

HM thanked by King of Jordan

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Abdallah II of the Kingdom of Jordan in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of the father of Queen Rania al Abdullah, Dr Faisal Sidqi al Yasin. In his cable, King Abdallah expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies. He also prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and the Omani people against all harm. – ONA



Royal Decree appoints ambassador

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued a Royal Decree No 31/2022 on the appointment of an ambassador. Article (1) appoints Saud bin Hilal bin Saud al Shidhani as the Sultanate of Oman's extraordinary and plenipotentiary Ambassador to the United Republic of Tanzania. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KING OF SWEDEN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Carl XVI Gustaf of the Kingdom of Sweden on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere appreciation to King Carl XVI, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty the Sultan also wished the people of Sweden further progress and prosperity. — ONA



BEFORE HM, AMBASSADOR TAKES OATH



Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Saud bin Hilal al Shidhani, Oman's Ambassador to the United Republic of Tanzania, took the oath of office at Al Barakah Palace on Sunday. The oath-taking ceremony was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. – ONA

Omanis win big at FIAP

FLORENCE: The Sultanate of Oman won for the fifth time consecutively, two World Cups in the 40th FIAP Youth Biennial in the under 16 years-old category and the under 21 years-old category. Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, said that winning the two cups for five years consecutively is a testimony to the skills of Omani photographers and their readiness to bag awards and medals.

He added that participation in such international competitions would promote Oman's customs and traditions. Winners of individual and group prizes were honoured during the event and the winning photos were displayed in a video clip.



19.45% rise in deaths in two years

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The number of deaths reported in Oman increased by 19.45 per cent in the last two years, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Of these, Omanis accounted for 80 per cent of the total number of deaths in the country. It may be noted that 4,260 people lost their lives in the country due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the first death reported in April 2020.

Statistics indicated that the deaths from the pandemic stood at 2,941 in 2021, which constituted 23.2 per cent of the total deaths in the Sultanate of Oman. Of these 10,108 deaths recorded among Omanis, 5,791 were males and 4,317 were females.

DEATHS PER DAY

Among 2,541 expatriate deaths, 2,092 were males and 449 were females.

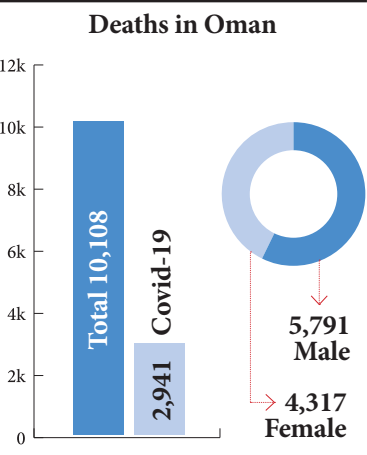
Two deaths were recorded per hour, 35 deaths per day and 1,054 deaths per month during this period.

The data indicated that the number of Omani deaths was highest in June last year at 1,338. Most deaths were in the age group of 65 years and above (6,833), followed by the age group 40-64 (3,943), and those in the age group of less than a year (675).

The Sultanate of Oman recorded a decline in crude birth as the number of live births reached 90,371 in 2017, compared to 82,224 in 2021.

The number of births in the Sultanate of Oman decreased during the past two years by 2.58 per cent, as the number of births among Omanis reached 76,457, forming a rate of 92.6 per cent, while the births among expatriates reached 5,767 live births or 7.4 per cent.

Deaths in Oman



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We have attracted 844mn USD in Foreign Direct Investment

Ahmed Al Massan oversees this



There are already 2,550 homes at AI Mouj Muscat

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150 SMEs operate at AI Mouj Muscat

Aisha Al Kharousi owns one of them



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8 agreements to boost social projects

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Sunday signed eight agreements with private establishments that support community programmes. It also honoured government and community units which contributed to social responsibility programmes.

The event was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said.

Two agreements were signed between the ministry and Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO). The first agreement deals with funding the construction of Al Wafa'a centre for the rehabilitation of people with disability to the tune of RO 220,000.

