

The total number of e-registrations for Haj 1443 AH reached 23,474 including 21,429 applications by Omani citizens and 2,045 applications by residents in Oman. Registration is now closed. The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah recorded the highest number of e-registrations, reaching 4,008, while the Governorate of Musandam recorded the lowest number of applications, standing at 191. The number of applications by males reached 14,037 constituting 59.8 per cent while the number of applications by females reached 9,437 constituting 40.2 per cent. The quota of the Sultanate of Oman for 2022 is 6,338 pilgrims. — ONA



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OMAN SINK BANGLADESH TO EMERGE CHAMPIONS



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BANKING SECTOR CREDIT CLIMBS TO RO 27.9 BILLION IN Q1 OF 2022



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BAIT AL MAQHAM: THE HOUSE BUILT FOR A NOBLE LADY



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY KOREA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Yoon Suk-Yeol of the Republic of Korea in reply to His Majesty's sincere sentiments, wishing him good health and happiness. He also wished the Sultanate of Oman further progress and prosperity. — ONA

CANDIDACY FOR MUNICIPAL POLLS

The Ministry of Interior on Sunday announced the opening of candidacy for the third term of municipal councils through the website elections.om, from Sunday until June 2. The Ministry of Interior called on those willing to stand for the elections and who are eligible for candidacy to submit their applications on the elections website after filling the e-form and attaching the required documents. The registration in the electoral registry continues for citizens who have not registered before. DETAILS ON P2



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HIS MAJESTY ISSUES THREE ROYAL DECREES

Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies established

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued three Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 26/2022 conducts military promotions and placements at the Royal Office.

Article (1) appoints Maj Gen Nasser bin Saleh bin Saud al Maawali as Secretary-General of Liaison and Coordination.

Article (2) promotes Brigadier Idris bin Abdulrahman bin Hamoud al Kindi to the rank of Major General and appoints him as Secretary-General of the National Security Council.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 27/2022 on the establishment of an Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies and promulgating its system of functioning.

Article (1) stipulates that an academy to be named "Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies" shall be established and that it shall have a legal identity and enjoy financial and administrative autonomy. The Academy shall report to the Ministry of Defence

and apply the system attached to this Decree.

Article (2) states that the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies shall have its headquarters in the Governorate of Muscat and that, with a decision from the Academy's Board of Trustees, it may have branches in other governorates.

Article (3) states that all allocations, assets, rights and obligations of the National Defence College, the Joint Command and Staff College and the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies shall be

transferred to the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies.

Article (4) states that employees of the National Defence College, the Joint Command and Staff College and the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies shall be moved to the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, along with their existing job status and financial allocations.

Article (5) states that the Chairman of the Academy's Board of Trustees shall issue the Academy's internal bylaws and decision necessary for the

implementation of provisions of the system attached to this Decree. Till such time, the existing bylaws and decisions shall continue to be applied without prejudice to the provisions of this Decree or the system attached.

Article (6) cancels Royal Decree No 2/2013, as well as all that contradicts this Decree and the system attached or contravenes their provisions.

Article (7) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. TURN TO P2

New recreation and adventure projects to be announced soon

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

To boost tourism-related activities in the capital, the Muscat Municipality has floated tenders for projects across the city. The most important of these projects is the construction of a mountain walkway in the Riyam area in the Wilayat of Muscat.

The civic body has also invited bids to prepare dedicated sites for street vendors, which was earlier announced to be in the Al Amerat area of the city.

Earlier, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said that several projects for recreational purposes would be announced

Several projects for recreational purposes would be announced soon by the authorities concerned, including the Omran Group and the local bodies

SALIM AL MAHROUQI
Minister of Heritage and Tourism

soon by the authorities concerned, including the Omran Group and the local bodies.

The minister underlined the importance of such projects,

as citizens and travel industry experts suggested promoting the country as an international destination for global travellers.

Muscat Municipality is also working on an advanced walkway project in Al Mawaleh near the central market for vegetables and fruits.

The first phase of the project will include a pedestrian walkway, a bicycle track in parallel to the walkway, cultivation of green areas, sites for exercise, children's play areas, visitors' sitting areas, parking lots, water pools, cafes and shops.

Several citizens earlier demanded that apart from mega projects, the country also needs facilities for adventure and entertainment.

CONDOLENCES TO UAE PRESIDENT



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, offered his condolences to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, on the passing of Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, when he was received by the UAE President at the presidential airport in Abu Dhabi, on Sunday. SEE ALSO P2

Social media break can boost mental health

LONDON: It's no secret that too much social media can be bad for one's mental health. Now, research suggests that taking even a brief break from social media platforms can ease symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Staying off social media for a week meant, for some study participants, gaining about nine hours of free time, which improved their well-being, British researchers report.

"If you're feeling like you use too much social media and this is negatively impacting your mental health, then taking a break may be worth a try and give you at least some short-term improvements,"

said study author Jeff Lambert, an assistant professor of health psychology at the University of Bath. These findings could have implications for how people manage their mental health, offering another option for people to try, Lambert said.

"However, further research is needed to examine longer-term effects and whether it is suitable in a clinical context," he added.

For the study, the researchers randomly selected 154 people ages 18 to 72 who used social media everyday, instructing them to either stop using all social media for a week or continue using it as usual. — Agencies

OMANI ADVENTURER CLIMBS MOUNT EVEREST



Omani adventurer Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Naabi has managed to climb the summits of Mount Everest, which extends to 8,849 metres above sea level, and 'Lhotse', the fourth highest mountain top in the world, which extends to 8,516 metres above sea level in one single adventure. DETAILS ON P2



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SAYYID ASAAD OFFERS CONDOLENCES TO UAE PRESIDENT



His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, offered his condolences to the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the passing of Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, when he was received by the UAE President at the presidential airport in Abu Dhabi, on Sunday. — ONA

Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies established

FROM P1

Defence. Article (1) appoints Air Vice Marshal (Eng) Saleh bin Yahya bin Masoud al Maskari as Head of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. Article (2) promotes Brig Hamid bin Ahmed bin Said Sakroon to the rank of Major General and appoints him as Commandant of the National Defence College. Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Omani adventurer climbs Mount Everest

KATHMANDU: The Omani adventurer Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Na'abi has managed to climb the summits of Mount Everest, which extends to 8,849 metres above sea level, and Lhotse, the 4th highest mountain top in the world, which extends to 8,516 metres above sea level in one single adventure.

Al Na'abi said that the adventure began on May 4 and he reached the summit of mount Everest on May 12, followed by the summit of Lhotse mountain on May 13.

He added that this adventure is part of the "Explorer's Grand Slam" programme that takes its participants on a journey to climb the top of the seven highest summits and to reach the North and South Poles.

Climbers of Mount Everest, Al Na'abi said, face several health challenges, particularly an altitude-related sickness that can cause a headache and a shortness of breath. — ONA



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Candidacy for municipal membership opens

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Interior on Sunday announced the opening of candidacy for the third term of municipal councils through the website elections.om, from Sunday until June 2.

The Ministry of Interior called on those willing to stand for the elections and who are eligible for candidacy to submit their applications on the elections website after filling the e-form and attaching the required documents.

In an earlier statement, the Ministry of Interior announced that, in the context of preparations for the third term of municipal council elections members which were put off due to the Covid-19 pandemic, those who had formerly applied for candidacy of the municipal council membership in 2020 should reapply via the website elections.om as the previous applications submitted in 2020 will not be considered.

The registration in the electoral registry continues for citizens who have not registered before. They should submit a registration application on the elections website elections.om and ensure that their ID cards are equipped with the Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) system. — ONA

Oman-US joint air drill kicks off

MUSCAT: The joint air drill Accurate Test carried out by the Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo) with participation of personnel from the United States Air Force (USAF), kicked off on Sunday and runs till May 19.

Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of (Rafo) and Lt Gen Gregory M Guillot, Commander of the Ninth Air Force at the US Central Command visited the drill site and listened to a briefing about the progress of the exercise and its objectives.

The drill comes as part of the plans aimed at sustaining preparedness level and combat readiness and realises the operational goals and national duties undertaken by Rafo.

The launch of the drill was attended by Air Commodore Khalid bin Mohammed al Abri, Rafo Director-General of Operations and the US ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman as well as a number of officers from the US air force taking part in the exercise. — ONA





Women can emerge change agents of fisheries sector

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The global food system faces many complex challenges, including hunger, malnutrition, diet-related diseases, and an ever-growing global population that needs sufficient and healthy food. The depletion of natural resources and the effects of climate change have been the other concerns, not to forget the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The year (2022) is also being celebrated as the international year of artisanal fisheries and aquaculture. According to Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Representative to the Sultanate of Oman, there are many reasons for this focus, and one of them is the importance of small-scale and artisanal fisheries in contributing to food and nutrition security.

"The production in the fisheries sector in the Sultanate of Oman has reached 580,000 tonnes in the year 2020, and the value is also high as it is RO 880 million.

So it's also a sector which is self-sufficient and also has exporting capacity.

This is to say that fishery is important for the country in terms of diversifying its economy. It has been placed by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and Oman Vision 2040 as one of the priority sectors."

She added that Covid-19 also taught a lot about the importance of healthy diets, and the fishery

has been featured as one of the contributors to nutrition.

"Fisheries also has resilience," she said and added, "With the development of the e-commerce artisanal fisheries in Oman played an important role. During Covid-19, it facilitated their participation in e-auction."

"This year is an opportunity not only to raise awareness about the importance of fisheries for our consumption and our food security, but also to spearhead action towards the development of this important sector, which is more and more being looked at as a source of protein, a source of energy and very important and healthy food.

Just as small and medium enterprises are being considered today, artisanal fisheries are also being looked upon as a sector that could see development as well as be part of food security.

"When we see that most fisheries operations in the world are artisanal, the same goes for the Sultanate of Oman. And more than 90 per cent of the operations here are of artisanal nature, and knowing that the Sultanate of Oman has three types of fisheries, mainly small-scale artisanal and commercial and also coastal. But the artisanal accounts for more than 99.5 per cent.

So we need to pay attention to those small-scales and artisanal fisheries and fisherfolk. Therefore, it is important to support small and medium enterprises' capacities to create jobs and boost



the economy. Because all the studies show that these types of enterprises are actually at the heart of the economy," she explained.

According to her, the whole value chain is important, from production to consumption. Just as in the agricultural sector, the expression from farm to fork is used; the same concept goes for fisheries too. All the steps of the chain are extremely important when it comes to fisheries and in particular, artisanal is about collecting, cleaning, and harvesting marine products.

"Also important is marketing and all the post-harvest activities of which marketing is part. This is where women are very much present. Most of them do not go to sea, even though things are changing now. But most of their participation is found in the pre and post-harvest activities. That is why we presented women and the

changing tide by breaking the bias -lessons from Omani small-scale fisheries," she explained.

According to the FAO representative to the Sultanate of Oman, overall, the role of women is very important. This aspect is being looked upon as extremely important because women are the ones who foresee the nutrition of the family, but also their role is very important in pre and post-harvest activities. But this role is undocumented.

"Not enough has been documented, and this is why we do have difficulties coming up with exact and accurate data on the number of women in the fishery sectors.

Of course, it depends on the country. But for the Sultanate of Oman, the study that we are referring to dates back to 2014 that shows that about 400 women are involved in the fisheries sector.



It is important to educate our children about the role of fisheries, women in fisheries, and the importance of eating fish. Including fish in diets will make them more healthy

DR NORA OURABAH HADDAD
FAO Representative

But this dates back a little bit, so we are trying to support them. The public needs to know that women are important in fisheries and that they are playing a role," pointed out Dr Haddad.

The event organised by FAO had the participation of the Ministry of Higher Education Research and Innovation, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

"It is important to educate our children about the role of fisheries, women in fisheries, and the importance of eating fish. Including fish in diets will make them more healthy," she noted.

She added, "We are foreseeing a few activities together with some partners here with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. We are working on a project to build the capacities of fisheries of coastal women, of a group of coastal women in Al Musannah."

The FAO representative said, "Another part of the component of this project is about adding value and supporting women to market the processed fish product. And we would like to showcase it as an example, and why not duplicate it in other areas of the country?"

We are working with the government on the policy side and the implementation of the guidelines on small-scale sustainable fisheries. We are developing studies around that to see how the implementation of these guidelines is doing in the Sultanate of Oman to try and bring about the challenges and also the opportunities of the sector. And this is how we have highlighted the importance of small-scale fisheries, not only women but also men."

Journalist association gearing up for IFJ meet

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Preparations are under way for the 31st Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which is scheduled to begin on May 31 and conclude on June 3.

The Omani Journalists Association (OJA) has formed committees for relations, media, marketing, events, secretarial and financial to ensure that the event happens smoothly.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araimi, President of the Omani Journalists Association, said the Sultanate of Oman has been chosen as a venue for the important international media event for several reasons.

"When Omani Journalists Association submitted a request to host the General Conference of the International Federation of Journalists in 2022, there was an international consensus from the global journalistic community that this conference will be a luminous sign in the history of international journalistic union work for two reasons - the country's stance in international issues and the freedom of the press," said Al Araimi.

Talib al Dabbari, Secretary of the Omani Journalists Association, said the conference's preparations had gone a long way in hosting the 31st Congress due to the efforts made by the working groups and committees concerned with the conference.

"More than 95 per cent of the preparations have been accomplished so far, whether in terms of receiving the lists of participants, obtaining entry visas to the Sultanate of Oman, reserving the conference venue, setting up delegations and accompanying events, in addition to preparing a media plan to benefit as much as possible from this global media presence," Al Dabbari said.

There is constant communication with the secretariat of the International Federation of Journalists in Brussels to follow up on developments regarding the needs and requirements of these meetings, which is to host elections for new leadership for the next four years.

As many as 350 journalists and media professionals from all over the world will participate in the event. It will give a boost to the Sultanate Oman's tourism and a learning experience for journalists, media professionals, and media students in the country. Dr Aisha bint Hamad al Darmakiyah, Member of the State Council, said the event would enhance the country's media and cultural position globally.

Al Sadiq Ibrahim Al Ruzaqi, President of the General Union of Sudanese Journalists, President of the African Federation of Journalists (Union of African Journalists) and Vice-President of the Union of Arab Journalists said the UAJ is all supportive to the conference which is first of its kind in the region.



Artificial light pollution threatens migratory birds

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, marked the World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) which is celebrated on May 14 every year.

Light pollution was the focus of the World Migratory Bird Day 2022 in reference to the increase in artificial light pollution by at least 2 per cent per year which poses a threat to many bird species.

Light pollution adversely affects migratory birds causing disorientation when they fly

at night, leading to collisions with buildings, perturbing their internal clocks, or interfering with their ability to undertake long-distance migrations.

Solutions to light pollution are readily available with many cities around the world taking measures to dim building lights during migration periods in spring and autumn. Best practice guidelines are also being developed under the Convention on Migratory Species to address this growing issue and ensure that action is taken globally to help birds

migrate safely.

The number of bird species registered in Oman stands at 535, with migratory birds representing 80 per cent of recorded birds or more than 400 species, while 20 per cent are resident species that remain in the country throughout the year.

The Wetland Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate (Bar Al Hikman) is one of the most prominent sites for migratory birds in Oman. The site is visited by more than half a million birds during the winter season. — ONA

Labour Ministry holds meeting for Govt units' HR directors

MUSCAT: Represented by the central team tasked with Performance Measurement (Ejada), the Ministry of Labour on Sunday organised a second meeting for directors of human resources departments at government units.

The meeting seeks to establish an integrated milieu for Ejada to ensure the sustainability of this performance measurement system's application.

The meeting touched on various aspects of Ejada focusing on its implementation over the past period since its inception. It looked into three sets of performance assessment: quarterly, tertiary and biannual assessment.

