if the result is a dream." — Reuters



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after winning the Uefa Champions League round of 16 first leg match against Real Madrid at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. — AFP

Ronaldo breaks goal drought as United move up fourth

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo broke his goal drought to score Manchester United's opener in a 2-0 defeat of Brighton & Hove Albion that lifted them into the Premier League's top four on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, without a goal since December and dropped to the bench by interim manager Ralf Rangnick in some recent matches, answered his critics five minutes after halftime with a superb finish after being played in by Scott McTominay.

Brighton had been the better side before halftime with United again looking disjointed and lacking spark.

But their hopes of responding after falling behind were damaged when Lewis Dunk was sent off after a foul on Anthony Elanga, an initial yellow card being upgraded to red.

Even then United were unconvincing and Brighton's



Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo scores their first goal against Brighton & Hove Albion. — Reuters

Jakub Moder curled an effort against the crossbar before former United striker Danny Welbeck headed over a late chance.

Bruno Fernandes gave the

scoreline a flattering look with a well-taken solo goal in stoppage time as United moved above West Ham United into fourth spot with 43 points from 25 games.

The opening 45 minutes were tough to watch for United fans with Brighton looking the more polished side.

But for a sensational save by

David de Gea to deny Moder's header, the boos at halftime would have been louder.

Ronaldo changed the mood, however, after the break.

He had gone six games without a goal, his driest spell at club level since a run of seven games without scoring between December 2008 and January 2009.

Some have even suggested his second spell at United was fizzling out but his goal against Brighton was vintage Ronaldo.

When Brighton lost possession and McTominay fed Ronaldo he swerved away from three defenders and with minimal backlift, smashed a shot past Brighton keeper Robert Sanchez.

"An amazing goal," Rangnick said. "Not only an important one but an amazing goal and I think overall it was a good performance by Cristiano.

"Energetically, he was always trying to help team mates and I

think in the last weeks definitely the best performance by him and a very, very important goal for us."

Brighton got themselves in trouble again soon afterwards trying to play out from the back and Dunk was too casual, losing the ball to Elanga who he then dragged back.

Despite being down to 10 men Brighton continued to cause United problems and it was quite a relief for the hosts when Fernandes broke away from the halfway line and sat Sanchez down before tucking away a fine goal.

It was only ninth-placed Brighton's second away league defeat of the season and manager Graham Potter could only marvel at Ronaldo's quality.

"Punished by a world class finish from a world class player," he said. "Cristiano Ronaldo is absolutely amazing, world-class. There's nothing else to say with that." — Reuters

SEEB STAY CLOSE WITH 26 POINTS

DHOFAR HANG ON TO TOP



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 16

Salalah giants Dhofar remained on top of Omantel League after holding close rivals Seeb 1-1 in a key clash of the 13th week on Tuesday night.

At Al Saada Stadium, Dhofar managed to end the winter season at the top of the table with 27 points, while Seeb stayed close with 26 points.

Dhofar head coach Rasheed Jaber, said post the match that the top fixtures normally accept all the results. “Dhofar were the better side as we controlled the game. Our strikers missed many scoring attempts which could have put the team in better position. A special thanks to all the spectators who supported the team during the game”, he said.

The match began with both teams looking for an opening goal.

Seeb’s Abdulaziz al Maqbali tried in different opportunities to penetrate the opponents’ defence but all his chances were broke by the Dhofar defenders and goalkeeper Suleiman al Buraiki.

In the following half, both the coaches implemented different tactics with an aim of ending the match on winning side.

The hosts players pressed hard towards Seeb side and Yazeed al Mashani was very close to score the opening goal as his shot hit the bar. After series of chances, Dhofar’s Omar al Malki managed to register the first goal in the game through a strong header in the 61st minute after perfect assist from experienced midfielder Ali Salim.

After the goal, Seeb bounced back to the match and were seeking for the equaliser. In the last 10 minutes, former Dhofar player Mohammed al Musallami struck the equaliser to snatch a crucial point for the visitors.

NIZWA POST SECOND STRAIGHT WIN

Nizwa registered their second successive win in the league as they defeated Bahla 2-1 in a home match at the Nizwa Sports Complex. The hosts goals were netted by Kamara (16 and 57 minutes) while the consolation goal for the visitors was scored by Ayman al Mukhaini (45).

Despite the triumph, the Al Dakhiliyah team is still in the danger zone while Bahla remained in 10th place with 11 points.

In another match, Al Nasr snatched three crucial points from hosts Muscat as they came from behind to register a 2-1 victory.

At the Seeb Stadium, Mundher al Wahaibi put Muscat ahead in the first half in the 38th minute. Fahad Adil equalised in the 57th minute before former national team player Said al Ruzaiqi netted the most important goal in the game in the dying minutes (92). The victory took Al Nasr to 25 points in the third place while Muscat remained 11th with 11points.

At Sohar Sports Complex, Al Rustaq clinched an important win as they edged Sohar 2-0. The triumph helped Al Rustaq to fourth place with 22 points while Sohar were seventh with 18 points.

OGA tees off 2022 GOjuniors Tour

MUSCAT: After a break of almost two years the Oman Golf Association (OGA) resumed its programme of tournaments for junior golfers this weekend.

As part of its mission to grow the game of golf in the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Golf Association identified a lack of playing opportunities for younger golfers, as despite many children taking golf lessons at the clubs in Oman only a small percentage actively played on the golf course. To provide an opportunity to not only compete but also to meet other junior golfers, the GOjuniors series was developed.

The 2022 GOjuniors Tour will feature 10 events throughout the year spread around the courses in Muscat where the youngsters will compete in three age divisions: Under 18, under 15 and under 13. Although the GOjuniors Tour is aimed at those juniors who can demonstrate a suitable level of ability by way of holding an official golfing handicap index there are other GOjuniors activities planned during the year for those less experienced.

Al Mouj Golf was the venue for the first event of the 2022 season with many of the Oman junior national team in attendance as well as several players participating in their first ever tournament.

At the front of the field were the under 18 players. Despite a disappointing double bogey at the last hole it was Ahmed al Wahaibi who took the top honours in the gross division with a steady round of 78 which included three



birdies. Ayman al Busaidy claimed the best net score (the score with the handicap index taken into account) with a net 75.

Next onto the links were the under 15’s where Adam al Barwani dominated the gross division to win by a margin of 14 strokes, with Pransh Jagwani claiming the net division with a fine net score of seven under par 65.

KAIS CELEBRATION

Adam’s victory continued a great golfing weekend for the Al

Barwani family as the day prior Ghala Golf Club had hosted the annual Qais Celebration Golf Trophy in which Adam’s father Masoud, and sister Huwaida had won the men’s and ladies divisions, Adam himself had finished as runner-up to fellow junior national team player Faris al Busaidy.

The popular stableford tournament is held annually to celebrate the huge contribution that the late HH Sayyid Kais bin Tarik al Said made to the development of golf in the

Sultanate of Oman. With his passion for golf and youth development it was rather fitting that the winners demonstrated the unique nature of golf where family members, both young and old, male and female can play and compete together.

In an encouraging sign for the future of golf the largest division of the day was the under 13’s. Although the younger players only played the front 9 holes the competition was no less fierce and it took a countback to separate the two leading players, Jacobo Moreno and Krish Pawani, who both scored an impressive gross 40. By virtue of a better last six holes, it was Jacobo who took the best gross title with Krish taking the best net with a five under par 31.