The second agreement is on developing Al Aman rehabilitation centre at Al Khoudh with a total cost of RO 118,000.

The two agreements were signed by Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, and Khalid bin Mohammed Al Fannah al Aرامي, OMIFCO's Director of Sustainability and Corporate Communication.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the ministry and Oman LNG's Development Foundation on the continuation of cooperation in social responsibility fields,



training programmes and setting up projects and initiatives that achieve maximum benefit to a large segment of the society.

Al Shamsi also signed an agreement with Dr Amir bin Nasser al Mata'ni, CEO of Oman LNG's Development Foundation, on funding the construction of a

workshop for blacksmithing and carpentry.

Another agreement was signed by Al Shamsi with Dr Omar bin Salim al Jaidi, General Manager of ARA Petroleum company, on funding the setting up of a specialised workshop for blacksmithing and carpentry at

the evaluation and vocational training centre of the Ministry of Social Development.

An agreement worth RO 144,000 was signed between the ministry and Al Jisr Foundation. This agreement aims to achieve joint cooperation in the field of empowerment projects for social

security families and people with limited-income.

This was followed by a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) worth RO 144,000 signed between the ministry and Al Jisr Foundation aimed at achieving joint cooperation in the implementation of empowerment

projects targeting social security families and low-income families. The MoC also deals with cooperation in assisting urgent cases.

The event also included the signing of an agreement between the Association of Early Intervention and Khimji Ramdas company to fund the establishment of a vocational centre worth RO 144,000 at the headquarters of the Association of Early Intervention.

The seventh agreement was signed between Mitsui E and P Middle East BV Company and Al Noor Association for the Blind to provide prosthetic devices and training blind job-seekers to the tune of RO 33,000.

Mitsui E and P Middle East BV Company also signed an agreement to provide physiotherapy equipment and devices worth RO 30,000 for the Children with Disability Association.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the chief guest honoured 36 establishments which supported social development programmes.

The event was attended by Dr Laila bint Ahmed Al Najar, Minister of Social Development, several ministers, undersecretaries and high ranking officials representing the private sector. — ONA

E-sorting of Haj pilgrims concludes

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday concluded the electronic sorting for people who e-registered for this year's Haj Season 1443 AH. The process has been arranged with pilgrims' registration

firms through a shared digital connection system.

The eligible applications' quota includes 14 applicants for cancer patients, 5,381 for people who met the requirements of performing Haj, 61 for people who want to

perform Haj to fulfil wills, 572 volunteers and 128 applicants who want to perform Haj on behalf of other incapable people. Oman's quota for this season of Haj is 6,156, with 5,956 seats for Omanis and 200 for residents. — ONA

Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tender for 2022:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
18/2022	Evaluate and Update Business Continuity Management (BCM) Manuals and Procedures.	16 JUN 2022	30 JUN 2022	25 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E-Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. The Vendors must provide **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value valid for (120) days on website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24402200 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

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■ DRONE TO STERILISE PUBLIC PLACES



Omani students from University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas in the North Al Batinah Governorate have developed a project to sterilise public places with drones more quickly than manual sterilisation.

19.45% rise in deaths in two years

FROM P1

The total number of births last year was 82,224 and during the past year, 10 births were recorded per hour and 228 live births per day, while 6,852 births were registered in a month.

The data showed that the birth rate per thousand of the population was 18.2 in 2020, with a record of 82,224 births, and the death rate per thousand of the population increased to 3.6 in 2021, with 12,649 deaths.

The statistics confirmed that the birth rate for Omanis was 27.3 live births per thousand of

the population, and the number of births among Omanis during August was the highest in the year with 7,194 live births.

MORTALITY RATE

The maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births amounted to 58 per cent of births to mothers aged 25-34 years, and there were 894 live births for mothers aged 15-19 years, including 827 Omanis and 67 expatriates.

It was reported that 22 new Omani mothers were over 50 years of age, compared to two expatriate mothers.