The quarterly assessment system was chosen by 24 government units, the tertiary by 6 units and the biannual by 27 units.

The meeting explored the experience of three leading government units — which were the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar and the Public Prosecution Department — with a view to tapping their expertise. — ONA



MANAGING BACK PAIN

BACK PAIN
OCCURS
EQUALLY
IN MALES AND
FEMALES MOSTLY
IN THE
AGE GROUP OF

35
TO
50

ZAINAB
AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

PROBLEM in muscles, nerves, bones, joints, or a herniated disc within the spine usually causes back pain. It can occur suddenly or gradually, and it can be continuous or intermittent. It spreads from one place to another (usually towards the arm and hand, the thigh or leg). The quality of the pain varies as it may be sharp, dull, or like a burning sensation. Other symptoms may be associated with the pain, such as muscle weakness, numbness, and tingling.

Dr Hamed al Hinai, a surgeon at Orthopedics Department, Nizwa Hospital, said, “The daily orthopaedic clinic is hardly devoid of dozens of patients complaining of back problems and pain. Back pain is considered one of the common diseases in society. About 70 per cent to 85 per cent of the population develop low back pain at some point in their lives. Generally, it recovers in some weeks. Back pain occurs equally in males and females mostly in the age group of 35 to 50, and is common as one gets older.”

The doctor said that among the factors of back pain is weight. “Excess weight strains the back and causes pain. Also, lifting, pushing or pulling while bending the spine cause back pain,” noting that pain appears as a constant dull then turns to a sudden sharp that makes it difficult to move. “It can start quickly if you drop or lift something very heavy, or it can slowly get worse over time,” he added.

About the causes, Al Hinai indicated that causes of back pain vary, saying “it could be caused by muscle strain around the shaft (muscular strain), herniated disc, sliding vertebrae, toughness of the joints of the vertebrae, nerve canal stenosis, a fracture, bacterial infection, tumours, diseases of fragility, rheumatism and blood, internal diseases or even psychological diseases”.

He recommended regular exercise, keeping back muscles strong, maintaining a healthy weight, and developing habits to stand straight and avoid lifting heavy objects. If you have to lift any heavy thing, bend your legs and keep your back straight.

However, the patient should see a doctor if he notices numbness or tingling, severe pain that does not get better with rest, pain after a fall, difficulty urinating, weakness and numbness in legs, fever, or weight loss.

Dr Hamed al Hinai mentioned that there is a difference between acute and chronic pain. “Acute pain begins quickly and lasts less than six weeks. It is the most common type of back pain. It may be caused by things such as falling or lifting something heavy. While chronic pain lasts more than three months and is less common than acute pain,” he explained.

As for the treatment, it is non-surgical in most cases, including physiotherapy, medicines, change in lifestyle, or using back needle. Besides, there is surgical treatment (if conservative treatment fails or there are signs of danger). According to the doctor, surgery is done in chronic cases in which conservative treatment has failed, if there is weakness in the muscle and severe pressure on the nerve. Surgery is done also in unstable fractures, bacterial infections, or tumours.



The daily orthopaedic clinic is hardly devoid of dozens of patients complaining of back problems and pain. Back pain is considered one of the common diseases in society. About 70 per cent to 85 per cent of the population develop low back pain at some point in their lives

DR HAMED
AL HINAI
Nizwa Hospital



Nizwa people hold prayer for rain



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MAY 15

People from Nizwa and nearby places in Al Dakhiliyah

Governorate held a special prayer for the rain on Friday. Several men, women and children participated in the prayer in the White Valley in the wilayat.

During the ceremony, the Imam gave a sermon in which he called on the people to be thankful for the countless blessings that Allah has bestowed upon them, not despair and be sincere in repentance and urged the faithful to pray to Allah to bless them, their children, their beasts and their crops with rain and mercy.

Programme on documentary film-making

MUSCAT: A training programme on documentary film-making began here on Sunday with participation of some media personnel and journalists from the Ministry of Information and various government units. The 5-day programme is organised by the Media Training Centre at the Ministry of Information in cooperation with Al Jazeera Media Institute. It aims to sharpen skills of the participants in directing, production, photography and montage of documentaries. — ONA

Toastmasters celebrate 200th session

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Royal Meadows Toastmasters Club, Muscat's leading toastmaster club, celebrated its 200th club session with extensive events at the Hotel Golden Oasis recently. DTM Gurbinder Singh Pun, District 105 Director delivered the keynote address and Toastmaster Nidheesh Mani, President of the Club gave the introductory address. DTM Saiju Victor, District 105 PR Manager DTM released the newsletter. Division C Director DTM Alex Krasta, Area 10 Director TM Rajulal Rafeeq, Area 12 Director TM Avodai Nayakam, Founder President DTM George Meladan and Club Sponsor DTM Dileep Kumar and former presidents'



TM Prajeesh Varkey, TM Jeejo Thomas and TM Sunil Kumar addressed the gathering. TM Jaseel shared the toastmasters new member experience. Various Cultural activities led by TM Sinoy Jose, Jovita Jeejo and Andrea Jeejo were also added colour to the function. Area Director TM Rajulal Rafeeq presented trophies to the winners of the annual speech competition. TM Zayanuddin delivered the vote of thanks. TM Denny John, TM Saji Phillip, TM Jamsheer, TM Nixon Baby and TM Paulson taken the lead to organise the event.

Construction sector employs highest number of expats

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Five economic activities account for 74.3 per cent (1,449, 358) of the total expatriate workers in the private and family sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 25.7 per cent of those workers are in the construction sector. NCSI's monthly statistics showed that until the end of the first quarter of this year, the total number of workers in the construction sector, wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, manufacturing industries, household activities, hospitality and food services were 1,766,426. NCSI said the number of expatriates in the construction sector amounted to 373,184, compared to 353,584 workers at the end of 2021, with an increase of 5.5 per cent, while the number of workers in the wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles reached 216,493, compared to 206,868 workers last year, an increase of 4.7 per cent. The number of workers in the manufacturing sector reached 179,838, compared to 171,296 at the end of 2021. In households that employ individuals, and household activities in the production of non-distinguished goods and services for their own use, the number of expatriate workers reached 196,839, and the number of workers in housing and food services activities reached 110,72, compared to 103,471 at the end of last year. The bulletin said that there are 65,590 migrant workers

working in transport and storage activities, an increase of 3,286 workers from last year, while 87,729 workers work in agriculture, forestry and fishing activities, 72,063 workers in administrative and support services activities, 13,154 workers in education, 12,783 in human health and social services activities, 19,662 expatriates in professional, scientific and technical activities, and 13,037 workers in mining and quarrying activities. The bulletin said according to professional groups, the number of expatriate workers working in the basic and auxiliary engineering professions in the private and family sectors reached 600,927, at a rate of 41.5 per cent, and the service professions came in second place with a number of 444,011, at a rate of 30.6 per cent. The number of workers in the professions of industrial and chemical operations and the food industries is 102,533, at a rate of 7.1 per cent, and in the sales professions are 92,816 workers, and 87,743 workers are in the professions of agriculture, animal husbandry, while their number is in the professions of specialists in scientific topics. 53,011 technical and humanitarian workers, 35,561 technical workers in scientific, technical, and humanitarian subjects, and 32,258 in the professions of public administration and business managers. The number of expatriate workers in the private and family sectors constitutes 97.6 per cent of the total number of workers in the Sultanate of Oman, whose total number in the three sectors, including workers in the government sector, is 1,485,123.

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
54/2022	Rehabilitation e-service portal	Companies specialized in the field of designing, installing and maintaining programs and equipping informational data centers that are registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent or first degree	Thursday 2-6-2022 02:00 PM	Wednesday 22-6-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) , On Monday 16/5/2022.
- ❖ 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).

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Houses of different specifications are on offer for both citizens and expats in Rimal 2 project by Aqar. Some 148 housing units are being offered under the project, which was launched last week. Strategically located in Bausher near the dunes, the Rimal 2 was launched after the success of the Rimal 1 and is available at a starting price of RO 35,000. Built on 40,000 square metres with three-level electronic underground parking, Rimal 2 offers 148 residential units provided with luxurious integrated services. Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman and CEO of Aqar under Al Khonji Real Estate and Development, said nearly 35 per cent of the project had been sold off during the first offer that was allocated for Aqar's existing customers. "There is no doubt that the success of Rimal 1 and the great demand that we received, the units were sold within two weeks of its launch. It worked as a great incentive to launch our new project, Rimal 2. Aqar is committed to developing quality real estate projects built with modern specifications and integrated services," said Al Khonji. Al Khonji Real Estate and Development and Bank Nizwa signed a memorandum of cooperation for ease of financing for those interested in buying units in the project. Mohammed al Khonji signed on behalf of Al Khonji Real Estate and Development, while Arif al Zaabi, AGM Retail Banking, on the bank's behalf. "The real estate market demands integrated housing complexes with unique specifications. Now is the most appropriate time to buy residential units, coinciding with Rimal 2, which launched its units at prices that match the market levels," he added. Ownership of the project's units is available to all nationalities and will be delivered in less than three years' time. "It is expected to take three years to build this project. Construction work will be undertaken by Al Binaa Contracting Company, the main contractor, a subsidiary of Aqar. The project's construction started in January, and 35 per cent of the units sold during the first offer," Al Khonji added. "We provide innovative and Shariah-compliant real estate financing solutions. We have designed our real estate financing solutions to meet the different requirements of our growing customer base. At the same time, we are confident that the new profitability rate is an exemplary rate for the retail customers who are interested in utilising the Shariah-compliant real estate financing solutions easily and flexibly," Arif al Zaabi of Bank Nizwa said. Rimal 2 project consists of one, two and three bedrooms apartments and a housemaid room/office. Some apartments have been provided with a plunge pool. The apartment areas range from 70 to 215 square metres.

Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTERNAL TENDER

Tender No.	9/2022	Tender Name	SERVICE UNIT PROJECTS AT AL MAZARA QURIYAT
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)		25 O.R	
Tender Document Sales End Date		05 / 06 / 2022	
Last Date for Bid Submission		29 / 06 / 2022	
Grade		First	
E-Tendering Portal		https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om	

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local bank not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission online.
 - Any bid that does not meet the required tender bond will not be considered
 - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

Lebanon votes but few expect major change

BEIRUT: Lebanon held its first election on Sunday since a painful economic crisis dragged it to the brink of becoming a failed state, a major test for new opposition groups bent on ousting the ruling elite.

But few observers expected a seismic shift, with all levers of political power firmly in the hands of traditional sectarian parties and an electoral system seen as rigged in their favour.

Lebanon shares power among its religious communities, and politics is often treated as a family business.

“We tried this current political class before, and now is the time to bring in new faces,” said 28-year-old Beirut voter Nayla after casting her ballot.

A new generation of independent candidates hopes to kindle the kind of change that a 2019 protest movement failed to deliver, and looked likely to do better than the single assembly seat they clinched last time.

But most of parliament’s 128 seats are expected to remain in the grip of the entrenched groups blamed for the country’s woes -- chiefly the economic downturn that is the worst crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Turnout in the election was



A Lebanese woman after voting for the parliamentary election at a polling station in Beirut’s southern suburbs. — AFP

low, with only about 25 per cent of registered voters casting their ballots by 3 pm, according to the interior ministry.

“It seems almost impossible to imagine Lebanon voting for more of the same,” said Sam Heller, an analyst with the Century Foundation.

“And yet that appears to be the likeliest outcome,” Lebanon’s

A new generation of independent candidates hopes to kindle the kind of change that a 2019 protest movement failed to deliver



Lebanese army vehicles drive along a road while on patrol in the southern city of Nabatiyeh during the national parliamentary elections. — AFP

crisis has been so severe that more than 80 per cent of the population is now considered poor by the United Nations, with the most desperate increasingly attempting perilous boat crossings to flee to Europe.

The Lebanese pound has lost 95 per cent of its value, people’s savings are blocked in banks, the minimum wage won’t buy a tank

of petrol and mains electricity comes on only two hours a day.

Deepening the country’s woes, much of the capital was devastated by the deadly August 2020 explosion of volatile chemicals that had been left for years in a portside warehouse, one of the largest non-nuclear blasts ever recorded.

Top political barons have stalled an investigation into the disaster,

and legal proceedings against the Central Bank governor over alleged financial crimes are equally floundering.

The army deployed across the country on Sunday to secure the election, which Lebanon’s international donors have stressed is a prerequisite for financial aid crucial to rescue it from bankruptcy. — AFP

Thousands attend new Tunisia oppn alliance demo

TUNIS: A crowd estimated at more than 2,000, lower than expected, took part on Sunday in the first demonstration of a new alliance to oppose a power grab by President Kais Saied.

“We shall overcome,” and “We are united, not divided,” read banners of the National Salvation Front protesters gathered in front of the municipal theatre on Bourguiba Avenue, a traditional hub of demonstrations in central Tunis.

“The people want... respect for the constitution and a return to democracy,” they chanted.

Veteran opposition figure Ahmed Nejib Chebbi announced the formation of the new alliance on April 26 to “save” Tunisia from deep crisis following Saied’s power grab last year. Chebbi, 78, was an opponent of ruler Zine el Abidine Ben Ali’s rule.

Demonstrators said they were disappointed by the numbers that turned out for the first public show of support for the alliance. “A larger crowd” was expected,

said Salah Tzaoui, a 57-year-old teacher, especially by those who had lived under Ben Ali who was ousted in a 2011 popular uprising that sparked the Arab Spring revolts around the region.

Saied on July 25 sacked the government, suspended parliament and seized wide-ranging powers. He later gave himself powers to rule and legislate by decree, and seized control over the judiciary.

“He wants to govern alone. It’s not possible. I’m here for my children and grandchildren,” Tzaoui said.

Khaled Benabdelkarim, a 60-year-old fellow teacher who voted for Saied three years ago, said the president had “betrayed the people. He has no political project, no economic project.”

The National Salvation Front comprises five political parties including Saied’s nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, along with five civil society groups involving independent political figures. — AFP

Palestinians mark ‘Nakba’ anniversary amid outcry over funeral raid

TEL AVIV: Palestinians rallied on Sunday to mark the “Nakba,” or catastrophe, 74 years after Israel’s creation, with condemnation spreading over a police raid on the funeral of a slain journalist.

The annual demonstrations across the occupied West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem and inside Israel came with tensions high over the killing of 51-year-old Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

The Palestinian-American was shot dead on Wednesday during an Israeli raid in Jenin, a West Bank flashpoint. A prominent Palestinian activist wounded in clashes there, Daoud al Zubaidi, died from his injuries in an Israeli hospital on Sunday.

Israeli police have vowed to investigate the chaos that marred the day of Abu Akleh’s funeral, after television footage seen across the globe showed pallbearers struggling to stop the casket from toppling to the ground as baton-wielding police descended upon them, grabbing Palestinian flags.

The scenes on Friday sparked



A young Palestinian waves national flags from a rooftop as people march in a rally marking the 74th anniversary of the ‘Nakba’ in the occupied West Bank town of Ramallah. — AFP

international condemnation, including from the United States, European Union and United Nations. Late South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s foundation said Israeli police “attacking pallbearers” was

“chillingly reminiscent of the brutality” seen at the funerals of anti-apartheid activists.

As Israel reopened following the Shabbat pause, local commentators joined the chorus lambasting the raid as Abu Akleh’s

coffin emerged from Jerusalem’s St Joseph’s hospital. “The footage from Friday,” wrote Oded Shalom in leading Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot, “documented a shocking display of unbridled brutality and violence”. — AFP

ABU DHABI

New UAE president holds talks wiht Macron

The UAE’s new president, Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, held talks with French counterpart Emmanuel Macron as world leaders streamed in to the Gulf state to pay tribute to his late predecessor.