OGA Chairman Mundhir al Barwani said: “We are delighted to be able to resume our junior tournaments and we must thank our programme sponsor Oman LNG and partners Sohar Aluminium and Moore for supporting us in providing this opportunity to Oman’s young golfers.

Events such as these are essential to grow the game but also provide a great opportunity for social development, after the challenges of the last two years it was great to see the children back on the golf course engaging in some friendly competition.”

The next event in the GOjuniors Tour will be played at Ghala Golf Club at the end of February.

IPL’s Kolkata appoint Shreyas Iyer captain

NEW DELHI: India’s Shreyas Iyer has been appointed captain of Indian Premier League side Kolkata Knight Riders, the franchise said on Wednesday, succeeding Eoin Morgan who went unsold at the tournament’s recent auction.

Iyer was the costliest player bought by Kolkata, owned by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, selling for \$1.62 million in the auction last weekend ahead of season 15 of the lucrative Twenty20 tournament.

“We are delighted firstly to have been able to successfully bid for Shreyas in the IPL auction and to have the opportunity for him to lead #TeamKKR,” Venky Mysore, chief executive of Kolkata, said in a statement.

“He has impressed one and all as a quality batsman at the highest level and we are confident that he will excel as a leader of #TeamKKR.”

The two-time champions released Morgan after last year’s edition of the tournament despite the England white-ball captain leading the team to a runners-up finish in Dubai.

The 27-year-old Iyer, who recently hit a match-winning 80 in India’s 3-0 ODI whitewash of the West Indies, led IPL side Delhi Capitals



to their first final in the 2020 season, which was won by Mumbai Indians.

“The IPL as a tournament brings the best players from different countries and cultures together and I look forward to leading this great group of very talented individuals”, said Iyer, an attacking batsman who has played 32 T20 matches for India since his debut in 2017.

Kolkata secured a return for Australia’s Pat Cummins, who went to the same team for a record \$2.17 million in 2019 but was released last year for nearly \$1 million.

Kolkata are coached by former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum.

The 15th edition of the IPL begins in late March, with the final in May. — AFP



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Asyad Shipping signs MoU with Japanese shipping giant

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 16

Wholly Omani government-owned Asyad Shipping — part of Asyad Group — has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Japanese shipping giant Suzue Corporation to explore prospects for collaboration and unlock mutual business opportunities.

Through this MoU, the parties aim to pool their capabilities and potentials, and expand their global logistics networks to start new projects that promote the trade and logistics sectors in both the Sultanate of Oman and Japan.

To this end, Asyad Group seeks to maintain an active exchange of information, technologies and know-how with the Japanese provider of integrated logistics services Suzue Corporation that offers a wide range of shipping and

transport services in East and Southeast Asia and plans to establish a joint venture with Asyad Shipping in the future in the Sultanate of Oman.

Asyad Group looks to harness this MoU to serve its mutual interests with Suzue, expand its network of shipping partners and collaborators and add to its offering new support logistics solutions in East and Southeast Asia. The MoU affirms Suzue's intent to cooperate with Asyad Shipping for the Sultanate of Oman to become its logistics gateway to the European and African markets.

These efforts translate into Asyad Group's vision of cementing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a global logistics hub standing at the nexus of key shipping routes considered to be the transit gateway to East Africa, Middle East Arabian Gulf and India.

(With inputs from ONA)



Value of Oman-UAE 2020 trade and investments crosses RO 4 bn



BUSINESS REPORTER
DUBAI, FEB 16

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held meetings on Wednesday with a number of ministers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including Dr Thani Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of Foreign Trade, Dr Ahmed Balhoul al Falasi, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and Abdullah Touq al Marri, Minister of Economy.

The meeting reviewed means of enhancing cooperation in trade, industry and investment between the two countries.

Further, the two sides called upon businesspeople to benefit

THE INVESTMENTS OF UAE COMPANIES ARE BASED ON VARIOUS SECTORS, FOREMOST OF WHICH ARE CONSTRUCTION, TRADE AND SERVICES

from available investment opportunities in the two countries.

Statistics confirm that bilateral trade and investment has grown remarkably between the two countries. The volume of trade exchange exceeded RO 4 billion in 2020.

The investments of UAE companies are based on various sectors, foremost of which are construction, trade and services.

Meanwhile, the second edition

of the Oman-UAE Economic Forum will kick off on Thursday in Dubai. The event is taking place on the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai.

Mohsen bin Khamis al Balushi, Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, who is also Commissioner General of Oman at Expo 2020 Dubai, said the Omani delegation will be chaired by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with the participation of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Oman Investment Authority

(OIA) and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The forum aims to strengthen joint cooperation, discuss investment opportunities in the targeted sectors and increase the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

The two sides will present several working papers during the forum. Moreover, a set of economically feasible investment opportunities will be offered during the event.

The forum's programme includes bilateral meetings between major companies from both sides in sectors of priority and common interest in a bid to discuss opportunities for cooperation and investment.

(With inputs from ONA)

Capital market contributes RO 2-3 bn in annual financing

ENHANCED ROLE: CMA reviews investment options for Sohar Free Zone companies

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 16

The capital market of the Sultanate of Oman continues to play a key role in meeting the huge financing needs of various economic sectors through long term financing instruments through shareholding or borrowing. The total value of government and corporate bonds and Sukuk was about RO 6.024 billion at the end of 2020.

The sector contributes annually to RO 2 to 3 billion financing. Mohammed bin Said al Abri, Vice-President for Capital Market at the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said the capital markets are the main pillar in supporting the economic development

worldwide further to being the underpinning in creating true partnership between the public and private sectors through furnishing financing for huge development and investment projects supporting the economy.

Al Abri said the Omani capital market is ready to finance huge productive projects to ensure the expansion of investment and lucrative investment opportunities for individuals and institutions.

Al Abri gave an opening speech in the seminar organised by the CMA in collaboration with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones at the Sohar Free Zone under the theme "The Capital Market and its Financial Options to Enhance Investment Activity" for the directors and managements of the companies operating at the Sohar Free Zone as part of series of awareness seminars to be



organised this year in the various governorates.

Al Abri added that the laws and regulations governing the capital market have recently witnessed updates as well as expansion in licensing new products in line with the new fintech to meet the financing needs of the market, and that the CMA is dealing with adequate level of resilience to

ensure protection of the rights of all stakeholders as well providing enhanced public confidence.

Al Abri emphasised that the seminar aims to extend communication bridges for exchange and sharing of views between the capital market institutions and the enterprises at the economic and free zones in the Sultanate of Oman through

emphasising the role of the sector in ensuring the sustainability of the performance of the companies and providing long term financing further to creating true partnership with the private sector through unified policy and methodology in executing huge development project based mainly on financing from the capital market.

Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), referred to the gradual development of MSX and the roles it plays in financing economic development projects whether for the government sector or the private sector.

He talked about MSX's strategy that is derived from the main pillars namely the growth of the national economy, attractiveness of the stock exchange, the fintech, the commercial performance of the stock exchange and the development of the internal

infrastructure of the stock exchange.

He added that such pillars are the foundation for a set of objects and initiatives to go ahead in the next five years in accordance with a work plan and timeline with the clear indices to assess the extent of success.

The key object we hope to achieve soon is to upgrade the MSX to an emerging stock exchange as per the ratings of the global rating agencies, he said.

To this end we will work to increase shares liquidity and the market value focusing on easing entry of foreign investments and adding trading features such as short selling and securities borrowing to enable the MSX to upgrade to global indices. He emphasised the importance of listing the companies in the stock exchange and disclosures as well as environmental, social governance and corporate governance.