And 70 per cent of Omani

births were in urban areas and 30 per cent in villages, while the expatriate babies were born in urban areas at 96 per cent and only 4 per cent in villages.

The percentage of births among Omanis in urban areas ranged between 78 per cent of those born in Muscat Governorate and 37 per cent of those born in Al Wusta Governorate.

As for the scientific status of working mothers, it became clear that 34 per cent of Omani mothers do work, compared to 22 per cent of working expatriate mothers.



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Omanis win two world photography cups



Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Shuaili won the gold medal for his photo titled Tafkeer or Thinking

FROM PAGE 1

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Shuaili won the gold medal for his photo titled Tafkeer or Thinking in the under 21 years-old category. Mahir bin Nussair al Khusaibi won the silver medal on his photo titled Eltiwa or Twisting in the under 16 years-old category. Zamzam bint Khalfan Bani Orraba won the bronze medal for her photo titled Talashi or Fading. Oman scored 457 points to win the World Cup for the under 21 years-old category. It scored 462 points in the under 16 years-old category to win the second world cup. — ONA



Mahir bin Nussair al Khusaibi won the silver medal on his photo titled Eltiwa or Twisting



More PPP sought in education sector

KABEER YOUSUF

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More public-private partnership (PPP) in the education sector can bring in great changes and help achieve the desired results as is stipulated in the Vision 2040, experts at Oman Education Forum said.

Better cooperation of the private sector with the public sector in terms of curriculum planning, and knowledge developing in addition to supporting and developing educational initiatives and projects of a sustainable nature is sought after.

The two-day forum aimed at achieving partnership with public and private sector institutions was organised by the Ministry of Education represented by the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat.

The 2-day forum which also sought to honour school administrations with individual initiatives at the governorate level was opened by His Highness Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham

bin Tarik al Said, the sponsor of the event in the presence of Dr Madeeha al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and a number of their highnesses and excellencies, honourable members of the State Council, and Majlis Ash'shura.

The Oman Education Forum is a step forward towards keeping pace with Oman's Vision 2040 in marching forward strengthening the foundations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence.

"Oman's Vision 2040 has placed at the forefront of its priorities the interest in education, learning, scientific research and national capabilities, and His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has affirmed the continuation to pay attention to education, making it a national priority during the next stage, and providing it with all means of empowerment as the basis through which students will be able to contribute to building the requirements of the next stage," said Dr Ali al Jahwari, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat.

"The Sultanate of Oman recognises the need to prioritise the education sector and therefore it's a key element of the 'Vision 2040'. The government is making significant efforts to improve the information technology infrastructure in educational institutions and supporting the use of cutting-edge technology, e-learning, capacity building and infrastructure improvement in schools and higher education," said Manan Khurma, Founder, Cuemath.

"It is therefore critical for educators, governments, and the wider stakeholders to support STEM education that encourages critical thinking and problem solving that contribute to a stronger, innovation-based economy," he added.

As many as 16 educational initiatives were selected from among 126 participation initiatives at the level of schools in the Governorate of Muscat, in the areas of technology, academic achievement, community partnership, and innovation in education.

■ FINANCE MINISTER MEETS EGYPTIAN COUNTERPART



Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, met Dr Mohammed Maait, Egyptian Minister of Finance, in Sharm El Sheikh on Sunday. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the Islamic Development Bank Group's 47th Annual Meetings, held in Egypt. They explored areas of cooperation and reviewed matters of common interest. They also exchanged views on financial matters in light of international developments. — ONA

Oman hosts IMF team of experts

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), is hosting experts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for meetings that will take place from June 5 to 12, in the context of preparing for Article IV consultations of the IMF Membership Agreement.

The IMF delegation will meet a number of officials from CBO, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, Oman Investment Authority, the National Center for Statistics and Information, as well as

other entities. This visit aims at informing the IMF of the economic and financial situation of the Sultanate of Oman and providing them with the required data in preparation for the Article 4 consultations.