Macron, on his first foreign trip since his second term, expressed his condolences to the leader following the death of Shaikh Khalifa. Macron, the first Western leader to pay his respects, was followed by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, US Vice-President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Israel’s president and the king of Spain, among a long list of dignitaries. — AFP

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka lifts curfew for Buddhist festival

Sri Lankan authorities lifted a nationwide curfew for an important Buddhist festival, but celebrations were muted as the island nation’s new premier struggled to find his footing and tackle a worsening economic crisis.

A countrywide stay-home order has been in place for most of the week after mob violence left nine dead and over 225 wounded, sparked by attacks on peaceful demonstrators by government loyalists. Protesters

SEOUL

N Korea reports more ‘fever’ deaths amid Covid

North Korea reported 15 additional deaths from “fever”, days after officially confirming its first-ever Covid-19 cases and ordering nationwide lockdowns.

The outbreak, which leader Kim Jong Un has said is causing “great upheaval”, leaves a country with one of the world’s worst healthcare systems on the edge of potential disaster. North Korea has no Covid vaccines, antiviral treatment drugs or mass-testing capacity. While it has maintained a rigid coronavirus blockade

since the pandemic’s start, experts have said that massive Omicron outbreaks in neighbouring countries meant it was only a matter of time before Covid snuck in. — AFP



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7

Finland announces ‘historic’ Nato bid, Sweden to follow

HELSINKI: The Finnish government officially announced its intention to join Nato on Sunday, as Sweden's ruling Social Democratic Party on Sunday said it was in favour of joining Nato, reversing its decades-long opposition and paving the way for the country to submit a membership application.

“The Social Democrats will thereby work to ensure that Sweden, if the application is approved, expresses unilateral reservations against the deployment of nuclear weapons and permanent bases on Swedish territory,” the party said in a statement just hours after neighbouring Finland announced its official intention to apply for membership.

Less than three months after Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, the move is a stunning reversal of Finland's policy on military non-alignment dating back more than 75 years.

Sweden, which has been militarily non-aligned for more than two centuries, is expected to follow suit with a similar



Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin and Finland's President Sauli Niinistö at a press conference to announce that Finland will apply for Nato membership at the Presidential Palace in Helsinki. – AFP

Stoltenberg says ‘Ukraine can win war against Russia’

BERLIN: Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said he believes Ukraine can win its war against Russia, pointing out just how far from Moscow's original plan its attack had strayed.

“Ukraine can win this war,” Stoltenberg said after attending a meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Berlin on Sunday. The war in Ukraine was not going according to plan for Moscow, Stoltenberg said, noting that the offensive in the Donbass region had stalled and Russian troops were withdrawing from the area around Kharkiv. “Russia is not achieving its strategic objectives,”

Stoltenberg said, adding “Ukraine stands. Nato is stronger than ever.”

Stoltenberg has said he does not expect the anticipated accession of Finland and Sweden to the defence alliance to be delayed by Turkey's objections. Turkey had made it clear that it did not want to block accession, Stoltenberg said at the end of a Nato foreign ministers' meeting in Berlin. “I'm confident that we will be able to address the concerns that Turkey has expressed in a way that doesn't delay the membership or the accession process,” Stoltenberg said. – dpa

announcement, possibly on Monday. “This is a historic day. A new era is opening”, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö told reporters at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Sanna Marin on Sunday.

Nato membership needs to be approved and ratified by all 30 members of the alliance.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed last-minute objections, but Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday that Ankara was not opposed to the two countries' bids. “Turkey made it clear that its intention is not to block membership,” Stoltenberg told reporters virtually after alliance foreign ministers met in Berlin.

“I am confident we'll be able to find common ground, consensus on how to move on membership issues,” Stoltenberg said, adding that he was in touch with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. Cavusoglu lauded Finland's conciliatory approach, but criticised Sweden's foreign minister for “provocative” statements.— AFP



هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (the Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred by Article (109) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal Decree (No. 78/2004) (the Sector Law), proposes to modify the Licence granted to Oman Power and Water Procurement Company S.A.O.C (Licensee) by adding a new Licence Condition in relation to transferring of assets and the Distribution and Supply business of Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC.

These proposed modifications are required to implement transfer of assets and businesses arrangements through entering into Power Purchase Agreement (PPAs) and any other agreements ancillary thereto such as the Bulk Supply Agreements (BSA) with the relevant companies.

Any person who has any objection to the proposed modifications shall submit details of their objections to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered.

Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights
Block No 9993 | Building No. 95 | First Floor.
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair
P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133
email: enquiries@apsr.om
Tel: +96824609700, Fax: +968 24609701



OMAN CHLORINE S.A.O.G. عمان كلورين ش.م.ع.م

P.O. BOX 193, POSTAL CODE 134, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN TEL: 24695839 - FAX: 24695768

Chairman's Report For the three months period ended 31 March 2022

Dear Shareholders,

After greetings.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the unaudited result of parent and group for the three months period ended March 31, 2022.

The summarized operating result for the above period is as under:

Details	Parent			Consolidated		
	31-03-22	31-03-21	Variance	31-03-22	31-03-21	Variance
	RO'000	RO'000	% YOY	RO'000	RO'000	% YOY
Sales	3,405	2,135	59%	6,997	3,981	76%
Cost of sales	(1,818)	(1,175)	-55%	(4,013)	(2,904)	-38%
Gross profit	1,587	960	65%	2,984	1,077	177%
Selling and distribution expenses	(287)	(252)	-14%	(710)	(442)	-61%
General and administrative expenses	(265)	(303)	13%	(486)	(475)	-2%
Operating profit	1,035	405	156%	1,788	160	1018%
Finance charges	(41)	(16)	-156%	(602)	(638)	-6%
Other income	78	71	10%	67	14	379%
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	-	(169)	(105)	-61%
Profit before taxation	1,072	460	133%	1,084	(569)	291%
Taxation	(164)	(55)	-198%	(164)	(55)	-198%
Profit for the period	908	405	124%	920	(624)	247%
Profit attributable to parent co. shareholders	-	-	-	936	(152)	716%
Share of profit/(loss) attributable to minority shareholders	-	-	-	(16)	(472)	97%

1. Performance Overview of Parent Company:

- The company commenced the commercial operations of our brownfield expansion for Caustic Soda Plant (30 MTD) from November 2021.
- The company consistently maintained the capacity utilization of the plant at high level and the company achieved over 99.9% capacity utilization from the existing plant and 109.47% from brownfield expansion plant for during first quarter of 2022. The combined capacity of the plant now is 75 DMT.
- The higher capacity utilization enabled to optimize the selling price to key customers wherever possible also the increased capacity utilization is likely to lead higher customer retention and improved billing in the coming years especially after commencement of commercial operations of our brownfield expansion.
- The overall sales volume increased during 2022 over 41.6% due to higher production volume resulting from expansion and improved sales prices for our products.
- The export sales volume was higher, and this is partly on account of reaching new areas in MENA, East Africa, and some European regions.
- Selling prices were higher during first three months of 2022 except Hydrochloric Acid for all the products due to steep rise in global caustic and Oil prices.

Taking into the account the competitive environment and the profitability of the parent company to be considered exceptional.

2. Performance overview of Subsidiaries

2.1 Union Chlorine LLC (UAE)

For the first three months of 2022, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 762K (Q1-2021 RO 136K). Profit of RO 249K reported during Q1-2022 against the net loss was RO 359K corresponding period 2021. The parent company's share of profit including its 100% subsidiary (OIOC) is RO 149K. The plant operating at capacity utilization of 103%, the revenue was higher due to higher international price of caustic flakes.

Amount RO ('000)		
Particulars	Q1 2022	Q1 2021
Revenue	2,238	1,333
EBITDA	762	136
Profit (Loss) after Tax	249	(359)

2.2 Gulf Chlorine LLC (Qatar)

For the first quarter of 2022, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 491K (RO 71K in Q1-2021). The net loss was RO 236K (RO 670 - Q1-2021) The parent company's share of loss is RO 120K.

Amount RO ('000)		
Particulars	Q1 2022	Q1 2021
Revenue	1,520	633
EBITDA	491	71
(Loss) after Tax	(236)	(670)

Revenue during the period has increased from RO 633K to RO 1.52 M. Company since March 2022 is operating at 100% capacity and is expected to operate at 100% capacity for remaining period of 2022.

2.3 Oman Industrial Development Company SAOC

Oman Industrial Development Company is fully owned by Oman Chlorine and the company holds an 11.1% economic interest in Union Chloride LLC – Abu Dhabi. posted loss of RO 1,019/- for the first three months Q1 2022 (RO. 1,399/- for 2021).

3. Outlook

a. Parent:

The parent company awarded the contract for the brownfield expansion of the existing Chloro Alkali plant from 45 TPD to 75 TPD which is now fully operational and for new Calcium Chloride plant with the capacity of 85 TPD in 2019, which will become operational in Q2 2022 The above expansion will lead to cost optimization and enable the parent company to cater local demand and compete effectively with imports in the local market and also enable to offer better price to export customers.

The commissioning of leading industrial ventures in Oman will improve the demand for the products and the impact will be fully reflected in the profitability once the proposed expansion goes on stream.

We are cautiously optimistic about product demand and stable price during 2022.

b. Subsidiaries

Union Chlorine LLC

Management is taking all measures to enhance sales to end-users as well increase value added

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of financial position as at 31 March 2022

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/03/2022	31/12/2021	31/03/2022	31/12/2021
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	16,364	15,859	77,549	77,520
Investment in subsidiaries	13,544	13,544	-	-
Subordinated Loan	2,302	2,302	-	-
Investment in Joint Venture	-	-	1,124	1,295
Right of use assets	820	831	2,534	2,556
Total non-current assets	33,030	32,536	81,207	81,371
Current assets				
Inventories and consumables	894	1,178	2,676	2,850
Trade and other receivables	4,100	3,540	8,644	7,488
Cash and bank balances	2,291	1,473	2,653	2,712
Total current assets	7,285	6,191	13,973	13,050
Total assets	40,315	38,727	95,180	94,421
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810
Statutory reserve	2,848	2,848	2,848	2,848
General reserve	850	850	850	850
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	(219)	(270)
Retained earnings	17,386	17,669	10,681	10,937
Equity attributable to the Parent Company's shareholders	27,894	28,177	20,970	21,175
Capital contribution from non-controlling interest	-	-	7,128	7,128
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(1,710)	(1,728)
Total equity	27,894	28,177	26,388	26,575
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	5,359	4,601	47,156	46,719
Liability on land lease non-current	830	830	2,549	2,569
End of service benefits	169	157	310	302
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	-
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	366	356
Deferred tax liability	753	742	753	742
Total non-current liabilities	7,111	6,330	51,134	50,688
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	4,613	3,633	10,560	9,432
Liability on land lease current	73	73	123	114
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	-
Current portion – Term Loan	175	218	4,563	3,443
Short term borrowings	-	-	1,963	3,778
Cashflow hedge reserve	-	-	-	95
Provision for income tax	449	296	449	296
Total current liabilities	5,310	4,220	17,658	17,158
Total liabilities	12,421	10,550	68,792	67,846
Total equity and liabilities	40,315	38,727	95,180	94,421
Net asset per share	0.410	0.414	0.387	0.329

products. The end-user contribution approach was positively reflected in the last year performance on top of the continuous improvement in the cost of production due to the adopted cost cutting measures taken by the management and the continuous reduction of electricity tariff among all. The company is mainly focusing on long term supplies to the government entities and private companies while capitalizing on value added services.

Management outlook for the selling Prices in 2022 is positive to remain in the same direction which will a key factor for generating positive returns and healthy inflow.

Gulf Chlorine WLL

For remaining months of 2022 company expect a promising outlook in terms of production, revenue growth, EBITDA and bottom-line. The JV, producing Cacl₂, in which the company holds 35% share is operating at 95% capacity, the product being at a high demand. During the period the company enter various export markets and expecting to increase its export in GCC, MENA and Europe in future

Oman Industrial Development Co. SAOC (OIOC)

The improved operating performance of Union Chlorine LLC will result in improved operating performance of OIOC.

The above measures will enhance the future cash flows of the company and its subsidiaries and will improve the financial leverage of the group.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management, we wish to express our loyalty and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik May God protect Him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its People.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Government Authorities for their support and encouragement in particular the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority as well as all the employees of the company and management for their sincere efforts, leading to the continued success of the company.

Sheikh. Said Mohamed Ahmed Al Harthy
Chairman of Board of Directors

Unaudited condensed interim Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the 3 months period ended 31 March 2022

	Parent		Consolidated	
	31/03/2022	31/03/2021	31/03/2022	31/03/2021
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Revenue	3,405	2,135	6,997	3,981
Cost of sales	(1,818)	(1,175)	(4,013)	(2,904)
Gross profit	1,587	960	2,984	1,077
Selling and distribution expenses	(287)	(252)	(710)	(442)
General and administrative expenses	(265)	(303)	(486)	(475)
Operating profit	1,035	405	1,788	160
Finance charges	(41)	(16)	(602)	(638)
Other income	78	71	67	14
Share of loss of Joint Venture	-	-	(169)	(105)
Profit before taxation	1,072	460	1,084	(569)
Current tax	(153)	(61)	(153)	(61)
Deferred tax	(11)	6	(11)	6
Profit for the period	908	405	920	(624)
Other comprehensive income:				
<i>Items that are or may be reclassified to profit or loss:</i>				
Currency translation difference of foreign subsidiaries	-	-	-	-
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	85	26
Total comprehensive income	908	405	1,005	(598)
Results attributable to:				
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	936	(152)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	(16)	(472)
Total comprehensive income attributable to:	908	405	920	(624)
Parent Company shareholders	-	-	987	(137)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	18	(461)
Earnings per share on profit attributable to the Parent Company shareholders – Basic and diluted	0.0133	0.0059	0.0137	(0.0022)

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of a written request.

How to make our schools a place of healing



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

Teachers have a unique relationship with their students and they are usually aware of when students are going through a tough time emotionally. Caring for students’ mental health is essential in providing a supportive learning environment at school. When teachers take care of their well-being and that of their students, those schools thrive.

The stress of the pandemic has impacted students and teachers alike but taking a healing-centred approach in the classroom is helpful for all. If we’re able to create spaces where emotional and social repair can take place, students are more likely to be successful academically and developmentally.

Here are some steps that teachers can bring into their classrooms to make it a place of healing and wellness. Strong relationships are the basis for learning and

creating opportunities. When students practice compassion in the classroom, it can nurture bonds between them.

With young children, assigning a classroom encourager each day is very helpful. Asking the student to keep an eye out for someone who may be struggling and be ready to offer a kind word or a helping hand teaches them to support others who may be struggling.

With older students, encouraging them to help each other, even if it is just on a math problem, shows them to reach out to their friends. When teachers model what helping looks like and sounds like and even provide sentence starters to give them an entry point, students find it easier to practice.

Collaborative learning in the classroom can be rewarding and fun for the students. Learning in groups and partnering together

AUTONOMY AND EXPLORATION ARE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE STUDENTS’ HEALING EXPERIENCE

injects joyful moments into the day, and students enjoy the learning experiences. Teachers can try socially engaging activities where students need to work together to create something, solve something or discover something. If the content seems dry, teachers can consider raising the stakes by creating a game or friendly competition.

Physical activity allows the students to work through emotions, including anxious feelings, frustration, and sadness. It also releases important hormones that buoy children’s moods. Teachers

can build-in times for students of all ages to move, whether through play at recess, gross motor work in the classroom or yoga and stretch breaks between lessons. It gives students a chance to blow off steam and tune into their bodies, allowing their brains to focus on the task at hand.