Ahlibank posts 15 per cent year-end net profit growth

MUSCAT: Ahlibank has announced its financial results for the year-ending December 31, 2021. At the back of the bank's resilience, fortitude and operational excellence, the bank has reported overall growth in its key financial indicators, wherein its total assets grew by 13.0 per cent, reaching RO 3.05 billion, compared to RO 2.70 billion in 2020. Customer deposits went up by 13.3 per cent to reach RO 2.18 billion, compared to RO 1.92 billion the previous year. Likewise, net loans, advances and financing grew by 8.3 per cent, reaching RO 2.40 billion.

Moreover, the bank's operating income increased by 15.2 per cent, reaching RO 82.4 million in 2021 and the net profit for the period increased by 15 per cent, reaching RO 27.6 million. These achievements and continued

growth, showcase the bank's consistent rollout of innovative products, services and offerings that are oriented toward enhancing customer satisfaction.

Ahlibank's strategic roadmap encompasses a robust digital transformation strategy and an expansion plan that entails ramping up its on-ground presence and overall infrastructure. The bank is powered by its rich human capital with high qualifications and extensive experience in the sector.

This has enabled it to further enhance its customer excellence and optimise on emerging opportunities in order to increase its contribution in supporting the national economy's future progress.

Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi (pictured), CEO, ahlibank, remarks, "We have had



commendable growth in 2021 despite economic challenges and an unpredicted change in the financial and banking landscape.

This is the result of the introduction of various bespoke products and services for the conventional and Islamic banking segments apart from the enhancement and strengthening of our existing portfolio and the boosting of our operational processes, systems and digital infrastructure."

"Our commitment to deliver

efficient and professional customer service has earned us rightful recognition and commendation from the industry, which resulted in ahlibank receiving prestigious awards such as the 'Excellence in Private Banking' Award and the 'Excellence in Islamic Retail Banking' Award. The bank also received the JP Morgan Chase '2021 Elite Quality Recognition' Award for maintaining an outstanding 99.9 per cent modification-free rate for the bank's remittance in US dollars", Al Hatmi added.

In its bid to offer more customer service access points and expand its reach to the wider banking community, the bank has opened six new branches during the year, three of which are for ahlibank and three for ahli Islamic, distributed in different governorates in Oman.

Ahlibank's CSR commitment has also led to the deepening of its involvement in community and national projects and initiatives. Of particular significance is its participation in the National Covid-19 Vaccination Campaign and in the relief program to support people and communities affected by cyclone 'Shaheen'.

The bank is keen to support Oman Vision 2040's objectives through implementing the Nationalisation strategy, and has achieved a 94.34% of Omanisation across its different divisions, effectively contributing to the joint efforts of the government in empowering the national workforce.

In order to build competencies of individuals and prepare them to meet the requirements of the work environment, ahlibank provides learning and skill

enhancement opportunities for existing employees, through its development programs.

The bank has also welcomed the 7th batch of its flagship programme 'Himam' as well as the 5th batch of its leadership and training Business Graduate program aiming at building a robust pipeline of future leaders in the banking sector.

Ahlibank continues implementing its medium- and long-term prospects and plan, emphasising its key objective of maintaining its steady growth, which is further supported by its ambitious project of expanding its headquarters and promoting it as a smart and innovative hub. With its outstanding achievements and a proven track record of consistent growth, the bank is on its way to become the leading banking institution in Oman.

Ooredoo connects more locations with Fibre Home Internet

MUSCAT: Covering more areas in the Sultanate of Oman, Ooredoo has now added its Fibre Home Internet service to Samayil Lizeg and Al Amerat Saih Al Dhabi, with Saham being added at the end of the month. Residents in those areas can now enjoy an amazing value high-speed service from as little as RO 29.4 per month.

With speeds of up to 1GB, plus a whole range of unique benefits like unlimited data, 10% discount on international calling, unlimited national minutes, and free modem and installation, it's the perfect solution for the whole family.

With Ooredoo's Fibre Home Internet services, customers can surf, chat and browse the Internet for much longer without worrying about any interruptions while streaming movies and TV shows. So connect today and enjoy more ways to relax, work and share.

Bank Muscat trains branch employees in sign language

MUSCAT: Financial inclusion is an important aspect of the growth and development of economies around the world. Hence, in line with its commitment to deliver long-term benefits to Omani society and the nation, Bank Muscat has always extended strong support to initiatives that promote the welfare and financial inclusion of disabled persons.

Recently, the bank announced that it has trained a number of its employees at different branches across the Sultanate in Arabic Sign Language so as to improve service delivery and facilitate their inclusion into mainstream economic activities.

In collaboration with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired, the bank has been identifying branches, which serve the maximum

number of hearing-impaired and speech-impaired persons, and accordingly training a number of employees in Sign Language over the past few years. At present as many as 93 bank employees have completed two levels of the Sign Language course in order to better serve customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Said bin Salim al Aufi (pictured), General Manager — Human Resources and Administration, said: "Bank Muscat has always been a pioneer in promoting financial inclusivity. We are very happy to continue our partnership with the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired and to train our employees in sign language so as to promote greater participation in economic activities by all sections of our society.

Employees who complete



these courses are able to communicate effectively with customers with hearing and speech disabilities, and understand their various financial needs, thereby ensuring that we are able to better serve them, every day.

Going ahead, the bank will continue its efforts for greater all round financial inclusivity, which is a key enabler of the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040."

As the leading financial services provider in Oman, Bank Muscat has been

undertaking many measures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. In 2021, the bank contributed a number of wheelchairs and electric beds to persons with severe disabilities in partnership with the Oman Association for the Disabled.

The bank also recently contributed laptops and BrailleSense devices to visually-impaired students at Sohar University and hearing aids to the Omani Association for the Hearing-impaired.

Bank Muscat had earlier supported the construction of a playground at the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre for children with severe disabilities, and is also at present helping provide a sports field at the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. The bank has also previously installed a special ATM with a special

transaction flow for blind and visually-impaired people on the premises of the head office of the Al Noor Association of the Blind.

Also, special access ramps and other arrangements for easy access have been made available at different branches and ATMs in Oman. Financial inclusion is very important to Omani society and the Renewed Renaissance of Oman.

Bank Muscat is constantly innovating to improve and enhance inclusivity through its various CSR and sustainability programmes. It must be noted that the bank has been honoured in the past by the Ministry of Social Development, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Fourth Oman Forum for Partnership and Social Responsibility for its efforts in this regard.

Own the powerful Toyota Fortuner with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The Toyota Fortuner is now even more exciting to own with exclusive benefits. The benefits include 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance from RO 250 up to RO 300. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply.) The campaign is valid up to March 9, 2022. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The powerful Fortuner is equipped with Petrol Engines that include a 2.7 Litre Four Cylinder Engine producing 164 HP & 25.0 Kg-m of Torque. For even more exciting experiences, the 4.0 Litre V6 Engine churns-out 235 HP along with 38.3 Kg-m of Torque.

The 6-speed Automatic Transmission, available as a standard option, provides thrilling acceleration.

Rugged and adroit, the Fortuner also is known for its high standards on the inside.



Premium Leather Seats, Leather and Wood finished Steering Wheel with Paddle Shifts, Cool Glove Box, Cruise Control and a whole bunch of other goodies augment its interior ambience.