During the meetings, the IMF team will discuss a number of topics with officials and specialists related to the latest macroeconomic developments and its expected prospects, in addition to a number of topics related to financial and monetary policies and government measures as part of its Medium-

Term Fiscal Plan, including the financial adjustment measures.

The IMF conducts such visits to follow up and implement its primary responsibilities to supervise the international monetary system, follow-up economic and financial policies in its 190 member states, and monitoring potential risks that could threaten financial stability. This allows the IMF to give appropriate recommendations on the monetary and fiscal policies in a way that enhances international financial and economic stability. — ONA

Apollo Super Specialty Hospital, Al Hail welcomes first baby



Technically 'inaugurates' their Women & Child Care facility

The state-of-the-art Apollo Super Specialty Hospital, which began operations in Al Hail recently, welcomed its first-ever newborn baby on June 1.

The Omani mother, Nawal Auwaid Al Shidi, gave birth to a healthy baby girl ushering in a new era of high quality care for all women and children at Apollo, Al Hail.

Launches Baby Care

The newborn's arrival has also succeeded in technically launching the high-end Woman & Child Care facility at Apollo, which is under the care of Dr Shakeel Moinudhdin and Dr Jayapriya Sudhakar of the Paediatric and Neonatology Department.

The delivery was held under the supervision of the consultant Gynaecologist, Dr Vandana Pandit, assisted by Dr Mahalakshmi Baskaran and Dr Roula Osama Almahayni OBG specialists from the department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Free consultation for a year

The medical team said that the infant and mother are doing well.

Marking the occasion, V.T Saileswaran, managing director, Apollo Hospitals, Oman, has offered a year's free consultation for the baby.

Whole floor for women and children

A whole floor (the fifth floor), is dedicated to women and

children with facilities such as Outpatient Departments for both Gynecology and Pediatrics, USG scans, treatment rooms, labour suites, well baby clinic and in-patient facility for mother and children.

Apollo Women & Child Specialty Centre provides comprehensive care for mother and child. It offers the best of services at all stages of pregnancy and beyond.

Comprehensive package

"The division, which assists in the special journey towards motherhood, aims at covering everything from the time of conceiving and delivering in a professional and caring manner. It is a comprehensive one covering both antenatal care and delivery," the team said.

Care, comfort and convenience

An expectant mother can avail of the facilities at the fifth floor dedicated to women going through an important stage of their life. "She can have her consultations with Gynaecologists, perform scanning, have admission for delivery and receive professional child care, all in the same area, cocooned in an arena of comfort, care and convenience," the team added.

Three world-class delivery suites

Apollo offers three world-class delivery suites overlooking the Arabian Sea. The department offers antenatal and postnatal care, painless childbirth and management of high-risk pregnancies as well as healthy family services. In addition, open and laparoscopic surgical procedures for cysts, myomas, fibroids, hysterectomies and C/S deliveries are routinely done as well if need be.



Let us protect environment for a healthy life

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttv

REPRESENTED

by the Environment Authority, the Sultanate of Oman joined other countries across the world to mark the UN-led World Environment Day on Sunday, June 5 with the theme ‘Only One Earth’.

This day is celebrated every year to raise awareness about degrading environmental conditions and to encourage people globally to take positive environmental actions, to help create a better future.

“World Environment Day provides a global platform to inspire positive change towards our lives. Where the environment is life, therefore, it must be preserved in order for that life to continue”, the Environment Society of Oman said in its twitter handle.

In Oman, however, the day is celebrated on January 8 to raise awareness about the need for environment protection with emphasis on the contribution of society and government and private institutions in the protection and conservation of natural resources.

Since its inception, World Environment Day has spread to over 140 countries and has had its main celebratory event held on all the six inhabited continents.

The theme of the World Environment Day 2022 reflects the three crises of the earth, which are climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the risks of pollution and waste.

In fact, the Sultanate of Oman is one of the leading countries in dealing with all issues related to the environment and climate, and

it is keen on supporting international solidarity to address the problem of climate change and its negative effects.

Climate change is now affecting every country on every continent. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives, costing people, communities and countries dearly today and even more tomorrow.