Building with their hands allows the students to accomplish something tangible, and it taps into their creativity and gives them a sense of pride when they succeed. Whether through a project, a craft or a maker’s space, opportunities where students use their hands to tinker, investigate and learn can be an excellent source of positive emotion. Beyond setting safety expectations, teachers need to make sure not to be overly prescriptive in the instructions given.

Autonomy and exploration are critical components of the students’

healing experience. When big feelings arise, having tools and routines to help students work through them will let them get back to learning more swiftly. Assisting young students to name their feelings by posting an emotions chart is always helpful.

When we carve out space in our classrooms where an overwhelmed student of any age can take a moment to collect themselves, it shows them that experiencing emotions is normal, and there is always a chance to work through our difficult emotions. It can help de-escalate a heated situation in the classroom.

Celebrating accomplishments is as essential as teaching in the classroom. Taking a moment to mark the happy moments together can go a long way toward building community and connection in our schools.

Hospital reunites Ukrainian patients and medics

Four Ukrainian flags are flapping in the cold northern wind outside the university hospital (UKSH) in Luebeck on Germany’s Baltic coast.

Since the beginning of the Russian attack, Ukrainian nurses and doctors at this ultra-modern facility have been treating patients from their home country.

Originally from Chernivtsi, close to Ukraine’s border with Romania, Oleksandra Shaniotailo, 31, was taken on as a nurse two months ago.

“I am waiting for my nursing degree to be recognised,” she tells in her newly acquired German. “In Ukraine, I worked for 11 years in a hospital,” says the young woman, who is waiting to meet the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

On the fringes of a meeting of G7 foreign ministers a few dozen kilometres away from Luebeck, Ukraine’s top diplomat has come to visit the hospital, where 61 young refugees have been taken on as nursing staff.

Between selfies with the guest of honour, the new team members share their patriotic support with Kuleba. “I am working in outpatient care for five months before starting a four-month course for my degree to be recognised,” says Anastasiia Demicheva, 20, from the same town in Bukovina.

The fragile young woman, whose make-up barely hides her pale complexion, is serving meals to patients, bathing them or helping them walk up and down the corridors of the vast hospital, which employs some 2,000 medics between Luebeck and the more northern city of Kiel.

In parallel, Anastasiia is taking German courses to be able to speak fluently with her patients.

The Ukrainian foreign minister also visits the bedsides of the Ukrainian patients who have been transferred to the hospital.

“We have cancer patients whose chemotherapy has been interrupted” by the war, says UKSH president, Jens Scholz, 63.

Among them is Oleg Kovalenko, whose cancer was diagnosed in Kyiv. With a sallow face and wearing his yellow hospital gown, he tells the visiting minister how grateful he is to be receiving treatment in Germany.

“It’s an enormous privilege,” he says in Ukrainian, before saying “danke” (“thank you”) in German.

The hospital is also hosting Ukrainian children who need major surgery or suffer from cardiac problems. — AFP



Richard Fausset

The writer is a correspondent based in Atlanta and writes about politics, culture, race and poverty

Beach houses on the outer banks are being swallowed by the sea

Like millions of other people this past week, Hien Pham marvelled at the online video of the two-story, pea-green beach house as it collapsed into a rising sea, left to bob in the agitated surf like a giant cork.

This particular giant cork, formerly at 24265 Ocean Drive, was Pham’s. He had purchased the four-bedroom place in November 2020 for \$275,000.

“It’s definitely a feeling that you can’t explain,” said Pham, 30, a Knoxville, Tennessee, real estate agent. “Just to see something that once was there, and it’s not there anymore.” The feeling, he added, “is pretty empty.”

Three prime beachfront lots are now empty on Ocean Drive, a small stretch of a charmingly scruffy Outer Banks subdivision called Trade Winds Beaches that has, to the chagrin of its property owners, become a sort of poster neighbourhood for sea-level rise — particularly since the video of Pham’s house, which collapsed on Tuesday, was shared widely on social media.

The once-generous stretch of beach in front of the houses has largely vanished in recent months, leaving them vulnerable to the destructive power of the Atlantic Ocean.

It was February 9 when the first

EXPERTS AND LOCALS NOTE THAT ON PLACES LIKE HATTERAS ISLAND, IS ONE OF NUMEROUS IMPERILLED NEIGHBOURHOODS, WHERE BEACH EROSION IS A NATURAL AND INEVITABLE PROCESS

house on the street floated away. A second house, a girthy two-story place with double wraparound porches owned by Ralph Patricelli of California, was claimed by the ocean just hours before Pham’s.

“I talked to a contractor who is helping us with the cleanup; he said there is nothing left of our house,” Patricelli said. “We don’t know where it’s gone. But it’s just completely gone.”

The gradual nature of sea-level rise means that for many coastal communities, it can feel like a distant

threat. That is not the case on North Carolina’s Outer Banks, the delicate chain of barrier islands fronting the Atlantic. Federal officials say that sea levels in the area have risen roughly 1 inch every five years, with climate change being one key reason. State officials say that some Outer Banks beaches are shrinking more than 14 feet per year in some areas. “The water’s already high and the waves are coming that much further inland, eating away at sand in a way that it wouldn’t if the seas were lower,” said William Sweet, an expert on sea-level rise at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Experts and locals note that on places like Hatteras Island, a thin strip of land where Trade Winds Beaches is one of numerous imperilled neighbourhoods, beach erosion is a natural and inevitable process. Barrier islands get battered by storms on the ocean side, with the sands shifting westward, building up on the bay side.

David Hallac, superintendent of the National Parks of Eastern North Carolina, said that rising seas, and the increased frequency and intensity of storms, are likely intensifying the erosion on Ocean Drive, which abuts the Hatteras Island National Seashore. Patricelli, who was never a climate-change doubter, said the disappearance of his house brought the issue out of the realm of abstraction. “I think I have been naive that it’s not going to affect me on the level that it just did,” he said. “Having experienced this, I have a whole new level, in my head, of how severe climate change is.”

The last two houses were destroyed amid a multi-day nor’easter that pushed sand and wind onto North Carolina Highway 12, closing the essential two-lane route onto Hatteras Island for more than a day. On Thursday, Ocean Drive was a post-storm mess. The pavement was buried under several feet of sand, as if in a snowstorm.

Splintered wood and other debris from the two houses were scattered around, spreading southward along the coast. — *New York Times*



Two homes collapse into the Atlantic Ocean on the coast of Rodanthe, NC, after a storm.

Tribute to angels in scrubs



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

Reflecting on real life experiences, soldiers are always highly valued by almost everyone. This comes in return to sacrificing their life, time and effort to save their countries. To them, saving their home land is a sacred responsibility. On the other hand nurses are soldiers too, but are they valued as much as soldiers?! Perhaps yes, but not by all as some might associate the word “nurse” to a

personal experience that reminds them of a certain incident in a hospital. Else, the word brings back an old memory of a loved one who had been treated by a nurse.

In another connotation, the word “nurse” describes a person who is strong enough to tolerate anything and soft enough to understand anyone. Generally, nurses are called angles of mercy, dispensing to their patients comfort, compassion, and caring without even a prescription. However, very often we underestimate the power of a nurse’s touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring; all of which have the potential to turn a life around.

Becoming a nurse is one of the most selfless acts a person can undertake. In a world of so many different races, cultures, customs, and beliefs, nurses are a universal gift to all. Nurses care is based on the individual’s physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, social and spiritual needs. Nursing combines physical science, social science, nursing theory and the skill in caring for those individuals too. Nurses kindness delivered in

every corner of hospitals serves as a reminder of the fundamental humanity inside us all.

Nurses remain committed to providing care and nurturing of both healthy and ill people, individually, or in groups, or even communities. Nurses are simply life-savers who believe in Einstein’s saying “Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile”. Behind the scrubs and lab coats are an army of devoted professionals that deserve to be respected and valued. Nurses are a compassion in scrubs and will always give patients hope. They fill their hearts with love and spend their life in service.

Hence, all mankind owes nurses respect and gratitude for all what they deliver to humanity. According to the “State of the World’s Nursing 2020 report”, issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), jointly with the International Council of Nurses and Nursing Now, about 59 per cent of all healthcare professionals are nurses and the global workforce of nurses is currently around 28 million, of which 19.3 million are professional nurses, 6 million are associate professional nurses and the remainder is not being classified.

On the other hand, to all nurses, Plato advised you to be kind as everyone you meet is fighting a battle. As a nurse, you have the opportunity to heal the mind, soul, heart, and body of your patients. They may forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel. Be the nurse you would want as a patient, as Charles Dickens said, “Have a heart that never hardens, a temper that never tires, a touch that never hurts”. Just remember to work for a cause, not for applause and to live life to express, not to impress. Thus, never strive to make your presence noticed, but make it felt.

A nurse is the one who opens the eyes of a newborn and gently closes the eyes of a dying man. It is indeed a high blessing to be the first and last to witness the beginning and end of life. Every day, a nurse will either touch a life or a life will touch hers. A nurse is always there for everyone of us and is drawn to nursing because of a desire to care, to serve, or to help. Tribute to all nurses; they are not only stitching painful wounds, but crowning patients with happiness!



Ecosystem restoration is good for your health

ANUJA MALHOTRA& ABI VANAK

Humanity currently faces multiple, interlinked existential crises. The catastrophic consequences of climate change, ecological degradation, and biodiversity loss have cascading knock-on effects on human health and well-being. As the Covid-19 pandemic illustrates, ecosystem damage can contribute significantly to a global public-health emergency. But scientists are also increasingly finding that ecological restoration, by reversing the threats to soil, biodiversity, water, and other ecosystem services, can deliver major health benefits.

There have been many attempts to understand the nexus between ecological degradation and human health. A recent study of over 6,800 ecosystems across six continents provided further evidence that deforestation and extinction of species will make pandemics more likely. Ecosystem damage also leads to water contamination, creating breeding grounds for infectious diseases. Similarly, soil degradation not only reduces agricultural productivity, but also has been linked to disease and increased mortality.

The emergence and spread of zoonotic diseases like Covid-19 are closely associated with the health of ecosystems. For example, 75 per cent of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic, caused by unsustainable use of natural resources, factory farming of animals, and other industrial-scale anthropogenic factors.

Ecosystem decline has also contributed in recent decades to reduced immunological resilience and an increase in allergic conditions in humans. The effects are not limited to physical health, but also include mental-health problems such as an increase in eco-anxiety, or fear of environmental damage due to ongoing ecosystem degradation.

Conversely, restoring natural ecosystems could provide pathways for reversing some of the effects of climate change and ease the global chronic-disease burden, thus improving human health and well-being. One recent study showed that soil restoration and the reintroduction of native plant species led to a reduction in physical and psychological impacts of certain diseases. In another case, ecological restoration of an urban river in northwest England was linked to psychological benefits for surrounding communities.

There is also evidence that ecological restoration can protect people from extreme climate events and related public-health crises. Finally, using alternative cooking fuels such as biogas in improved

stoves, thereby reducing the need for fuelwood and helping to prevent forest degradation, has been shown to improve respiratory health and household diets.

The economic case for ecological restoration is strong. Rising public-health costs and the significant disease burden – exacerbated by the pandemic – strengthen the case further. The World Health Organization estimates that global spending on health rose continuously between 2000 and 2018, to \$8.3 trillion, or 10 per cent of world GDP.

Some prominent international efforts to reap the benefits of ecological restoration to planetary and human health are already under way. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, running from 2021 to 2030, and the land degradation neutrality programme of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification encourage signatory countries to recognise the central importance of ecological restoration. Likewise, the #HealthyRecovery initiative, signed by over 4,500 health professionals from 90 countries, urged G20 leaders to fund projects that enable ecological restoration as part of their pandemic stimulus packages.

In recent decades, researchers have developed various models – including the Mandala of Health, the Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs, and, more recently, the One Health approach – to capture the interconnected relationship between humans and nature. The challenge now is to develop a unifying framework to maximise the synergy of ecological restoration and human health.

Policies designed to address one should not exclude the other.

We therefore need to redefine ecological degradation, understand its far-reaching effects on human health, and recognise that these effects cannot be fully addressed without structured, context-specific ecological restoration plans. Achieving this will require institutionalising and mainstreaming inter-sectoral collaboration between scientists and practitioners from the ecological, medical, and sustainability domains.

Alliances and a sense of ownership among core governance structures of public health and ecosystem restoration will be crucial. In India, for example, a pioneering effort to mainstream cross-disciplinary initiatives is bringing together the government, scientists, and local partners and practitioners with the aim of improving zoonotic-disease control. Such a framework can generate valuable knowledge and insights for similar collaborative initiatives elsewhere.

Ecological restoration is a clear and identifiable way to tackle the global disease burden and improve public health.

As the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration commences, policymakers should encourage collective action to spur inclusive, interdisciplinary activities that demonstrate the positive global benefits of restoration for social, physical, and mental health. We owe it to ourselves and to the planet to mitigate at least some of the threats we have created.

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Pariama Hutasoit, a 52-year-old coral reef conservationist, along with volunteers, cleans the coral nursery from algae in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia.– Reuters

sport

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Oman sink Bangladesh to emerge champions

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Oman thrashed Bangladesh 6-2 in the final to emerge champions of the 2022 Asian Games Qualifiers tournament in Bangkok on Sunday.

World No 23 ranked Oman held a clear advantage over World No 29 Bangladesh in the final of the qualifying tournament for the Asian Games 2022 to clinch their

first major trophy in recent times.

Oman pumped in three goals in the first quarter and one in the third quarter and struck the target twice in the last quarter.

The resounding triumph by the Sultanate of Oman team turned out to be a sweet revenge for their 5-3 final defeat against the same opponents in penalty shoot-out at the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Cup in Jakarta, Indonesia on March 30. The match ended 1-1 at full-time.

In the Thailand capital, Oman started strongly with Ammaar al Shaaibi striking early from a penalty corner in the third minute.

Fahad al Lawati made it 2-0 for Oman in the seventh minute with a field goal. Two minutes later, Salah al Saadi found the target through a field goal.

Bangladesh defence was rattled by Oman's fast attacks from the kick off as they conceded three goals in the first 10 minutes itself.

The Tigers then turned focus on the defence to avoid further goals and manoeuvred the job successfully till the end of second quarter.

After the break, Oman returned to their original self as Mubarak bin Asaad al Qasmi scored a field goal in the 33rd minute.

With Oman leading 4-0, Bangladesh made some desperate attempts to reduce the huge deficit.

A resultant penalty corner in

the 47th minute was successfully converted by Ashraful Islam to make it 4-1.

Star Omani player Rashad al Fazari came into the act in the 50th minute with a brilliant field goal to put his team 5-1 ahead.

Oman continued their brilliant form as Asama al Shibli made it 6-1 in the 58th minute through another field goal.

Fazla Rabby returned one goal for Bangladesh with one minute to go but it was beyond the reach

for his team in the final as Oman stormed to a 6-2 victory.

In the semifinals on Saturday, Oman blanked Indonesia 2-0 while Bangladesh outsmarted hosts Thailand 4-1.

In the play-off matches on Sunday, Indonesia edged Thailand 4-3 to claim the third position.

Sri Lanka finished in fifth spot after beating Uzbekistan 3-1 in the penalty shoot-out. At regulation time, the match ended in a thrilling 3-3 draw.



Members of the Indian men's badminton team celebrate after defeating Indonesia in the men's finals of the Thomas and Uber Cup badminton tournament in Bangkok on May 15, 2022. — AFP

Ruthless India make history with first Thomas Cup crown

BANGKOK: India made history by winning the Thomas Cup for the first time with a ruthless 3-0 upset of reigning champions Indonesia in Bangkok on Sunday. India, competing in their debut final of the men's team championship, sealed the title when world number 11 Kidambi Srikanth defeated higher-ranked Jonatan Christie 21-15, 23-21.