Toyota Fortuner has a powerful Air-conditioner. Other innovative touches include a Navigation System. The Rear View Camera ensures peace of mind when Reverse Parking.

The 6-speaker Audio System enhances its harmonious

ambience. And to add to the convenience, there is a Power Back Door System which adds to the sheer convenience.

The Fortuner is equipped with Comprehensive Safety Systems to protect its occupants. These include Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) that prevents the tyres from locking during braking. The Fortuner is equipped with SRS Driver Airbag, SRS Front Passenger Airbag, Side Airbag, Curtain Airbag and SRS Knee

Airbag (driver only).

In terms of seatbelts, a three-point Emergency Locking Retractor (ELR) seatbelts are equipped. When impact is experienced during a collision, the Seatbelt Locks to restrain the passenger. Other reassuring safety features include the Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

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NBO offers discount on Danube Home

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched a month-long special offer in collaboration with Danube Home. From February 15 to March 14, 2022, customers can avail an extra 10% discount at Danube Home, both in outlets and online, when paying using their NBO VISA debit or credit card.

Valid on all sale items which are discounted at 30% or less, customers can choose from a wide range of stylish furnishings and home décor at better value than ever.

Maha al Raisi, AGM — Head of Products at NBO, said, "At NBO we are always trying to find ways to make banking more rewarding for our customers. Through this partnership, not only are everyday purchases made even more rewarding, but our customers are offered tailored payment options with total security and confidence.



What's more, credit card users can convert their purchases to monthly installments with zero interest."

NBO's suite of credit, debit and prepaid cards offer cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of its customers.

Providing excellent spending power and a smarter, safer alternative to cash, cardholders are able to access a host of exciting benefits including Nuqati points, cinema tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, airport lounge access and more.

Moreover, through the bank's new multi-purpose banking kiosks, which are available at its Al Athaiba and Al Khoudh branches, customers are able to renew and print out their cards instantly. For terms and conditions visit <https://www.nbo.om/en/Pages/Offer/Danube-Home.aspx> or contact the Call Centre on 24770000.



UK annual inflation hits fresh 30-year high

LONDON: UK annual inflation has hit the highest level since 1992, data showed on Wednesday, adding pressure to the cost of living and on the Bank of England to keep raising rates.

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) edged up to 5.5 per cent in January from 5.4 per cent in December, also a level not seen in almost three decades, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

The rate is now at the highest level since March 1992, the ONS added. Prices have soared globally over the past year, in large part owing to surging energy prices, while consumers are facing also higher food costs as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns.

"We understand the pressures people are facing with the cost of living," British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said in response to Wednesday's data.

"These are global challenges," the finance minister added.



A man shops inside a supermarket in central London. — AFP

Annual inflation in the euro zone stands at a record-high 5.1 per cent, while CPI in the United States hit 7.5 per cent in January — the largest increase in almost

40 years.

As global inflation reaches decades-high peaks, central banks are deciding on how fast to hike interest rates.

The Bank of England earlier this month lifted its main interest rate for the second time in a row aimed at bringing down inflation, which is rising faster than workers' wage

increases.

The BoE has forecast Britain's annual inflation rate to peak at 7.25 per cent in April, far above its 2.0-per cent target.

The latest "increase in CPI inflation... will add a bit more pressure on the Bank of England to continue raising interest rates rapidly", said Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics.

Policymakers in December lifted borrowing costs from a record-low 0.1 per cent to 0.25 per cent — their first tightening in more than three years. They raised them again this month, to 0.5 per cent.

With prices shooting higher, Sunak earlier this month unveiled a support package worth £9 billion (\$12.2 billion) targeted at 28 million poorer and middle-income households.

This is likely to be offset, however, by a surge in domestic energy bills and a salary tax hike from April. — AFP

Oil prices recoup losses as Russia-Ukraine tensions stay high



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Cushing, Oklahoma. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil prices recouped losses on Wednesday as investors weighed conflicting statements on the possible withdrawal of some Russian troops from around Ukraine amid tight global supplies and recovering fuel demand.

Brent crude was up \$1.37, or 1.5 per cent, at \$93.93 a barrel, having slid 3.3 per cent overnight after Russia announced a partial pullback of its troops near Ukraine. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up \$1.27, or 1.4 per cent, at \$92.68 after the contract ended Tuesday's session with a 3.6-per cent decline.

Both benchmarks hit their highest since September 2014 on Monday, with Brent touching \$96.78 and WTI reaching \$95.82.

The price of Brent jumped 50 per cent in 2021 while WTI soared by about 60 per cent as a global recovery in demand from the Covid-19 pandemic strained supplies.

Moscow announced a partial pullback of troops from Ukraine's borders, but Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Wednesday that the alliance had not seen any de-escalation and that Russia was continuing its military build-up.

"The risk of a full scale invasion has receded a bit. But we are unlikely to move out of the current status quo," said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB in Oslo. — Reuters

Military attachés visit Duqm SEZ



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 16

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) recently organised a visit for a number of residents and non-residents military attachés in the embassies of brotherly and friendly countries accredited to the Sultanate of Oman to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

The delegation included

a number of senior officers and retired senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces Command.

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

The programme included a number of presentations on the capabilities of the zone and the advantages, incentives

and facilities offered to businessmen and investors, as well as the basic facilities, the location, the strategic projects that have been implemented and the ongoing projects, in addition to the services provided and the lifestyle of the zone.

The visit also included tours of several projects in the economic zone including Oman Drydock, Port of Duqm, Emad Logistics and Duqm Refinery.

US says China did not adopt WTO policies

WASHINGTON: China has not adopted the rules of the World Trade Organization even after 20 years' membership, the United States said on Wednesday, adding that the world's second-biggest economy had "retained and expanded" its statist approach to the detriment of businesses and workers globally.

"China also has a long history of violating, disregarding and circumventing WTO rules to achieve its industrial policy objectives," said an annual report to Congress by the office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) Ambassador Katherine Tai, laying out the Biden administration's assessment of China's WTO membership.

Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the WTO works to enforce rules governing international trade, including promoting fair competition and open trade. When it joined in December 2001, Beijing said it would embrace those principles, Tai



A red light is pictured at a pedestrian crossing in front of the WTO headquarters in Geneva. — AFP

said.

"China has instead retained and expanded its state-led, non-market approach to the economy and trade," she said.

"It is clear that in pursuing that approach, China's policies and practices challenge the premise of the WTO's rules and cause serious harm to workers and businesses around the world, particularly in industries targeted by China's industrial plans."

The United States has long denounced Chinese practices, such as its subsidies for public companies. — AFP

Unprecedented surge in MENA M&A activity in 2021

STRONG GROWTH: Total number of deals in 2021 reached 661 worth \$99 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 16

MENA M&A activity witnessed a major resurgence in 2021, registering an increase of 66 per cent from 2020, according to the EY MENA M&A Insights report.

These record M&A levels were primarily driven by domestic (intra-regional) deals which increased to 366 in 2021, compared to 192 deals in 2020.

The report also showed that announced total M&A deal value increased by 16 per cent in 2021 to \$99 billion from \$85.2 billion in 2020, while the top 10 deals by value in 2021 aggregated to \$58.8 billion, 59 per cent of total announced deal value.

Brad Watson, EY MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, said: "In 2021, we saw a tremendous surge in MENA M&A activity as a result of improving post-Covid-19 market conditions. The recovery in oil and gas prices and an improving public health backdrop have also helped to lift the economic outlook in the region, leading to renewed confidence in regional boardrooms."