Oman has resolutely endeavoured to honour its international commitment to achieving these goals by creating long-term strategies and short and medium-term plans and programmes, whilst relying on the United Nations 2030 Agenda as a central pillar to take action to combat climate change and its impacts The Oman Vision 2040 and the 10th Five-Year Plan both underscore the fact that Oman takes the 2030 Agenda seriously and has devised the necessary policies, initiatives and programmes to ensure the achievement of desired goals by the internationally agreed deadline.

However, Oman is not considered safe from global climate change, as its geographical location near the sea and oceans make it more vulnerable than any other country in the region.

“It is located within the high temperature zone, which is characterised by great variation between the upper and lower temperatures, especially during the summer, and the negative effects on various ecosystems, such as vegetation and biodiversity”, says the report by National Committee for the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite this vulnerability, Oman has been making all-out efforts to adapt in many different areas, such as tropical cyclones, coastal erosion, rising sea levels, the fisheries, the marine environment, water scarcity and desertification, flood protection, energy security and food security.

“In order to achieve the objectives of protecting the marine environment and the conservation of marine biological resources, the country has given special importance to the implementation of studies, the establishment of marine conservation zones and the promulgation of legislations”, the

report points out. Other initiatives include the implementation of coastal zone management plans, the rehabilitation of degraded areas and the cultivation of mangroves in its various governorates, in addition to campaigns to clean the environment and control turtles and marine mammals, as they are important for the sustainability and balance of the marine environment.

As part of its participation in the Clean Seas Campaign of the United Nations Environment Programme, an integrated programme to clean coral reef environments was implemented in 2018.

An Action Plan has also been developed to Combat Desertification and Land Degradation, which included the development of a natural resource registry for containing water sources, vegetation cover and soil.

The country also implemented several projects to alleviate land degradation and combat desertification, in which many scientific and research institutions participated in order to ensure quality of implementation and access to reference information at the national level. The most important projects implemented are the fog harvesting project in Dhofar Governorate, the draft land degradation map and the land rehabilitation of areas affected by desertification factors. These projects identified degraded areas and lands prone to degradation, the development of a spatial database and a monitoring system based on high-resolution satellite data.

ADVERTORIAL

Takaful Oman: the Islamic insurance partner of choice

Oman’s Islamic financial system has, in recent years, witnessed significant expansion, operating seamlessly alongside the conventional financial system. Islamic financial institutions have shifted their focus to developing an efficient, effective, and resilient form of financial intermediation that promotes greater awareness of Islamic finance products, wealth creation, and sustainable economic growth.

As the only indigenous Islamic insurer in the Sultanate of Oman, Takaful Oman has also carved its niche in the growing Islamic finance industry. As of December 2021, the total assets of Islamic banking entities in Oman surpassed a market share of 15% in the banking sector. Takaful, being a supporting industry, has capitalized on the resultant opportunities. Offering an entire bouquet of insurance products which includes General, Health, and Family Takaful, Takaful Oman has established itself as a strong and trustworthy brand.



Commenting on Takaful Oman’s role in the ecosystem, Mr. Mohamed Abdulla Al Khonji, Chairman of Takaful Oman said, “As the Sultanate’s first fully-fledged Islamic insurance provider, Takaful Oman has proactively demonstrated its ability to adapt to a dynamic market and has continued to provide unparalleled services to its customers. Governed by effective Shari’a compliant structures, sound risk management, and an inherent people-first culture, the company has upheld the highest degree of excellence in operations.”

Expansion, diversification, and continued growth

Takaful Oman has, through the years, been expanding its branch network and complementing it with innovative Sharia-compliant Takaful products. The company has a well-unified network of branches and agencies across the Sultanate that contributes as much as 30% to the top line. With a growing customer base of over 200K, there also exists a huge potential for innovative and embedded products.

The company is now gearing for a Rights Issue of 150,000,000 shares at a price of 41 Baiza per share (with a share price of 40 Baiza per share plus issue expenses of 1 Baiza per share). The opening date for the Rights Subscription was 1 June 2022 and will close on 8 June 2022.