A devastated Indonesia, the tournament's most successful team having previously won it 14 times, could not keep pace with the fire brought by the Indian team — who joyfully rushed the court following Srikanth's win.

India were already 2-0 up, with Lakshya Sen beating Anthony Ginting in the first singles match and then Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty defeating Mohammad Ahsan and Kevin Sukamuljo in the doubles.

It fell to Christie, an Asian Games gold medallist now in his fourth Thomas Cup campaign, to save Indonesia's flagging title hopes.

But the eighth-ranked Christie couldn't do it and seemed overcome with nerves at the onset of his do-or-die match against Srikanth.

The 29-year-old Srikanth took full advantage, bearing down relentlessly on Christie in the second game.

Srikanth praised his teammates for their performance individually and as a team, noting: "I think everyone really stepped up when it was required."

"A credit goes to the whole team, players, coaches, support team. I love them, they have been fantastic. It's one of the best teams that I have been part of," he said.

"Thomas Cup is something that India has never won and now to be part of a team that won the Thomas Cup and to contribute to the team's win just gives me a lot of happiness," he added.

Srikanth, who told reporters the team's WhatsApp group was called 'it's coming home', said while the team hadn't got any firm plans for celebrations that evening, "it's definitely going to be crazy".

A dispirited Christie said it wasn't easy coming into his match 2-0 down in the tie, but that he had given his all.

"We already tried our best, I think, and we will try our best the next time," he said. — AFP

Australia cricketer Andrew Symonds dies in car crash

SYDNEY: Australian cricket was reeling on Sunday after swashbuckling former all-rounder Andrew Symonds was killed in a car crash — another tragic blow after the recent deaths of fellow greats Shane Warne and Rod Marsh.

The 46-year-old, who played 26 Tests and 198 one-day internationals from 1998 to 2009, was involved in a single-car accident outside Townsville in Queensland state on Saturday night. Police said emergency services attempted to revive him, but he died from his injuries after the car left the road and rolled.

Pictures published by the Brisbane Courier-Mail showed a vehicle on its roof and skid marks on the road.

"We are still in shock — I'm just thinking of the two kids," his tearful wife Laura told the newspaper, referring to their young children. "He was the most laid-back person. Nothing stressed him out."



Cricket Australia chairman Lachlan Henderson said the sport had lost "another of its very best".

"Andrew was a generational talent who was instrumental in Australia's success at World Cups and as part of Queensland's rich cricket history," he added. "He was a cult figure to many who was treasured by his fans and friends."

Symonds' fatal crash comes just months after the deaths of fellow Australian greats Warne and Marsh, who both died unexpectedly from heart attacks. — AFP

Spectacular qualifying from Al Harthy on Imola debut

MILAN: History-making racing driver Ahmad al Harthy entered his name into the motorsport record books once again on Saturday, 14th May, after sensationally becoming the first Omani to qualify on pole position in the prestigious European Le Mans Series.

Delivering a faultless, sensational performance during the GTE qualifying session for round two of the season at Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari in Imola, Italy, the Oman Racing driver secured the GTE pole for today's four-hour race by just under 0.4 seconds.

Having been quick throughout practice, Al Harthy and teammates Sam De Haan and Marco Sorensen made good progress with the set-up of the No.69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE and in the standalone run for bronze graded drivers Al Harthy topped the times — a lap of 1m42.712 seconds.

Carrying the hopes of the Oman Racing trio into qualifying, Al Harthy went on to produce another exemplary showing and the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS backed sportsman dominated the session.

Posting a time of 1m42.299 seconds on his first flying lap, almost half a second clear of his nearest rival, Al Harthy sliced more than



three tenths of a second off his benchmark with his second lap, a superb time of 1m41.974 seconds — placing him an incredible 0.8 seconds ahead.

Ultimately ending the session 0.383 seconds clear, with that second lap, the Omani was elated to achieve his first European Le Mans Series pole position and particularly on his first ever visit to world-famous Imola.

The tremendous showing fol-

lows on from a top two qualifying performance during the ELMS championship curtain-raiser at Circuit Paul Ricard in France last month, underlining Al Harthy's renowned competitiveness and consistency.

"I'm really happy with our performance, it's great to have my first ELMS pole and it's obviously a very proud moment for me to fly the flag for Oman in this way", said an elated Al Harthy, "It's great to be here at

Imola, my first time as well, and the team did a great job in getting the car where we wanted it — honestly, perfect, perfect teamwork.

"We've worked all weekend throughout the practice sessions to make sure we have a good race car, so I'm really looking forward to the race now and getting a good result. As always, a huge thank you to my incredible partners for enabling us to be here in the ELMS this year."

Ahly stay on track for third straight CAF Champions League title

JOHANNESBURG: Mohamed Sherif equalised in added time for Al Ahly of Egypt as they drew 2-2 at Entente Setif of Algeria on Saturday to stay on course for an unprecedented third straight CAF Champions League title.

Ahmed Abdel Kader put Ahly in front after only two minutes of the semi-final second leg before goals either side of half-time from Ahmed Kendouci and Riad Benayah edged Setif ahead.

But two-time African champions Setif were denied the consolation of a home victory in Algiers when South African Percy Tau set up Sherif to equalise.

Ahly won the semi-final 6-2 on aggregate having built a four-goal first-leg lead in Cairo last weekend, and will face long-time rivals Wydad Casablanca of Morocco in the May 30 final.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) have scheduled the title decider in the premier African club competition for Morocco, saying they were the only bidders.

However, record 10-time champions Ahly want the match staged at a neutral venue and have appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Switzerland to overturn the CAF decision.

Ahly and Wydad met in the 2017 final with the Moroccans winning 2-1 on aggregate over two legs, before single-match finals were introduced two seasons ago.

CAF say they will consider reverting to two-leg Champions League finals, but are adamant



that the 2022 title decider must go ahead in Morocco.

HOPELESS TASK

Tau scored twice and created the other two goals in the first leg and his pass put Abdel Kader through to fire past goalkeeper Sofiane Khedairia less than two minutes after the kick-off.

The goal left Setif needing to score at least six to pull off the greatest comeback in Champions League history.

That was never going to happen against opponents as formidable

as Ahly, who have won 23 titles across four CAF competitions.

Instead, the Black Eagles sought the consolation of a home victory over the Red Devils and drew level as half-time approached.

Kendouci turned in the box and unleashed a hard, rising shot that flew into the net past captain and goalkeeper Mohamed el Shenawy off the underside of the crossbar.

Benayah notched his fifth goal in Africa this season to give Setif the lead just past the hour mark, beating El Shenawy with a shot from outside the box that flew into

the net off the surface.

Substitute Sherif then spoilt the pending victory celebrations of Algerian supporters with his sixth goal — one less than Champions League leading scorer Tiago Azalao from Angolan club Petro Luanda.

On Friday, Petro exceeded expectations by holding Wydad to a 1-1 draw in Casablanca in the other second leg, but the Moroccans advanced 4-2 on aggregate to their third final appearance in six seasons.

— AFP

Taha al Kishry elected as chairman of Arab Swimming Federation



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The General Assembly of the Arab Swimming Federation elected Taha Suleiman al Kishry as chairman of the federation during the meeting which was held in Morocco. Al Kishry elected as president for the third time in a row. Taha is among the experienced figures in the Arab world in the swimming sport as he has many sports positions at the local, regional and international levels.

The position of vice chairman won by Hamid Jassim al Gharib from Kuwait, Khaled Hassan al Khulaifi from Yemen, and from Algeria Ali Khalaf. While members of Board of Directors posts were won by, Ali Youssef Jaber from Qatar, Abdullah al Wahaibi from the UAE, Khaled Abdul Wahed Kabyan from Iraq, Osman Muhammad al Qunain from Libya, Amir Abdel Gawad

Ahmed from Egypt, Al Hadi bin Hassan from Tunisia, and Fawaz Zalloum from Palestine.

Al Kishry confirmed that he will work with the elected council members to move forward in implementing the approved plans and programmes made by the Arab National Federations. “ We will target supporting targeted programmes to promote spreading of aquatic sports in Arab countries, supporting programmes for preparing specialised human capabilities, raising the level of their administrative and technical competence to bring them to the international standards, developing and diversifying Arab competitions, championships and courses to raise the competitive capabilities of Arab swimmers, and support programmes and plans directed at swimmers that would enhance their competitive abilities at the global level” he ended.



Seeb crowned OL champions

S A H A M , N I Z W A A N D M U S C A T R E L E G A T E D

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Omantel League champions Seeb ended their concluding game of the 2021-22 top-tier league against Dhofar with a 1-1 draw late on Saturday.

At the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, Seeb players were crowned champions as they secured the second straight OL title. The Muscat-based team ended the season on a great note as they claimed both the top domestic titles by winning the HM Cup and Omantel League.

The champions topped the league table with 55 points

including 16 triumphs, seven draws and three defeats. It was the second time that Seeb won the title, the previous being in 2019-20.

At the end of the match, Shaikh Talal al Mamari, CEO of Omantel League, gave away the league shield to Seeb captain in presence of a big crowd of club supporters. The final ceremony of the league was attended by Shaikh Salim al Wahaibi, OFA chairman, and officials.

With the league and HM Cup triumphs, Seeb are equipped well to begin their campaign at 2022 AFC Cup on a strong note as they host Group A matches at Seeb

Stadium. Seeb will meet Syria's Jbleh SC club on Wednesday while they will face three times AFC Cup champions Kuwait SC on Saturday. The concluding game will be against Lebanon's Al Ansar club on Tuesday.

RELEGATED TEAMS

In the Omantel league, Saham, Nizwa and Muscat were relegated to the first division league. Saham were held to a 2-2 draw by Al Musannah while Muscat ended their game against Al Nasr in a 1-1 draw. Bahla thrashed Nizwa 4-1 to stay among the top flight teams.

Al Nahda ended their

campaign in the top domestic division league in the runners-up position with 53 points. The Al Buraimi club representatives beat Al Suwaiq 1-0 in their final fixture at 26th week of Omantel League. Salalah giants Dhofar finished in third place with 48 points while Al Musannah were in fourth position at 43 points. Sohar completed their league fixtures with a 1-0 win over Al Rustaq to finish sixth with 39 points. Salim al Maqbali netted the all-important goal. Al Ittihad remained in the league after defeating Oman club 1-0 at Salalah Sports Complex. The win took Al Ittihad to 10th position with 25 points.

Late drama in cup double for Liverpool

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MAY 15

Liverpool lifted the FA Cup after a dramatic 6-5 penalty shootout win against Chelsea replicating their victory in the League (Carabao) Cup final in February when they beat the same opponents in a 11-10 penalties.

The win keeps alive their dream of achieving a historic quadruple this season as they aim for the Premier League crown with the European Champions League final to come on May 28 against Real Madrid.

Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp, who has now won all six major club trophies available said: “It feels outstanding. It was incredibly intense. The penalty shootout was nerve-racking, my nails are gone. I couldn't be more proud of them with the shift they put in and how hard they fought.”

He added: “They are mentality monsters but I saw them in yellow too (the kit colour Chelsea played in). I really feel for Chelsea. They would have deserved to win too. But for us I am pretty happy. In the end there must be one winner and we'll enjoy it.”

Liverpool took early control and Chelsea were being overrun. They took time to settle. They were without their regular strikers,



Kai Havertz and Timo Werner, both injured. Chelsea's defence came under pressure with quick passes particularly from man-of-the-match Luiz Diaz and Trent Alexander-Arnold who worked

tirelessly throughout.

Diaz had the chance for an early goal when in the 9th minute his low shot was saved by Edouard Mendy's legs at first but as the ball slowly went towards the goal,

Trevoh Chalobah quick to get back, cleared it before Mo Salah could get to it.

At the other end, Christian Pulisic, in the 23rd minute, received a cross from Mason

Mount in the box but clipped it just wide of the left post. A few minutes later Marcus Alonso's shot was blocked by Alisson who had come out to narrow the angle.

Liverpool star player Mo Salah

had to come off injured in the 33rd minute with a supposed groin injury and was replaced by Diogo Jota. Even though Chelsea were livelier of the two sides for long periods during the second half, Liverpool were unlucky – with eight minutes before end of normal time – to see shots from Diaz hit the outside of the post and Andrew Robertson's volley at a curled cross from substitute James Milner hit the other post.

After the energy-sapping extra time ended in stalemate, came the dreaded penalties. Chelsea's second attempt from the spot kick by Cesar Azpilicueta hit the upright and Liverpool's Sadio Mane's shot was pushed away to the left by the diving Mendy.

After substitute Hakim Ziyech scored with the sixth shot, Alisson saved Mason Mount's low attempt. That finally set the stage for Kostas Tsimikas to send himself and Liverpool into a frenzy with the seventh shot firmly into the target in front of the numb Chelsea supporters.

A subdued Chelsea manager, Thomas Tuchel said: “We can produce peak performances to compete with Liverpool. The difference is they can do it Saturday to Wednesday. They have a bigger squad.”

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CBO instructs banks to expedite resolution of complaints

CODE OF CONDUCT: Quarterly regulatory reporting on complaints and disputes to become mandatory for all licensed entities effective from 2023

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has called on licensed banks and finance companies in the Sultanate of Oman to adopt concrete mechanisms to ensure that complaints and disputes raised by customers are addressed and resolved promptly, efficiently and equitably.

The new guidelines are set out in a Code of Conduct that forms the basis of a newly introduced regulatory framework for the protection of the rights and interests of financial consumers in the country.

The move promises to offer a



measure of consolation to many financial customers who have long lamented what they allege is the often lackadaisical approach of banks and financing companies in the handling of their complaints.

“Core to an effective Financial Consumer Protection Framework is an accessible and efficient recourse mechanism that allows consumers both to know and to assert their rights to have their complaints addressed and resolved in a transparent and just way within a reasonable timeframe,” Tahir Salim al Amri, Executive President – CBO, noted in a recent circular to licensed banking and financing entities

covered by the new framework. “The timely resolution of complaints, including provision of redress where warranted, is the primary responsibility of licensed entities,” he further stated.

In the circular, the Central Bank bemoaned that it has “been receiving many complaints directly from consumers, who claim to be unaware of the existing internal complaints handling mechanisms and procedures at Licensed Entities”.

In this regard, it directed all banks and financing entities to “widely publicise” information on how consumers may submit any complaints, and the channels

made available for that purpose. Additionally, the apex bank stressed the need for the expeditious resolution of complaints, noting that it “has been receiving many complaints of delayed resolution of cases”.

Calling on banks to be fully accessible to customers with grievances, the Central Bank stated: “Make available a range of channels—telephone, email, web, mobile—for submitting consumer complaints appropriate to the type of consumers served and their physical location, including offering a toll-free telephone number to the extent possible, depending on the size and

complexity of their operations.

Specially tailored channels may also be needed for consumers with low or no literacy, and the speech or hearing impaired,” it stressed. Significantly, quarterly regulatory reporting on complaints and disputes will become mandatory for all licensed entities effective from 2023, the Central Bank revealed.

“Licensed entities are advised to ensure that their complaints handling and database systems are fully equipped to accurately report complaints related statistics,” it noted in the circular.

Additionally, banks and financing company will be required

to publish annually certain data on complaints, including the number of complaints, the average length of time for resolution, and the number of complaints satisfactorily resolved, it added.

The Financial Consumer Protection Regulatory Framework, issued by the Central Bank earlier this month, applies to all products and services offered by banks and FLCs (finance & leasing companies) to individual consumers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Also falling within its remit are liability offerings and loans, investment, bancassurance and other products.

Manufacturing Matters: The rise of Gen Z Omani micro-manufacturers

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

The Sultanate of Oman is a country that makes things. From car batteries, cables, footwear, ceramic tiles, sanitary ware to luxury fragrances, the products manufactured in the country are incredibly diverse.