Government-related entities (GRE) including sovereign wealth funds and national oil companies were pivotal players in the MENA M&A market in 2021, contributing to a total deal value of \$62.6 billion, or 63 per cent of total disclosed deal value of \$99 billion.

There was also an upturn in Private Equity (PE) participation in MENA deals, with PE executing 165 deals in 2021, as opposed to 73 deals in 2020. PE will continue



to be net sellers in 2022 but with imminent fund raising in sight, buy-side PE activity is expected to increase in the future.

Strategic M&A also had a good year with interesting deals such as the acquisition of Bayara (a nuts and spices company) by Savola as well as multiple acquisitions by Agthia in the confectionary and poultry space to strengthen their

position in the food and beverage sector.

UAE experienced the highest deal activity in terms of volume (303 deals) whilst Saudi Arabia attracted the most M&A capital (\$47.4 billion).

Egypt also saw robust deal activity in 2021 with 118 deals worth \$7.7 billion.

Anil Menon, Head of MENA

M&A and ECM, EY, added: "MENA M&A activity in 2021 was unprecedented not just by sheer volume, but also because much of the deal making was conducted virtually."

"Furthermore, what makes 2021 remarkable is that the activity levels have been consistently good across sectors and geographies. We expect continued confidence and momentum in 2022."

The region saw significant M&A activity within the energy, resources and chemicals sectors in 2021, with several multi-billion-dollar deals being signed in Saudi Arabia.

The oil and gas sector witnessed the highest deal activity in terms of deal values, largely driven by a stake sale by Aramco in its natural gas pipeline business.

In April 2021, a consortium led by EIG Global Energy Partners acquired a 49-per cent stake in Aramco Oil Pipelines Company

from Aramco for \$12.4 billion.

This was followed by a \$12-billion deal in September after a consortium of buyers — including Air Products and Chemicals, ACWA Power Barka, Air Products Qudra and the Saudi Aramco Power Company — signed an agreement to acquire ASUs, gasification, syngas clean-up, utilities and power assets from Aramco.

As the year ended, BlackRock Inc and Hassana Investment Co signed a lease and leaseback deal with Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) in December 2021. The deal will see the acquisition of its gas pipeline network for \$15.5 billion.

Looking ahead, MENA M&A activity in 2022 is expected to remain robust. Key deal themes include Continued GRE investment, digitisation and technology and portfolio optimisation.

China prices are cold comfort for global shoppers

Global consumers fretting over soaring costs can take some comfort in Chinese data. Factory-gate prices eased to a six-month low of 9.1% in January against the same period last year, and consumer inflation rose just 0.9%.

It reduces any immediate lingering concern that the world's largest exporter might bump up costs for overseas customers who are already grappling with high inflation at home.

Widespread supply strains that hobbled Chinese manufacturers late last year have faded.

A coal shortage and an ensuing nationwide electricity crunch exacerbated by an aggressive green energy transition have passed.

Monetary conservatism during the pandemic by the People's Bank of China has helped keep price pressure in check too.

Less flattering factors also are at work. Chinese consumers are hesitating to spend on apartments as debt problems engulf real estate developers.

Although the central bank has stepped up credit easing recently, mortgages issued in January were over 200 billion yuan (\$32 billion) less than the same period last year while consumers added 5 trillion yuan in savings.

With President Xi Jinping's deleveraging policies taking aim at an industry contributing roughly 30% of GDP, it will take a lot to restore confidence.

How long global shoppers are spared from China-led price hikes will depend on the size and effectiveness of China's stimulus plans. If the PBoC focuses on injecting liquidity into the market instead of cutting interest rates, the burden will fall on the government to ramp up investment, including on infrastructure, to juice economic growth languishing at 4% in the fourth quarter.

Even so, Zhongtai Securities' analysts expect infrastructure investment to grow a tepid 3.5% this year. Government spending is constrained both by debt and falling revenue from land sales.

Soft prices stemming from a weak Chinese economy will only be briefly good for the rest of the world if it's the result of financial chaos in the crucial real estate sector. Ongoing problems create heightened uncertainty and can have unexpected knock-on effects. It drags down global economic growth too. All that should be wished for with caution. — Reuters

How long global shoppers are spared from China-led price hikes will depend on the size and effectiveness of China's stimulus plans



PRICE PROTESTS

Farmers burn hay outside an Auchan supermarket during a demonstration called by farmer unions FDSEA 72 and Jeunes Agriculteurs over price disputes of their products in Le Mans, western France. Farmers are protesting to demand the application of the EGalim 2 law, which is undergoing negotiations, and aims at protecting farmers' remuneration by taking into account production costs, as well as reinforcing the origin indications of products. — AFP

Growing role of Islamic banking



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ISLAMIC BANKS ARE ALSO WORKING TO PROVIDE SEVERAL TOOLS FOR INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND OTHER SERVICES

The advent of Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman is more recent compared to the Gulf, Asian and European countries where the sector has thrived for a considerably longer time.

Today, there are two Islamic banks in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to a number of Islamic windows opened by conventional banks with independent capital to cover the needs of individuals and customers, and to obtain a share of banking activities in the country.

However, Islamic banks today face great competition from their conventional peers, which has led to a decline in the value of their shares in daily trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange. Some shares are sometimes sold for less than its nominal value.

The first Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, was established in 2015 followed by Alizz Islamic Bank. The history of Islamic banking in the Sultanate Oman dates back to the beginning of the current century, following the issuance of the first Royal Decree in 2012 according to which Islamic banks and windows were exempted from any kind of fees imposed on transactions related to real estate and movable assets.

Experts believe that the Islamic banking

activity in the country is still in a stage of gradual growth, at a time when they are preparing to offer more products and services that are compatible with the provisions of Islamic law to increase the confidence of customers.

Islamic banks are also working to provide several tools for innovative products and other services to attract more investors and customers. These banks need to develop their activities and programmes, and to keep pace with business developments in the local, regional and international arenas.

Today, the Sultanate of Oman is considered as one of the fastest growing countries in these services among all other GCC countries.

Those interested in Islamic banking believe that their future bodes well as a result of their success in raising their market share among other banks, developing their assets and diversifying the sources of competencies and their employees, in addition to their success in attracting young customers and investors.

These actions undoubtedly lead to creating close relations between Islamic banking, finance and economic sectors to achieve sustainable development goals, while officials are continuing to solve the problems and challenges facing these

banks.

Today, there are several institutions working to enhance the role of Islamic banking and enhance awareness of the importance of supporting economic and social development, in addition to activating the role of Sharia governance and strengthening their bodies through modern technology.

From this point of view, these banks are continuing in their activities. Bank Nizwa recently organised a workshop on "Settlement of Islamic Banking Disputes by Conciliation and Arbitration" with the participation of various judicial, governmental and banking bodies, in addition to distinguished judges, employees of conciliation and reconciliation committees.

The focus was on how Islamic banks contribute to creating standardised model contracts for Islamic finance, and reducing the differences in practices between banks in such business, which will lead to more coordination between them.

Such activities provide participants with the necessary knowledge about the foundations of arbitration in accordance with jurisprudence and law, in addition to their knowledge of the mechanisms of banking dispute settlements and others.

Free the money we need



JAYATI GHOSH

The author is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation

The main factor limiting the global recovery is not the much-discussed increase in inflation in advanced economies, which is likely to be transient, but rather the massive inequalities between most rich countries and the rest of the world, with the exception of China.