“As part of the company’s long-term growth strategy, it continues to leverage market opportunities and effectively tailor its products to the bespoke needs of the customers. Simultaneously, it has re-

mained steadfast in adhering to its strong corporate values that lay a keen emphasis on fair and equitable treatment of fund providers and other stakeholders,” said Mr. Neelmani Bhardwaj, Acting CEO of Takaful Oman.

Strong collaborations and innovative offerings

Takaful Oman’s stable growth is reflected in the number of contracts signed with leading corporate and retail companies. Its innovative packages were affordable, practical, and convenient and included multiple geographical coverage options with emergency medical assistance and expense covers of up to USD 1 Million. Dedicated to promoting inclusivity, the covers were packaged in three different plans, each with its set of features and benefits.

The company has also strengthened its focus on diversifying its portfolio of insurance risks while concentrating on Life and Medical Takaful, where it ranks second in the market. Currently, Life Takaful is the single largest seg-

ment accounting for 40% of the overall business. Meanwhile, for Motor Takaful, where the gross contributions for 2021 were OMR 6.2 million, the company seeks to further enhance its profitability through better segment-based pricing and claims management.

As a leading bancatakaful operator in Oman, the company also takes great pride in its partnership with almost all the Islamic banks and windows in Oman. With contributions of more than 50% to the top line, it offers more than seven products and reserves further potential for cross-selling, upselling, and creating new offerings.

Digitalisation

The company is in the process of digitalization through state-of-the-art B2B, B2B2C & B2C portals with new architectural framework to enable seamless policy issuance and related activities. Predictive underwriting through business rule engine will ensure effective underwriting controls. Claims process automation is another important aspect which is underway

to do away physical claim files and thereby increase efficiency and reduce the turnaround time for just and fair settlement of claims

Omnichannel call center is being set up to provide best in class service to the customers. The integrated CRM solution will assist in claims tracking, registering complaints, renewal reminders powered by social media handles like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & Whatsapp.

At the heart of the company’s efforts is the intrinsic zeal to identify the needs of its customers, conceptualise innovative Sharia-compliant insurance offerings to cater to the evolving needs of the market, and advocate the benefits of opting for Islamic insurance products. Practicing utmost transparency in its dealings, Takaful Oman has been able to win the loyalty of its customers which has played a critical role in its success story.



Pact signed to train students in entrepreneurship skills

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Centre for Vocational Guidance and Student Guidance, on Sunday signed a cooperation agreement with the Zubair Centre for Institutional Development. The agreement aims at developing and designing entrepreneurship training programmes for students in grades 9-12, and training those in charge of mentoring services to present these programmes to students. The signing of the agreement took place in Khasab Hall in the Ministry's Headquarter.

The agreement was signed by Sana bint Saud al Busaidiyah, Councillor to the Minister of Education, and the Acting Director-General of the Centre for Vocational Guidance and Student Guidance at the Ministry; and Saeed bin Salem al Sahib, Head



of Zubair Centre for Institutional Development.

On the importance of this agreement, Al Busaidiyah said: "The culture of entrepreneurship falls within the priorities of the Centre for Vocational Guidance and Student Guidance, as it is an enabling tool for students to launch their lives. Hence, comes the Ministry's cooperation with the Zubair Centre for Institutional

Development, as it is one of the national expertise houses in this field. The centre designs and develops entrepreneurship training programmes for students in grades 9-12, in addition to training the guidance centre staff, to provide these programmes with high efficiency and an attractive and motivating method for these students, to achieve the desired goals. We highly value the

cooperation with the local private sector to serve the new generations and provide them with the knowledge they need to succeed in the future."

Al Sahib, Head of the Zubair Centre for Enterprise Development, said: "We are very appreciative for choosing the Zubair Centre to carry out this mission to enable our students to start their own projects, armed with the necessary knowledge and experience. We have taken upon ourselves to help the entrepreneurship sector, based on our belief in its pivotal role in the economic system of the Sultanate of Oman, and we look forward to seeing many successful ideas and projects from these young and enthusiastic minds, to provide them with knowledge and advisory support, to enable them to compete and grow locally and globally, as well as help them promote their products in the target markets."