Representing 9.5 per cent of GDP, employing over 200,000 people and exported to more than 130 countries, manufacturing is at the heart of Oman Vision 2040 and the topic of discussion for Wednesday evening’s Tejarah Talks at the Civil Aviation Authority in Al Hail North.

Breathing new life into the sector is the growth of Gen Z managed micro-manufacturers - small Omani businesses typically employing fewer than 10 people that are catering to a specialised market, one generally neglected or forgotten by larger companies.

They are often innovative twists on old ideas, completely new innovations or throwbacks to lost ways of doing things.

According to Maymuna al Adawi of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) and Tejarah Talks organiser, though small in size, many of these micro-manufacturers are becoming an economic force to



be reckoned with. A revolution in manufacturing is coming.

The power of automation and the dropping of the costs of tools is altering the landscape of how things get made in the Sultanate of Oman. In fact, the micro-manufacturing sector is part of a much larger creative economy that represents 3 per cent of global GDP, creating around 30 million jobs and generating over \$2 trillion in revenue.

“Micro-manufacturing is nothing new,” explained al Adawi, “but what we’re seeing is its resurgence, from women’s fashion to precision engineering, where innovation in design is creating products that meet the needs of today’s sophisticated, eco-conscious Omani consumer.”

This new breed of creative Omani micro-manufacturers includes artists, builders, programmers, engineers, bakers and graphic designers, all specialising in custom products, small quantities and

fast turnaround - making everything from high-end fashion, organic cosmetics, to frankincense infused chocolate. “These are creative people that just want to design and make cool things. They want to make stuff and they want to do that personally,” emphasised Al Adawi.

Today, small batch Omani manufacturers do not need large factories. Instead, they require compact, micro-manufacturing facilities tailored to small, flexible production runs like those offered by Muscat’s Innovation Factory and the Makers Oman Centre. “A few years ago, two guys with laptops described an Internet start-up. Now it describes a micro-manufacturing firm,” says Al Adawi.

Organised by MoCIIP in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth, Oman Business Forum, HSBC and SOHAR Port & Freezone the 7:30 pm Wednesday, May 18 Tejarah Talks panel includes His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Founder, The Firm; Cinzia Farisè, CEO, Oman Cables; Nadia al Zakwani (pictured), Managing Director, Endamage; Eng Hilal al Shibli, General Manager, Makers Oman Centre; and Firas al Balushi, CEO, Innovation Factory. To register for Tejarah Talks, email TT@tejarah.gov.om

شركة الفجر العالمية ش.م.ع.ع. AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN			
Group's Unaudited Financial Results for the nine months ended 31 March 2022			
Chairman's Report	Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income		
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the report on the activities and unaudited financial results of the company for the 3rd quarter ended 31 March 2022.	GROUP		PARENT
	31.03.2022 RO.	31.03.2021 RO.	31.03.2022 RO.
1. Operating Results			
The Group's total revenue for the nine months period ended 31 March 2022 was RO 13.384 million as against the previous year's revenue of RO. 14.821.	13,384,498 (10,862,885)	14,820,985 (12,212,761)	4,829,411 (3,550,970)
The Parent Company made RO 0.522 million profit after taxation compared to RO 0.632 million for the same period in the last financial year.			5,070,444 (3,651,641)
The Group recorded a consolidated loss after taxation of RO 0.179 million for the nine months period ended 31 March 2022 against the net profit of RO 0.032 million in the same period of the previous year.			
2. Operations			
Compared to the previous year, the Group revenue decreased by 10% on account of a slowdown in the market due to COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions during the major part of the reporting period. Further to the above, world-wide non-availability and increase of the price in major explosives raw materials played a major role in the reduction of turnover as well as profitability. The pandemic also contributed delays in collection of receivables that restricted us from taking up projects in order not to increase exposure in the Market. The Covid restriction is slowly being eased worldwide and we are confident that your company will achieve better results in the coming period.			
The drilling and blasting industry in Fujairah (UAE) is continuing its good performance but the recent issue of non-availability of the major raw material and increase in the raw materials price will have an impact during the Q2 of 2022.			
Explosives supply from Geodynamics is continuing with limited storage facility available and work on phase 2 of the Explosives facility is delayed due to increase of COVID-19 on account of new Omicron variant. We hope that after the completion of Phase 2 and the resultant additional storage facility, the volume will increase in the upcoming months and will help to improve the revenue and profitability of the Group.			
3. Health, Safety and the Environment			
Your Company is operated in a safe and efficient manner in strict compliance with the highest safety standards and in accordance with the prevailing Royal Oman Police Explosives Rules and Regulations.			
No accidents or environmental incidents were reported during quarter ended 31 March 2022.			
Your Company was in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations during the 9 months ended 31 March 2022.			
4. Future Outlook			
We would like to update the esteemed shareholders that construction work on Phase 2 of the proposed explosives facility in the UAE is in progress albeit with delays due to the Pandemic restrictions and funding requirements. Once this is completed, the additional storage facility will help to increase volume in the coming months. We are confident that this would enhance the overall profitability of the Group.			
Explosives and Drilling and Blasting industry in Oman as well as in UAE facing severe issues due non-availability of major raw materials and an increase in the raw materials price threefold. We expect that new infra projects will commence in the second half of 2022 due to the region's healthy situation created by the recent hike in oil revenue.			
The current increase of COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant resulted in further delay in the start of full-fledged production of the Gypsum mine. The situation is expected to improve in the coming months considering the low impact of the Omicron and Vaccination drive. We will achieve targeted production once the world market fully opens ups, which will add value to Group.			
Ahjaar Mining started commercial production in the Quarry where your company has 30% shareholding. Your company has an off-take agreement for aggregate produced in this Quarry. We have successfully completed two export consignments to Qatar during Q1 of 2022. We are confident that we will continue to sell aggregates in the coming months as we signed a back-to-back agreement for the supply of this material to the Qatar market that will add value to the Group.			
All new ventures are delayed until the world market situation improves post-COVID-19.			
5. Acknowledgements			
The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.			
The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.			
Haythem Mahmood Abd Al-Nabi Macki Chairman			
Note			
The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.			

Alizz Islamic Bank donates RO 20,000 to charity

MUSCAT: In line with the resolution of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to allocate at least (20%) twenty per cent of the corporate social responsibility budget to Oman Charitable Organization, Alizz Islamic Bank announced that it donated an amount of RO 20,000 to the Organization in the presence of the bank's CEO, Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthi and Mohammed bin Hammoud al Dhuhli, CEO of Oman Charitable Organization, at the headquarters of the Organization in Al Khuwair.

Prior to the handover of the amount, a meeting was held between both sides to discuss details of the Organization's activities and the role it plays towards the community with regard to receiving and collecting donations, gifts and other obligatory and voluntary charity

in order to help those in need.

Also discussed was finance projects that care for children, orphans or the elderly, support and social welfare projects and programmes that benefit citizens and provide urgent aid (relief) to victims of disasters, fires or accidents, whether individuals or institutions, inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The Organization also offers aid to social and charitable institutions and the poor and the needy inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman. The bank's CEO was also briefed on the programmes administered by the Organization, such as educational, medical, and food aid programmes, as well as orphans and needy families' support.

It's noteworthy that the bank's social responsibility policy is aligned with its mission of achieving exceptional and



sustainable results for our shareholders. In this regard, the bank launched several projects that have a positive impact on society by creating value for everyone. Since its inception, Alizz Islamic Bank has focused on investing in our communities

with a view to providing a better life for the people it serves across the Sultanate of Oman, in addition, it believes that investing in sustainable initiatives is critical to achieving the welfare of society.

The bank has offered strong support to effective national

organisations that seek to build strong and flexible communities; and has contributed to the growth of non-profit social organisations.

Alizz Islamic Bank has recently entered into voluntary partnerships to support various social initiatives, under direct supervision by the CEO, such as building the Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities and collecting donations for orphans of the Child Care Center. In addition, it is collaborating with a number of associations to engage employees in voluntary work.

The bank implemented various social responsibility programmes, such as a direct donation of RO 150,000 to the Shaheen emergency fund supervised by Oman Charitable Organization, launching a relief and food campaign to support those affected by the Cyclone, with the participation of a large number of

volunteers from all over Oman to distribute aids to those affected.

The bank also provided accommodation and support to our customers who were directly affected by the cyclone. Moreover, the bank recently had its flagship 'Iftar Sayem' initiative for the eighth consecutive year, to hand out Ramadan boxes, filled with essential food items, to low-income families in the communities we work in.

The bank also supported the efforts of the Ministry of Social Development by providing students from Low-income families with the advanced technologies they need in order to access the distance learning platforms that schools resorted to due to the pandemic, as the bank donated 50 laptops and 10 tablets to the ministry to ensure that these children can continue their education.

OCEC hires highly skilled management personnel to reinforce market presence

MUSCAT: As part of their plan to continue hosting large-scale events following the country's recovery from Covid-19, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) has hired a number of highly skilled and experienced middle and senior management personnel.

The new hires come as OCEC rapidly gains momentum in 2022 with its roll-out of an exciting line-up of events, conferences and exhibitions, after having had to suspend nearly all events for a 16-month period following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

The new members of OCEC's elite team — which include three Omanis and one expatriate — are set to further enhance OCEC's operational capacity, and reinforce its status as a world-class venue delivering exceptional facilities and operations for the local

and international Meetings, Conferencing & Exhibitions sector.

Collectively, the new personnel bring to OCEC well over 60 years' experience from the events industry and related sectors, as well as proven expertise, and proven track records of success in their individual fields.

The OCEC will leverage each individual's experience as team and strategic leaders — and their contribution of new, innovative ideas, and best practice approaches to each department, and the rapidly evolving international events industry.

Eng Said al Shanfari, CEO — OCEC, stated: "In our hosting of world-class events and provision of state-of-the-art services and infrastructure for event organisers, the OCEC is committed to maintaining the highest standards in

business and operational excellence. We are therefore delighted to welcome these new, highly qualified and highly experienced members to our team. I am confident that they will make a significant and value-adding impact within our Business Development department, Human Resources, and Event Operations, both in their individual capacity, and while working with our existing team members, partners and stakeholders."

In OCEC's Business Development department, the new hires include Talal al Mushaifri, Director; and Maryam al Balushi, Live Events Manager. Hisham al Ojaili joins OCEC's Human Resource department as Human Resources Manager; while Nagendran Naidu takes up the position of Director, Event Operations.

Ooredoo wins two awards at Global Business Outlook Awards 2022

MUSCAT: In recognition of its pioneering approach to customer experience and supporting the community, Ooredoo has been named Oman's Most Innovative Customer Friendly Digital Payment App for the pay+ Mobile Wallet and Most Innovative CSR Initiatives for SMEs 2022.

The awards recognise and reward excellence in businesses around the world and show Ooredoo's commitment to providing an exceptional level of customer focus and showing responsibility to lead in the community when times are toughest.

Ooredoo's pay+ prioritises simple, convenient and queue-free payment by allowing customers to complete a wide variety of transactions from a single app on their smartphone. Developed in partnership with the National Bank of Oman, it's a safe, secure and convenient alternative to cash, allowing users to leave their wallets at home.



Supporting the community has taken on an entirely new meaning over the past two years and Ooredoo stepped up to the mark to show it can be relied upon to help when needed most. During Cyclone Shaheen recovery efforts, volunteers from the Ooredoo family came together to donate essential food and cleaning supplies to residents in Al Suwaiq, Saham, Al Khabourah and Al Musannah, as well as helping on the ground to clean up roads and homes.

Ooredoo also joined forces with Oman's Charitable

Organisation and Dar Al Atta'a to raise funds to support those in need, donate electronic devices and household items while also donating profits from the iPhone 13 launch to families in the Al Batinah Governorate.

In addition, ongoing programmes such as the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey, Springboard and Spring Forward have continued to empower families, female-driven entrepreneurs, underprivileged communities and recent graduates to fulfil their potential and take the next step in their education or their careers.

Meethaq Islamic Banking continues to provide exclusive offers

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and commitment to offering the best value proposition to its customers, Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, has announced that the special offer on a number of Islamic financing products which are compliant with the provisions of Sharia will be available till June 30, 2022.

Customers can apply for a variety of Meethaq financing options including home finance, auto finance, personal goods finance, education finance, marriage finance, travel finance, and takeover finance, and take advantage of the attractive profit rate starting at just 4.99%.

The offer, which is based on excellent feedback from customers, is available to both new and existing Meethaq



customers working in government institutions as well as semi-government and Tier 1 companies. Customers who apply for any of the products will benefit from quick processing and minimal documentation.

Meethaq customers are eligible for up to 80 per cent financing for home or auto financing, while 100 per cent financing is available for

Travel, Marriage, Education and Personal Goods Finance.

Applications may be submitted at any of Meethaq's 24 state-of-the-art branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

In line with its full commitment to offer a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers in every corner of the country, Meethaq has established the

largest Islamic branch network in Oman consisting of 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates.

In addition to its already excellent network of branches, Meethaq has a dedicated network of over 40 ATMs and CDMs and also provides free access to more than 740 plus ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

For more details on financing facilities from Meethaq, please go to <https://www.meethaq.om/en/consumerfinancing/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24656666

A digital marketplace to be launched soon in Oman

MUSCAT: A new easy-to-use interactive and secure web platform that enables visitors to discover and shop for local products and services, as well as international products is soon to be launched here in the Sultanate of Oman.

A homegrown brand — Lamha — has been conceptualised to help businesses of all sizes grow. Literally means 'a moment of vision', Lamha is the brainchild of young and dynamic Omani founder, Fatma bint Salim al Kharousi (pictured). "In order to deliver sustained In-Country Value (ICV) for the Sultanate of Oman, Lamha seeks opportunities to create value chains for, and with merchant partners. We are also keen to assist in developing and promoting newly established Omani companies, especially SMEs, through our platform," says Fatma.

Lamha realises how valuable SMEs are for the development



and growth of the country. Lamha itself being a SME, have specially designed a specific section of the website dedicated for SMEs called 'SME Souq' to help SMEs embrace digital transformation effortlessly through a perceptive hands-on approach, and fine-tuned expertise that gears them for unprecedented transformation, to enable their growth digitally.

The company looks forward to helping businesses take their growth venture to the next level in an economically viable manner; by helping it transform, and thrive digitally, through suite of collaborative, user-friendly, web-based tools and resources.



Oman Chapter of INMECC set to be formalised



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

A high-level Omani business delegation led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held a meeting with representatives of the Indo-Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) in Mumbai (India) on May 13, 2022. The 48-member Omani delegation included senior officials and business representatives from various sectors, including health, pharmaceuticals, mining, tourism, telecommunications, energy, shipping, and real estate.

During the meeting, Al Yousef commended expanding and diversifying trade and investment ties between the Sultanate of Oman and India. He appreciated the efforts of professionals and business leaders in India and Middle East to create a platform dedicated to the promotion of economic, industrial, commercial and cultural relations between the two sides.

Al Yousef also announced the formation of the Oman Chapter, an MoU for which will be signed between INMECC and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) soon. During the meeting, a number of proposals were

discussed with the goal of promotion professional education, training, skilling and the tourism segments in the Sultanate of Oman. Both sides will also collaborate in the promotion of tourism, manufacturing, trading, agriculture, and skilling and upskilling of young Omani.

Dr N M Sharafudeen, Chairman of INMECC, described the Indo-Gulf Middle East Chamber as an initiative of professionals and business leaders in India and Middle East countries to create a platform dedicated to stimulating the growth of a vibrant and prosperous community across the region. It has chapters in different cities in India, UAE, Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar.