These disparities, by constraining the expansion of global effective demand, keep some poorer economies mired in stagnation, and eventually will affect investors in richer countries as well.

One major reason for the K-shaped global recovery is the huge variation in fiscal responses between rich countries and the rest.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic caused government revenues to decline everywhere,

the International Monetary Fund estimated in April 2021 that advanced economies had increased their public spending in 2020 by more than 6% of pre-pandemic GDP.

Emerging-market economies spent only 1% more on average, and low-income countries actually spent less.

By October 2021, even as fresh waves of Covid-19 infections were causing economic havoc, "fiscal consolidation" was already well under way in many middle- and low-income countries, owing to the rising levels of public debt accrued over the previous two years.

This inevitably worsened their economic outlook and prevented even essential public spending on nutrition and health services.

The only semi-bright spot in this bleak fiscal landscape for

much of the developing world was the IMF's new allocation in August 2021 of \$650 billion in special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF's reserve asset).

Unfortunately, SDRs are distributed according to countries' IMF quotas, which depend heavily on their GDP. Low-income and middle-income countries, therefore, received only around \$250 billion, while rich countries got nearly \$400 billion, most of which they are unlikely to use.

This system of SDR allocation is clearly outdated and illogical, especially given today's huge cross-country inequalities and the size and urgency of poorer countries' financing needs.

Even so, the SDR allocation was a lifeline for several developing countries facing severe balance-of-payments problems and helped to

prevent further economic decline.

Since August, at least 80 countries have used SDRs for various purposes. Thirty-two countries exchanged them for hard currency, 55 used them to pay their IMF dues, and 39 recorded them in the government budget, presumably to spend on healthcare and other priorities.

Moreover, SDRs have several advantages over other types of international financing. They do not add to countries' external debt burdens, and, unlike loans from the IMF and other multilateral lenders, they are non-conditional.

SDRs are accessible to all countries, including middle-income economies that may face balance-of-payments constraints but are excluded from other multilateral funding.

And they are virtually costless, with an interest rate currently

below 0.1%. It is difficult to think of an easier way to provide external finance to countries that urgently require it.

This is why many leaders want more frequent SDR allocations. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow last November, for example, the prime minister of Barbados, Mia Amor Mottley, called for the issuance of \$500 billion in SDRs annually for 20 years to fund climate action.

Since advanced economies have failed to fulfil even their relatively modest pledge at COP15 in 2009 to mobilize \$100 billion per year in climate finance for the developing world, regular SDR allocations would provide essential resources to bolster mitigation and adaptation efforts in countries where they are most needed.

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features



The seven villages that inspired a new generation of fragrances

From his initial trip to Khor Rori to his eventual discovery of Al Ulya, Wakan and five other mystical Oman destinations, Renaud Salmon, the Creative Director behind Amouage, wanted to capture the essence of Oman’s seven beautiful villages in a bottle. Here’s why these new attars are a must-try for you... **P20**

FASHION

READ



UGLY LOVE

BY COLLEEN HOOVER

Tate Collins and Miles Archer, an airline pilot, think they can handle a no strings attached arrangement. But they can't.

Michael Kors celebrates return of NY nightlife with Fall/Winter collection

VETERAN DESIGNER Michael Kors turned his inspiration of New York at night into reality for his New York Fashion Week runway show on Tuesday. Taking over live music venue Terminal 5, Kors, 62, said his Fall / Winter '22 Collection is about stepping out at night and during the day after quarantining.

The line was filled with statement-making coats paired with something provocative underneath. "To me, it's all about this sort of conceal and reveal", Kors said. "So you're going to see tonight a lot of really impactful outerwear and jackets because I think in a city, it's ultimately your calling



card." Kors described the outerwear as high-octane featuring hues from bright tangerine orange to electric pink and knitted shearling coats to chocolate

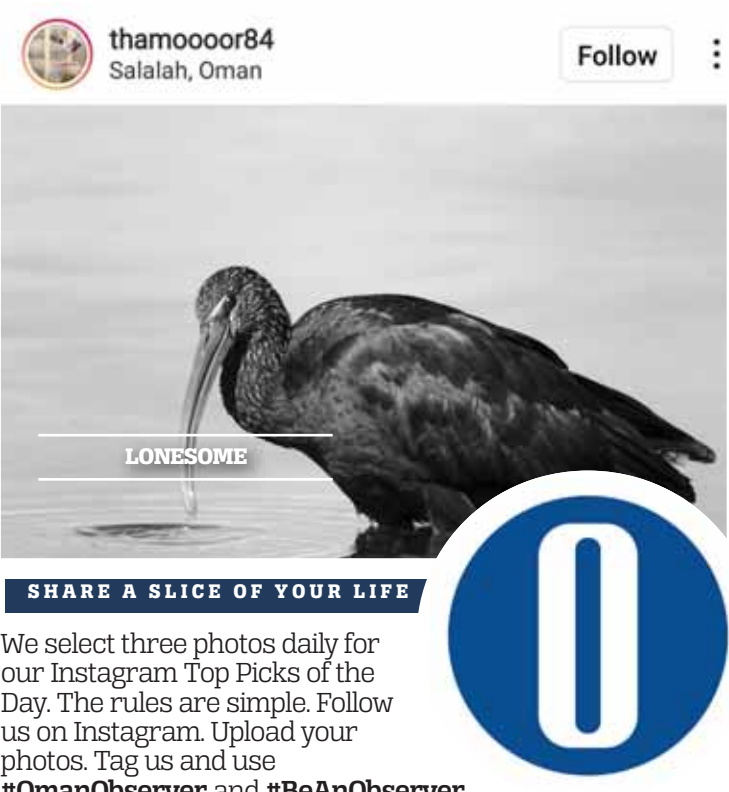
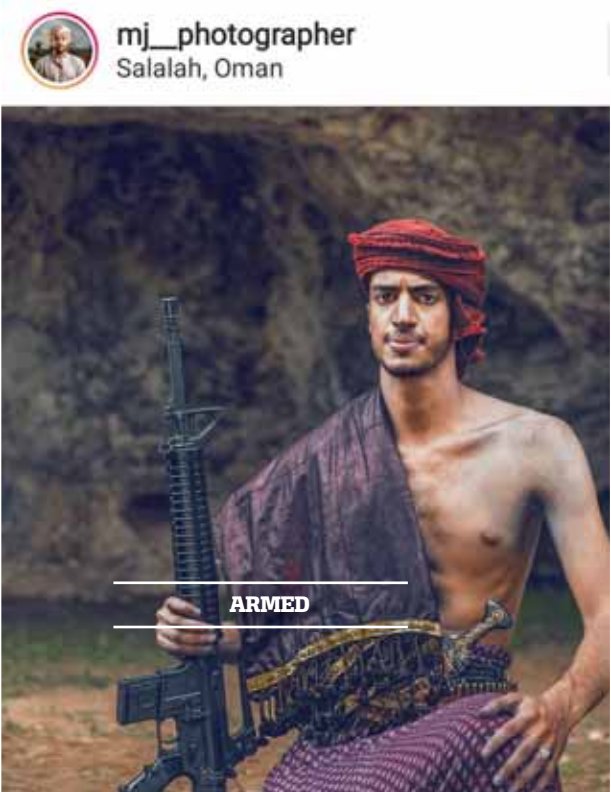
brown faux crocodile coats. "The coat you put on really is your street fashion show", Kors said. "Then when you arrive, whether you're going to some-

one's house for dinner or a restaurant, then there's the reveal." Grammy-winning artist Miguel provided the soundtrack for the show, singing hits like his "Pineapple Skies" and Prince's "Raspberry Beret." "I love live performance, and I love the energy of live performance, and I know that so many people have not really been fortunate enough to be able to get out and see an amazing performer with electricity, live. There's nothing like it", said Kors. On Tuesday, Louis Vuitton, LVMH's top fashion brand, announced it will raise prices globally as a result of increased manufacturing and transportation costs. Kors said he did not think customers would mind paying more for practical, sustainable quality pieces. "It's like anything, you know", he said. "Do you want to have junk food every night? No, you'd rather say, alright, let me save up and have the best meal." — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

BTS to hit the stage in South Korea for first time since COVID began



SOUTH KOREAN BOY band BTS are to put on their first shows for their home fans since the coronavirus pandemic began, with three concerts in the capital, Seoul, next month, their agency said on Wednesday.