The Oman Chapter of INMECC is headed by Suresh Virmani, with Mohiuddeen Mohamed Ali, Aftab Patel, Warith al Kharousi, Chander Khanna and Ahmed Rayees as Board members. Also present at the talks were Redha Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and India; Sulaiman al Zadjali, Consul General of Oman to India; Dr N M Sharafudeen, Chairman of INMECC, its Secretary General Dr Sureshkumar Madhusudhanan; Oman Director Davis Kallukaran; and Mumbai Chapter President Dr P J Aprain.

Banking sector credit climbs to RO 27.9 billion in Q1 of 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Total outstanding credit extended by conventional and Islamic banks (collectively referred to as Other Depository Corporations – ODCs) grew by 2.8 per cent to RO 27.9 billion at the end of March 2022, while credit to the private sector demonstrated a slight increase of 0.7 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.5 billion, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) stated in its latest monthly report.

Non-financial corporations and the household sector received the highest shares of the total private sector credit, at approximately 45.4 per cent each. The share of financial corporations was 5.4 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.8 per cent of the total private sector credit as at end-March 2022.

Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 4.7 per cent to reach RO 25.9 billion at the end of March 2022. Total private sector deposits increased by 2.4 per cent to RO 17.5 billion.

In terms of the sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution is from household deposits at



51.9 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 30.2 per cent, financial corporations at 15 per cent and other sectors at 0.8 per cent.

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 1.4 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-March 2022. Credit to the private sector decreased by 0.3 to reach RO 19 billion while their overall investments in securities went up by 13.5 per cent to RO 5.2 billion at end-March 2022.

Investment in Government Development Bonds increased by 14.6 per cent compared to the

same period last year to RO 2.1 billion while their investments in foreign securities declined by 18.6 per cent to RO 0.790 billion at the end of March 2022. On the liabilities side, aggregate deposits held with the conventional banks increased by 3.4 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 21.5 billion at end-March 2022.

Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 9.7 per cent at RO 4.9 billion and deposits of public enterprises increased by 16.2 per cent to RO 1.5 billion. Private sector deposits, which accounted for 68.3 per cent of

total deposits with conventional banks, increased by 0.4 per cent as of March 2022 to reach RO 14.7 billion.

The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 10.7 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 6 billion and constituted about 15.4 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end-March 2022.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 4.9 billion at the end of March 2022, recording a growth of 9.6 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 11.7 per cent to RO 4.5 billion.

GIB achieves 62 per cent growth in Q1 net profit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Gulf International Bank (GIB) reported a net profit of \$12.8 million for the first quarter of 2022 attributable to the shareholders of the parent, compared to a net profit of \$7.9 million in the prior year period, an increase of 62 per cent due to higher net interest income and net fee and commission income.

The consolidated GIB Group recorded a net profit of \$21 million compared to a net profit of \$14.1 million in the same period last year, an increase of 49 per cent. GIB is a pan GCC universal bank established in 1975 and regulated by the Central Bank of



Bahrain. GIB is owned by the governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund being the primary shareholder.

Total revenues of \$109.0 million for the three months were \$18.4 million or 20 per cent up on prior year with increases recorded in almost all

revenue categories.

The year-on-year increase in the bank's core revenue reflects the continued progress in implementing the bank's strategic transformation plan.

Net interest income at \$ 67.9 million was 21 per cent higher than prior year, due to balance sheet growth and the stabilisation of markets resulting in higher yields. Fee and commission income at \$23.1 million was 35 per cent up on the previous year, reflecting the continued success of the bank's strategic revenue diversification initiatives. Increases were recorded across asset management, corporate advisory, lending-related, global transaction-banking and retail fees.

Tourism Minister attends launch of Al Nakheel ITC

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 15

Al Nakheel – a new Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) – was unveiled on Sunday, May 15, 2022, at an event held the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at W Hotel Muscat.

Phase 1 (A) of the development was formally launched in the presence of officials of the Ministry as well as representatives from the investors. Also in attendance were Murtadha Ahmed Sultan, Member of the Board of Directors of Towell Group, partner in Alargan Towell Investment Company and primary investor of the project; Eng Khaled al Mashaan, CEO and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Alargan International Real Estate Company based in Kuwait; and Mohammed bin Moosa al Abri, CEO of Al Nakheel project.

Murtadha Ahmed Sultan noted, "The project aims to strengthen the infrastructure of the tourism sector, increase the number of hotel rooms,



create rewarding employment opportunities for Omanis, and achieve other goals that are related to the development of the tourism

sector in the Sultanate of Oman in line with Oman Tourism Strategy 2040. We are confident that the project will be a valuable addition

to the Wilayat of Barka as well as the surrounding areas, including the nearby capital city of Muscat."

Al Nakheel ITC project, which

spans a total area of 500,000 square metres of usufruct land, is located in Al Rumais which links Muscat Governorate with the Wilayat of Barka.

The development is characterised by its 830-metre waterfront overlooking the Sea of Oman. At the heart of the development is the Crystal Lagoon covering an area of 51,000 square metres and the promenade which will become the recreational and entertainment zone of the new urban area.

The development includes three hotels and hotel apartments with a total capacity of 670 keys, 1,436 residential apartments, villas and town houses that will be available for ownership by Oman citizens and other nationalities. It will also include a shopping mall, a traditional souk, an international school, various restaurants, an aqua park and other entertainment and service facilities.

The project will be developed in three phases over the course of 10 to 15 years. During this year, the construction works will

start in Phase 1 (A) of the project, which includes the internal roads and infrastructure of the project, the Crystal Lagoon with its recreational facilities, a four-star hotel with 188 keys, a traditional souk, apartments and residential villas.

Mohammed Moosa al Abri said, "The project is characterised by a natural and calm location on the beach of Al Rumais, which is close to the Governorate of Muscat, the City Centre of Barka and other urban centres. The project aims to create a tourist destination in the Wilayat of Barka that is attractive to citizens, residents and tourists coming to Oman. In addition to the Crystal Lagoon and its other design characteristics,

Al Nakheel ITC project will be distinguished from other ITC projects by the reasonable prices of residential units which will be within the reach of citizens and residents alike. We expect the project to attract local and foreign investments across various components of the project, create added value and contribute to the GDP of the Sultanate of Oman."

Shanghai to gradually reopen businesses

Shanghai announced a gradual reopening from Monday of businesses, though it remains unclear when the millions of people still locked down in China's economic capital will finally be allowed out of their homes.

Confronted with its worst Covid-19 outbreak since the beginning of the pandemic, China — the last major economy still closed off to the world — put the city of 25 million under heavy restrictions in early April.

The rigid strategy to root out virus cases at all costs has wreaked havoc on supply chains, crushed small businesses and imperilled the country's economic goals.

For many Shanghai residents, some of whom were already confined to their homes even before April, the frustrations have included problems with food supplies, access to non-Covid medical care and spartan quarantine centres, and many are venting their anger online.

Shanghai vice mayor Chen Tong on Sunday announced a reopening of businesses “in stages” from May 16. Chen however did not specify if he was referring to a gradual resumption of activity in the city or if it was conditional on certain health criteria.

Under China's zero-Covid strategy, any lifting of restrictions is generally conditional on seeing no new positive cases for three days, outside of quarantine centres. Shanghai authorities were aiming for this goal by mid-May.

Infections appear to be on the decline, with 1,369 new cases reported on Sunday in Shanghai, way down from more than 25,000 at the end of April.

In some areas of the city, however, restrictions have been tightened in recent days.

Some 1,200 kilometres north, residents of Beijing fear they could face a similar lockdown after more than a thousand cases were recorded in the capital since the end of April.

Beijing has repeatedly tested its residents and locked down buildings with positive cases and closed metro stations and non-essential businesses in certain neighbourhoods.

In an attempt to curb the outbreak, Fangshan district in the southwest of Beijing, which has 1.3 million residents, suspended taxi services from Saturday.

Apart from a few neighbourhoods which are under restrictions, the vast majority of Beijing's 22 million inhabitants can still leave their homes.

But many public places are closed and residents are forced to work from home, especially in the populous Chaoyang district, where many multinationals are based. — AFP

The rigid strategy to root out virus cases at all costs has wreaked havoc on supply chains, crushed small businesses and imperilled the country's economic goals



SYMBOLIC RICE

A worker is pictured in a rice mill in Iraq's central province. Drought is threatening the Iraqi tradition of growing amber rice, the aromatic basis of rich lamb and other dishes, and an important sector in a struggling economy. After three years of drought and declining rainfall, Iraq's amber rice production will be only symbolic in 2022, forcing consumers to seek out imported varieties and leaving farmers pondering their future. — AFP

The great inflation trade-off



HIPPOLYTE FOFACK

The writer is the chief economist and director of research at the African Export-Import Bank.

BECAUSE PRICES INCREASE MORE FOR THE BASIC GOODS THAT DOMINATE LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS' CONSUMPTION BASKET, THE RICH-POOR INFLATION GAP — A PHENOMENON ECONOMISTS CALL 'INFLATION INEQUALITY' — COULD WIDEN FURTHER

On May 4, the United States Federal Reserve raised its benchmark interest rate by half a percentage point in an aggressive attempt to curb surging US annual inflation, which currently stands at a four-decade high of 8.3%. And eurozone inflation reached a record 7.5% year on year in April, according to preliminary estimates.

These sharp, sizeable price increases — accelerated by the war in Ukraine — are raising the spectre of stagflation and may significantly erode households' purchasing power. Vulnerable lower-income groups are likely to be most severely affected because they have limited access to financial markets, making it difficult for them to smooth their consumption.

Furthermore, because prices increase more for the basic goods that dominate low-income households' consumption basket, the rich-poor inflation gap — a phenomenon economists call “inflation inequality” — could widen further.

Just a few months ago, the price stability objective was exceptionally low in the growth-inflation trade-off. Central banks, it was argued, should continue to focus on supporting the post-pandemic economic recovery. But now the critical question is whether monetary policymakers are doing enough to fight inflation. In the case of systemically important central banks, it is difficult to argue convincingly that they are considering the risks which have emerged.

For starters, major central banks' forecasting failures enabled inflation to overshoot their 2% targets and potentially become entrenched. Inflation was trending upward and exceeded official targets on both sides of the Atlantic in the first half of 2021, but officials at the Fed and the European Central Bank stubbornly insisted that faster price growth was transitory.

That view contradicted their own monetary policy rules and was inconsistent with the breakeven inflation rates — in the US, the difference in yield between a nominal treasury security and a treasury inflation-protected security of the same maturity — from implied market expectations. The five-year US breakeven inflation rate is currently about 3% (down from the record high of 3.59% in March 2022), and the Fed's long-run neutral rate is around 2.4%.

Well-calibrated pre-emptive strikes are often desirable when managing inflation. The risk of wrongly accepting the low-inflation hypothesis and doing too little to prevent the threat from metastasizing greatly outweighs the risk of mistakenly rejecting the null hypothesis of low inflation. This is particularly true when the economy is overheating, because reversing inflationary trends becomes even tougher once inflationary expectations become de-anchored.

But this is precisely where the world now finds itself. Some leading central bankers — as part of their well-intentioned attempts to support the fragile post-pandemic recovery — decided not to pre-empt inflation, or

even to respond to current price pressures until they were proven to be persistent.

A succession of shocks over the past few months have sustained the climb of consumer prices. These include supply-chain disruptions and bottlenecks, supply-demand imbalances, semiconductor shortages and rising commodity prices. Upward wage pressures also have played a part, with a tighter labour market feeding through to higher prices, especially in the US.

While some of these shocks are potentially transitory consequences of the pandemic-induced downturn, most have been driven by structural changes, including the deglobalisation process triggered by the US-China trade war. Likewise, supply-chain disruptions — which are estimated to have added one percentage point to core inflation in 2021 — were exacerbated by the pandemic but in fact predated it.

Moreover, the earlier prolonged period of low inflation fuelled the misguided belief that money creation is no longer inflationary. In 1993, then-Fed chair Alan Greenspan argued that the historical relationships between money and income, and between money and the price level, “have largely broken down, depriving the aggregates of much of their usefulness as guides to policy”.

But the current inflation overshoot has perhaps validated Milton Friedman's famous maxim: “Inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon.”

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Investors look for alternatives when stocks, bonds tumble

Wall Street equities have had the worst start to a year since 1939, while the bond slump is the steepest since 1842, which is sending many investors on the hunt for alternatives. As US inflation has soared to its highest in four decades, the central bank has begun to raise interest rates aggressively.

And the war in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, together with Covid-19 lockdowns in China have added to investor anxiety about the prospects for the economy.

“For the first time in over a decade, investors face both a hawkish Federal Reserve and genuine inflation

pressure,” said Ross Mayfield of Baird Private Wealth Management. “This has led to the sort of rate-driven selloff that can hit stocks... and bonds at the same time.” With interest rates rising, bond prices are falling — the two move in opposite directions — so they are no longer playing the safe-haven role they usually serve when equities are losing ground.

“It is a very tough environment,” said Anwiti Bahuguna from Columbia Threadneedle Investments. Uncertainty about the persistence of inflation and the outlook for global add to the challenges, said Chaguir Mandjee, portfolio manager at Tailor AM. “It's a headache,” he said.

Retail investors share the anxiety.

“I believe this market crash is going to be much bigger than 2008,” one said. “Right now I am looking to move into a mix of cash and precious metals,” said the investor, contacted on the Reddit social media site, who declined to be identified.

Greg McBride, chief analyst at Bankrate, agreed a lot of investors are moving their funds out of other assets into cash, despite the fact that inflation will cause capital to lose value, unlike the situation following the 2008 global financial crisis.

Other popular options include money market funds, which are shielded from the vagaries of the stock market but offer little return, as well as term deposits and even simple savings accounts, he said.

Those safe options were shunned in

recent years due to low interest rates, often less than 0.50 per cent annually.

After selling off bond holdings at a nine per cent loss, the Redditor found a two-year term account with a 2.65 per cent return.

Bahuguna's team saw the slide in bonds coming and shifted focus towards commodities, which are now easily accessible to institutional investors and individuals alike. From precious metals to energy and agricultural goods, commodities are considered a premier anti-inflation weapon.

Index funds — also known as exchange-traded funds or ETFs — which track the prices for particular goods or companies, have won impressive gains since the start of the year, often in excess

of 30 per cent.

But even these popular investments are showing signs of running out of steam, after hitting recent records, impacted by the end of cheap credit as well as the specter of an economic slowdown which would weigh on demand for raw materials.

Coffee, copper, nickel and silver have all deflated after a dazzling start to the year, as has gold, which is sometimes seen as a shield against inflation, and bitcoin, which has sunk dramatically in recent weeks.

In addition to commodities, McBride said real estate offers a longer-term option “for those that are just going to hunker down until the situation calms down.” — AFP

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Bait Al Maqham: The house built for a noble lady

Bait Al Maqham is located amidst the plantation in the quaint suburbs of the Wilayat of Bausher close to the main city of Muscat. Surprisingly, this splendid residence surrounded with wonderful view is tucked away near the city's last bit of sand dunes. Here are a few things you should know about it... **P20**



Fear and adrenaline as Czechs open world's longest suspension footbridge

FEAR AND adrenaline were some of the feelings as the first tourists stepped out on the world's longest suspension footbridge, spanning a mountain valley in the Czech Republic.

"We came here because we love adrenaline," day-hiker Michaela Klestilova said while approaching the 721-metre (2,365-foot) footbridge that hangs 95 metres above the ground at its highest point and opened to the public on Friday.

"We came by foot up here and now we are looking for our

reward."

Named Sky Bridge 721, it took two years to build at a cost of 200 million crowns (\$8.4 million) and is suspended by six main supporting ropes and 60 wind ropes.

It sits at more than 1,100 metres above sea level and connects two mountain ridges in the country's northeast region, 200 km from Prague and near the border with Poland.