The concerts, part of their "Permission to Dance on Stage" tour that has been disrupted by the pandemic, will be at Seoul's Olympic Stadium on March 10, 12 and 13, and will also be live streamed, Bit Hit Music said.

"We would like to thank all ARMY for patiently waiting for an in-person concert to be held in Korea," the company said on its online fan platform, Weverse, referring to the band's global fan base known as Adorable Representative MC for Youth.

Since their 2013 debut, the band have spearheaded a global K-Pop craze with catchy, upbeat music and dances, as well as lyrics and social campaigns aimed at empowering youngsters.

The seven-member band made history in November, becoming the first Asian artists to win the top prize at the American Music Awards.

Their last concert for South Korean fans was in October 2019, a couple of months before the coronavirus emerged.

As the pandemic spread in 2020, the band postponed and then called off what was meant to be their biggest international tour involving nearly 40 concerts. They held some online shows instead.

They played their first in-person concerts since the onset of the pandemic in November, in Los Angeles, and some die-hard South Korean fans flew in for the shows.

The pandemic has also affected some members of the band, though all are fully vaccinated.

V, the singer and songwriter whose real name is Kim Tae-hyung, was on Tuesday confirmed as the band's fifth member to contract Covid-19, Bit Hit said.

V had no symptoms apart from a mild fever and sore throat, and all other members had tested negative.

"He is currently undergoing treatment at home," the company said in a separate statement, promising a speedy recovery.

Rapper RM, vocalist Jin, and rapper Suga tested positive in December shortly after their return from the US shows, and singer Jimin contracted the virus last month. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

One-horse open sleigh ride across frozen Turkish lake



BY THE TIME KISMET the horse sets off, Orhan Goller's bare fingers have already turned blue from the freezing temperatures. But the pure white surroundings and the echo of hooves are enough to delight his customers in eastern Turkey.

Between December and March when the ice is sufficiently thick on Cildir Lake, one of the biggest in the Anatolia region, the 19-year-old who lives close by introduces tourists to the area which borders Georgia.

"We have 25 centimetres (9.8 inches) today," he says. "But the thickness can reach 40 centimetres. Some days the temperature falls to -30, -40 Celsius (-22, -40 Fahrenheit). It's not always sunny like today.. But there you go, it's our livelihood."

The lake, which is 20 kilometres (12 miles) long, is a paradise in the summer for migrating birds, especially gulls, swans and wild geese.

The region mainly produces cheese, including "gravyer" which is a form of

gruyere, made in the eastern province of Kars, with holes like the European original.

The cheese is a legacy of a visit by a Swiss citizen invited by the tsar when the Russians occupied the regional capital 70 kilometres from the lake in the 1870s.

But at nearly 2,000 metres altitude (6,500 feet), the winter is long and harsh and activity is rare so taking tourists on board horse-drawn sleighs is a small supplement to locals' income in a country where inflation reached nearly 50 per cent in January.

Since the arrival of affluent visitors from Ankara by the Eastern Express, a tourist train which travels across Anatolia in 36 hours from the capital, revenue has risen.

'MODE OF TRANSPORT'

Goller, an agronomy student in Kars, has grown up by the shores of Cildir Lake and is happy to be a guide at

weekends.

"We bring our culture, our traditions to life. In normal times, these sleighs are our mode of transport. In the past, our grandparents used them to go to hospital, to travel across the region's villages," Goller says.

"Nowadays, people are curious and so we take them."

Attractions include Caucasian horses racing across the ice, javelin throwing, fishing under the ice — which "we show to visitors to explain how we live here" Goller says as he lifts a fishing line from a hole made in the ice on the lake's surface.

Three visitor access points have been created along the shore where restaurants and tea houses have sprung up along with hot wine kiosks to warm those on excursions to the lake.

When the majority of businesses have packed up and closed for the day, it's just then as the sun fades that the frozen lake offers its utmost beauty. — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

British Museum exhibition traces rise and fall of Stonehenge



A NEW EXHIBITION on the Stonehenge stone circle in southern England sheds new light on its 4,500-year history, linking its declining influence to the Bronze Age population's discovery of metal working.

Opening on Thursday at the British Museum in London, the exhibition called "The World of Stonehenge" traces the development of the UNESCO-protected site — two concentric circles of huge stone blocks and lintels.

According to Celtic legends of the Middle Ages, the circle was magically created by the mythical magician Merlin.

Construction at the site was started during the Neolithic era by hunter-gatherers without metal tools and continued into the Bronze Age as metal working became widely established.

European metal workers arrived during the early Bronze Age, gradually superseding the local Neolithic population.

"Within a couple of hundred years, those people from Europe replaced the previous population by almost 95 per cent," Neil Wilkin, the exhibition's curator, said.

As their culture and beliefs became dominant, Stonehenge lost its original purpose and became used as a cemetery, he added.

The exhibition shows numerous tombs from the time, as well as objects such

as large gold necklaces made in France around 2300 BC.

The Nebra Sky Disc, the world's oldest surviving map of the stars, smelted in gold and bronze in 1600 BC in present-day Germany, is also featured.

Altogether there are more than 430 objects from the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, Denmark and Switzerland at the exhibition, which runs to July 17.

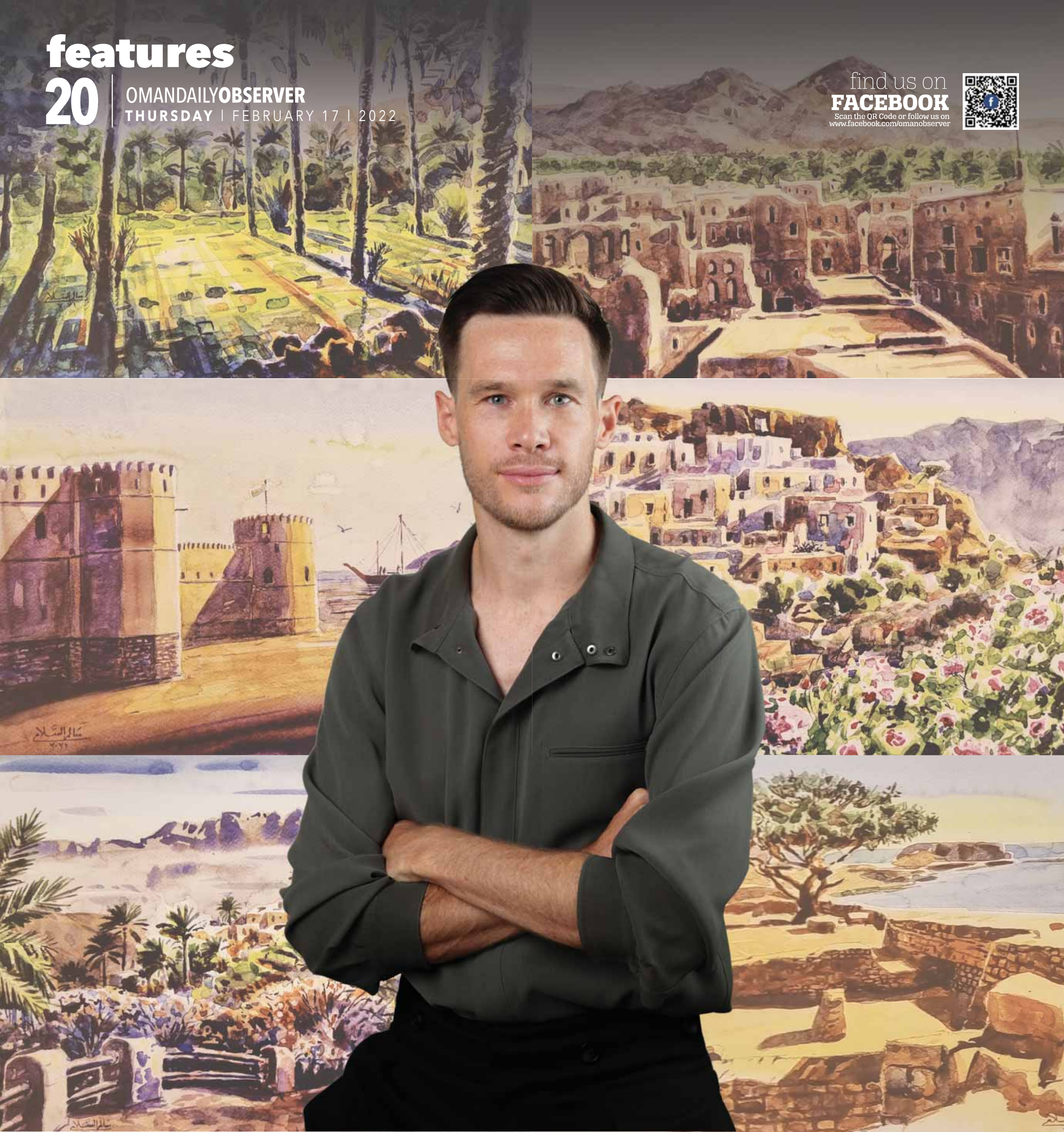
The British Museum also displays 14 wooden poles that were preserved for millennia under the sand of a beach in Norfolk, eastern England, until their discovery in 1998.

These are the remains of a wooden circle called Seahenge, on loan to the museum for the first time.

The 4,000-year-old circle once featured 54 oak piles arranged in a circle 6.6 metres in diameter, with a huge upturned tree in the centre, its roots facing skywards.

This circle would have been used for rituals in a similar way to Stonehenge, but was built five centuries later (2049 BC), using metal axes typical of the Bronze Age, said Wilkin, as the tradition of building such circles dwindled away.

"Seahenge is one of the last monuments of its type built in Britain. It's the very end of a long tradition that spans 1,000 years," he noted. — **AFP**



By Yeru Ebuon

Renaud Salmon has travelled across Oman visiting different destinations. As a French man in Oman, he has become fascinated by Oman's story, its hidden oasis, fantastic people and the country's unique characteristics that it is here he has made several realisations including

in the middle of this fantastic land, I thought, how amazing it would be if we can capture a boatful of frankincense in small bottles," he said.

That idea will eventually grow into a full brief for different master perfumers of which he was the creative director. As the chief experience officer of Oman's beloved Amouage, it is his role to envision not just the experience but the direction of where the

these places with wadis and date palms, you enter the place and it feels very generous, it feels very green and that's what your eyes would see. But one of the first things you might notice, or you might not see it right away but would smell it. At one point, you will notice the smell of smoke because somewhere, people will burn these palm leaves. So instantly, your brain would connect the place with the smell

When I visit places, I notice these little details, are the birds singing somewhere, are the waves crashing on the shore and in the end, bring all of these together as an experience on a perfume," he said.

From his initial trip to Khor Rori, Renaud reached out to three master perfumers that can help him capture the different experiences in a bottle.

"Over the years, I'd been in Oman and I've taken a few trips in the country and discovered amazing places. All of them are beautiful, inspiring stunning. They have traditions, they have very special people and characters and every fragrance connects that story with one key ingredient that I believe represents the soul of that place," he said.

Seven villages will eventually become their inspiration: Wakan, Al Agor, Barka, Khor Rori, Al Hamra, Al Ulya and Kumzar.

Cécile Zarokian, Julien Rasquinet and Dominique Ropion eventually crafted the perfect blend that drew inspiration from the Sultanate's rich traditions, rare natural treasures and inherent passion for fine fragrance.

"Overall, what we wanted to do is pack experiences of all these different places in bottles. That's what this is all about. People may not be aware of these scents when they are in Oman but internationally, those are the things that people can recall," he said.

"When I talk to people about Oman, when I meet people around the world, and I show them either a picture or a snapshot, they either say, wow, I did not know that there is so much depth and richness in Oman. So yes, it's capturing the essence of these places but also putting a little bit of fantasy to it because the goal is not to create postcards," Renaud said.

"When you visit Wakan, the literal way of bringing Wakan to life is to use notes of apricots but I felt it's too literal. Wakan is about the apricot blos-

soms that are fragile — fragile in the sense that if you miss it, you would have to wait another year to see it. What we did is we turn to orris to help us create an experience and mix with other essences, when you smell a bottle, you know it captures the essence of that place," he said.

The smell of Barka, Renaud explained, is capturing that trading era where the place used to be the centre of trading spices with China, India and the region using vanilla as a key ingredient. To capture Al Ulya or the villages of Bahla, they have to turn to saffron and a mix of other spices that relive the full experience.

"These new attars revolved around sourcing local ingredients, taking local inspiration but at the same time, doing an international take on it. Our ambition with our new Attars was to stay true to their noble and precious reputation, taking advantage of their history while infusing them with Amouage's innovative creative approach. It is the Attars strength and their resonance that has allowed us to reinvent them for a changing olfactory landscape without denying their identity," he said. It is evident that Renaud is smitten by Oman and this reflects strongly in his masterful creations. He also became an avid traveller of the country exploring not just top tourist hot spots even the remote ones. "I love Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. I love the serenity of it. I love the fact that you are high up in the mountains but experience a sense of comfort. I love mountains in general and usually, the higher you go, the higher the discomfort but in the case of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, it's the reverse. I love this idea of going to the mountain to escape the craziness of life, of work and to find a sanctuary just two hours from Muscat — to disconnect and enjoy the sunset on top of the mountain. I think it's a wonderful experience," he shared.

The seven villages that inspired a new generation of fragrances

different places having their soul.

"We went to Salalah. We were going around Khor Rori because it is part of history where the trade of frankincense happened. There was a sign there saying it's where the ships in ancient times used to dock and while

perfume industry is headed.

In another instance, Renaud found himself in the beautiful village of Al Ulya.

"I always tell this story of how I love going to oasis. When you go to Birkat Al Mouz or you go to Al Ulya or one of

of beautiful burnt palm leaves," he said.

"So, that's the exercise. Trying to capture memories. A lot of us capture these with our cameras and our phones. For us perfumers, I thought about the smell, about the sound.