The bridge tops the 516-metre Arouca Bridge in Portugal, which had previously been the longest

suspension footbridge.

The new Czech bridge, though, is not without its critics.

The Czech Nature Conservation Agency's regional director Michal Servus told Czech TV this week the bridge caused problems with protecting the surrounding areas and changed the character of the area.

Officials hope it will boost tourism in the area by giving a different look at the forested landscape.

"For me this is a great view," Michal Hofirek, the bridge's first visitor, said. — **Reuters**



READ

ART AND FEAR

BY DAVID BAYLES

Art & Fear explores the way art gets made, the reasons it often doesn't get made, and the nature of the difficulties that cause so many artists to give up along the way.



ART SCENE

A sculpture by Edgar Degas sold on Thursday for \$41.6 million at Christie's in New York, the highest price paid at auction for a work by the French artist, while a bronze by Pablo Picasso also broke a record. The Degas sculpture — "Petite danseuse de quatorze ans" — is a delicate bronze with a brown patina depicting a young ballerina in a muslin skirt with a ribbon in her hair. It is not the original — which is on display at the National Gallery of Art in Washington — but a cast made by Adrien-Aurelien Hebrard 10 years after the 1917 death of the impressionist. That did not stop it from setting a new record for Degas, easily topping the previous high of 22.2 million euros set by another version of the same work in 2015. — **AFP**



HOT TOPIC

Zion Ricks-Gaines, who is totally blind, gets air while executing an ollie at a skateboard park in San Francisco, California on May 6. — **AFP**





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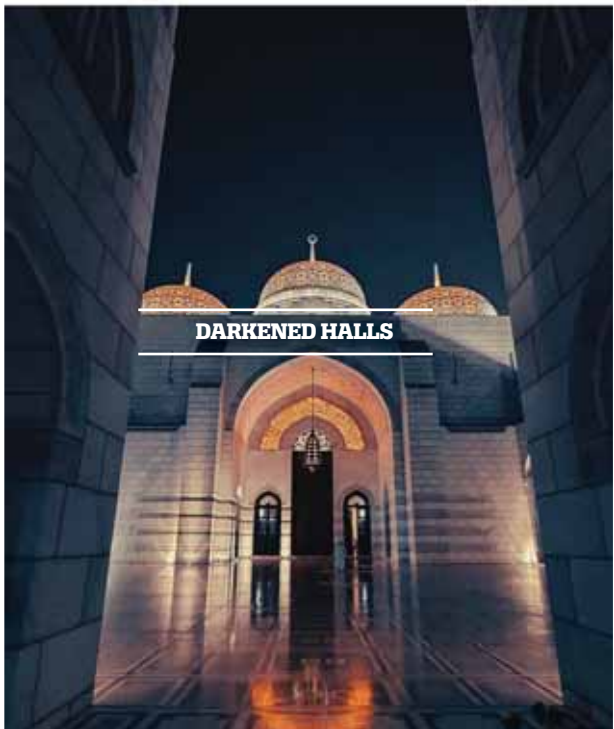


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AROUND THE WORLD

WORLD RECORD

Nepali woman's 10th Everest climb breaks her own record



A 48-YEAR-OLD Nepali woman scaled Mount Everest for the 10th time on Thursday, breaking her own record for the most summits of the world's highest mountain by a female climber, her hiking company said.

Lhakpa Sherpa last climbed the 8,848.86-metre (29,031.69-foot) mountain in 2018. A fellow Nepali, Kami Rita Sherpa, holds the men's record of 26 climbs.

"Lhakpa has broken her own record and become the first woman to achieve 10 summits," her brother Mingma Gelu Sherpa, an official of her Seven Summit Club hiking agency, told Reuters.

A Nepali tourism official, Bhishma Kumar Bhattarai, confirmed that she had reached the summit.

One of 11 children, Lhakpa was born in the eastern district of Sankhuwasabha, home to the world's fifth highest mountain, Makalu.

Also on Thursday, seven members of an "All Black Expedition" comprising climbers from the United States and Kenya climbed Mount Everest, said Jeevan Ghimire of the Shangrila-Nepal Trek hiking company.

Fewer than 10 black mountaineers in total had reached the peak before, but this is the first time that all members of an expedition were Black, hiking officials said.

Everest has been climbed 10,657 times since it was first scaled in 1953 from the Nepali and Tibetan sides. Many have climbed it more than once, and 311 people have died. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra throws down motherland's beats at Eurovision



WITH THEIR infectious musical fusion of roots and rhythm, Ukrainian folk hiphop band Kalush Orchestra is riding a wave of goodwill at the Eurovision Song Contest this year — while eyeing the contest's top prize.

Tapping traditional Ukrainian folk music but mashing up an invigorating hiphop beat with a haunting, lullaby refrain, "Stefania" was written last year by the band's frontman, 27-year-old rapper Oleh Psiuk, as a tribute to his mother.

But the song selected to represent Ukraine at Eurovision — just days before Russia's invasion — has taken on out-sized meaning for a country nearing its third month of war. It contains nostalgic lyrics such as "I'll always find my way home even if all the roads are destroyed" and celebrates cultural identity and the motherland.

Standing out in the competition long cheered for its flamboyance and camp, the band received a standing ovation on Tuesday after passing the semifinals. It is considered by bookmakers a favourite to become Eurovision's outright winner at the finale on Saturday.

"My mum is in Ukraine and many of my relatives are in Ukraine but there is really no safe place in Ukraine at the moment," Psiuk told AFP through an interpreter.

"It's really like a lottery, where you cannot know where exactly you'll get in danger. So we are very worried about everyone and our relatives that are in Ukraine."

Such worries have fuelled

the band's drive during Eurovision, he said.

"We feel here as if on a mission because at the moment, as we speak, Ukrainian culture is being destroyed," Psiuk said.

"But it is our role to show it is alive and it has a lot to offer. It's unique. It really represents every Ukrainian who is now suffering in the world today."

FLUTES AND FUSION

Although considered non-political, the world's biggest song contest, watched by millions of people, inevitably reflects greater geopolitical tensions.

This year, the European Broadcasting Union banned Russia from the contest a day after it invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia had competed in Eurovision since 1994.

Perhaps the most original and energising act at this year's competition, the six-member all-male Kalush Orchestra sprang from Psiuk's original hiphop group Kalush, named for his hometown in western Ukraine.

The band is made up of Psiuk, Ihor Didenchuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Oleksandr Slobodanyk and MC KylymMen ("CarpetMan").

Its new sound incorporates traditional folk instruments, including the telenka, which is played with one hand controlling the pipe's open end, and another flute-like instrument, the sopilka.

Performing in richly embroidered traditional garb, the band is also instantly recognisable for Psiuk's bubblegum pink bucket hat and the carpet-like bodysuit worn by the

breakdancing MC CarpetMan.

But it is Kalush Orchestra's sound that makes the band unique. It "mixes old ancient folk, even forgotten sounds, with super modern and understandable-for-everyone hiphop rap elements", Psiuk told journalists last week.

FIGHTING AGE

To win Eurovision, Kalush Orchestra will have to be chosen above 24 other finalists competing on Saturday. Votes are cast by a mix of music industry professionals and the public from each country — who are not allowed to vote for their own nation.

Were Ukraine to win, next year's Eurovision would be held in the country, which Psiuk vowed would be a "new, integrated, well developed, flourishing Ukraine".

Although one band member who joined the army three days after the invasion remains in Ukraine defending Kyiv, Ukraine's government gave the group special dispensation to travel abroad to compete at Eurovision.

"That's why we want to be as useful to our country as we can be," Psiuk told journalists.

"Representing your country is responsible anytime but representing it in a time of war is... a maximum responsibility for us."

Psiuk says the band will return to Ukraine directly after Eurovision.

As their press release written ahead of the contest explains: "They will be allowed to leave for the final on 14th May but must return as men of fighting age the day after" — **AFP**

CULTURE

Cartoon alien aims to ease World Cup culture shock in Qatar



A CARTOON SERIES on an alien who crash-lands in World Cup host Qatar aims to ease a culture clash between more than a million foreign football fans and the conservative state's residents.

Like the arriving fans, Kawkabani, star of the series launched by Qatar's first animation studio, has to learn Arabic pronunciation, how to drink coffee — and to discover that Qataris prepare way too much food for their guests.

Creators Hossein Heydar and Amal al Shammari also want Qataris to get the message that they will have to make cultural concessions to the beer-drinking, good-time-seeking masses who converge on their country in November and December.

The first two 10-minute episodes of "Kawkabani" — which means "The Planet Person" in Arabic — have already been launched on YouTube by their company, Nefais Animation.

"As an animation studio, we looked at content in the region, even in Qatar, and we felt there was a lack of content that represents Qatari culture," said Shammari, Nefais's creative director.

Arabic words were sometimes garbled and costumes not always quite right.

"We felt like we need a studio in Qatar that pays attention to all these details and represents Qatari culture in the right way," he said.

Tiny Qatar's triumph in securing the right to host the World Cup gives it the opportunity to show off its traditions and customs.

"We want to explain a lot of things and share our culture with the visitors," said Shammari, who wrote the script.

Nefais only hired artists from the Middle East with knowledge of Arabic culture, added Heydar, in charge of animation.

Besides Kawkabani, the series has three main Qatari characters representing what the creators consider to be the main strands of the 270,000-strong indigenous community, which lives alongside more than 2.5 million foreign workers.

COFFEE CULTURE

Faisal is a traditional

bedouin, the community that used to inhabit the desert.

"You know they're more proud of their culture, and then they sometimes overreact," said Shammari.

But "they would support you no matter what. They'll always be there for you."

Saad, another of the Qatari characters, is a more "modern" city dweller. "He is open to different cultures, he's open to people, he wants to be a businessman," said the writer.

As for Khalifa, he represents the growing mixed community in Qatar. A vegan, his mother is British and father Qatari.

Each of the five episodes in the first series — translated into English, French, Spanish, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese on YouTube — shows the Qatari way of life, especially food and drink.

Kawkabani runs into trouble for not knowing the right-handed gesture used to indicate having drunk too much coffee.

But the series also pokes fun at Qataris.

With up to 1.4 million visitors expected in Qatar for the World Cup, Shammari said the cartoon sought "to explain to Qataris that there must be acceptance of these cultures... and help them (visitors) coexist or understand the Qatari culture as well".

Kawkabani was part-financed by Qatar's World Cup organisers, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, as well as the Doha Film Institute and telecoms giant Vodafone.

While the first programmes do not touch on controversial issues such as rights of migrant workers and women, Heydar insisted there had been complete artistic freedom.

"This is our show and the sponsors were very supportive and they gave us all the freedom to create it the way we see it," he said.

The pair already plan two more series of Kawkabani alongside other projects to highlight Arab culture.

"Our heritage is full of stories, is full of characters, full of heroes and we want to showcase them from Qatar or from the Arabic region to the whole world," he said. — **AFP**

Bait Al Maqham: The house built for a noble lady

By Arwa Al Hashimi

History is a big part of Oman as an Arabic country which is why there is a great effort devoted to preserving the magnificent historical buildings across the country which tell many stories of the past. These buildings are not only important for their unique designs but also for the value they represent including an opportunity for future generations to look back and be proud of their ancestors.

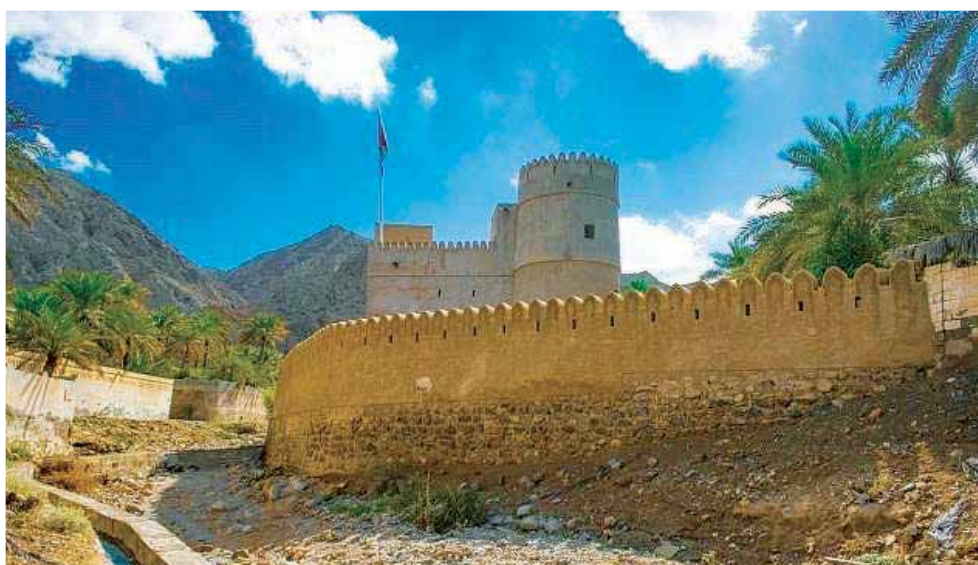
Bait Al Maqham is located amidst the plantation in the quaint suburbs of the Wilayat of Bausher close to the main city of Muscat. Surprisingly, this splendid residence surrounded by wonderful views is tucked away near the city's last bit of sand dunes.

While it has picked up yet as a must-visit attraction, the area surrounding Bait Al Maqham is perfect for tourists with Bait al Maqham itself one of the key attractions that narrate the splendid growth of this wilayat.

Being the oldest, historically, in the area, Bait Al Maqham has become an important pillar in the ways and methods of Omani architecture mixed with the military character, which gave it a functional, architectural and artistic value during the time it was built.

More than just a home, it was also built for defence making it a perfect place to also study the structure of ancient Omani fortification and how this has helped the community grow by providing security and protection.

The house was built for Sayyidah



Thuraya bint Mohammed bin Azzan al Busaidiyah who lived in it during the eighteenth century. It is called the big house because it is

one of the largest architectural buildings in the area in which the castle is built.

A series of architectural resto-

ration processes were carried out on the castle by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in the Sultanate of Oman in 1991, as a rational step to preserve and protect heritage capabilities from demolition and extinction. In 2010, another restoration was made to the building after the collapse of parts of the northwest tower due to heavy rain falling on it.

Architecturally, the castle was built on an irregular space due to the slope of the building in the southeast corner, which resulted in the irregular measurement of the four sides of it. It consists of three successive floors. The first floor consists of four rooms of irregular space that open with door entrances on a central hall with a 12.50 metres longitudinal

area from the entrance to the southern wall and covered from the top with a wooden ceiling based on three pointed arches carried on six rectangular trusses.

The second floor consists of the eastern and western arcades, each of which contains two rooms that open with door entrances to the exposed middle courtyard, which is 12.40 metres long from north to south, while the third floor consists of one room in the south-eastern corner, and the roof is surrounded by a stone fence that is about one metre high, topped by military merlons. In the northwest corner is the only castle tower, which is 16.35 metres high, while in the middle of the northern facade is the main entrance to the castle, which is one of the hollow entrances best-known types.

Bait Al Maqham Tower is located in the northwest corner of the building. It consists of four successive floors in what appears to be three floors. The height of the tower from the floor to a point below the merlons above its top is about 16.30 metres high, with a circular diameter ranging 10.73 metres it was built with medium-sized stone blocks with lime and sand material, while it was covered from the outside by a layer of "Omani Sarooj" material, leaving only the ground floor without external covering.

The castle was built using small and medium-sized stone blocks in all parts of the building, the tower located in the northwest, as well as the wall surrounding the fort. The Omani sarooj material was also used in the restoration work that was carried out by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture during the restoration.

Such a wonderful building carries a great value and conveys a message that shows the Sultanate's rich heritage and its competence in architecture and preserving the old historical buildings.