Agreements inked for vaccine tech transfer

MUSCAT: A technology transfer agreement was signed today between the National Veterinary Vaccines Company and India's TechInvention company. Memoranda of understanding were also inked with Indian Immunological Ltd for Animal Vaccine company and Malaysian Vaccines and Pharmaceuticals company.

The National Veterinary Vaccines Company will set up a factory for the production of veterinary vaccines at Sohar Free Zone (SFZ). The factory will cover local demand and will import to Arab and African countries.

The signing ceremony was attended by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Mohammed bin Obaid al Mazroui, Chairman of the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID).

The National Company for Veterinary Vaccines is the result of cooperation between the Oman Food Investment Holding Company and the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development to support food security projects in Oman and the Arab world.

— ONA

THE WASTE WILL BE USED IN PRODUCING MATERIAL THAT PROTECTS AGAINST RADIOACTIVITY

In a first for Oman, Royal Hospital recycles lead waste

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital, in cooperation with Arab Lead company, is implementing a project for recycling lead waste to produce cheaper protective material.

The project is a first of a kind in Oman and in the region. It is likely that the project will be the start of several similar experiments in near future.

Dr Khalsa bint Zahran al Nabhaniyah, Head of the Nuclear Medicine and Molecular

Imaging Department said that the department utilises varied amounts of radioactive materials which are used for medical reasons.

The waste, she added, will be used in producing material that protects against radioactivity.

She added that the radioactive materials are kept in containers made of lead to protect the workers in the Nuclear Medicine Department from exposure to radiation, and after using the

radioactive materials, the lead containers are turned into non-radioactive waste.

She stated that during the past years, large quantities of this waste had accumulated in the department's warehouse, which prompted the specialised team to think about how to dispose of it in a proper way and make use of it.

She pointed out that the nuclear medicine team counted approximately 10,000 kg of lead

container remnants accumulated from 2012 to 2020 in the radioactive material store at the Nuclear Medicine Department, and the radiation levels were measured by a medical physicist to ensure that they were free from radiation.

She added that personal radiation measuring devices were provided to the team dealing with these wastes, and lead containers were inventoried according to their type and weight by the same

team.

In this aspect, Arab Lead Company team was trained by the Nuclear Medicine Department team on how to safely deal with these wastes, especially nuclear generators and how to dismantle them and separate the radiation source from them and then store it in a safe way and deliver it to the Nuclear Medicine Department.

She stated that the last danger was the transfer of lead containers to Arab Lead Company in order

to recycle them and manufacture radiation protection devices with international specifications and standards for use by the nuclear medicine department staff.

Dr Khalsa said that the company delivered the two mobile radiation protection devices as a first batch of materials manufactured for the department in April 2022, explaining that the cost of one mobile device is approximately RO 13,000.

— ONA



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDERS NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
521/2021/MAFWR/HQ-81 Retenders	Maintenance works of Aquaculture Center at Al Bustan	25/-	Fourth	Tuesday 14/6/2022	Thursday 23/6/2022
537/2021/MAFWR/HQ-88 Retenders	Rehabilitation of Meeting Room at Ministry Head Quarter - Fifth Floor	25/-	Excellent	Wednesday 8/6/2022	Tuesday 14/6/2022
279/2022/MAFWR/HQ-34	Supplying office furniture to the General Directorate of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam Governorate	25/-	Specialized	Wednesday 15/6/2022	Thursday 23/6/2022
285/2022/MAFWR/HQ-35	Supply and installation of air conditioners for the offices of the General Directorate of Agricultural Wealth, Fisheries and Water Resources in Musandam Governorate	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 16/6/2022	Thursday 23/6/2022
290/2022/MAFWR/HQ-36	Supply and installation of devices, equipment for Fish Diseases Laboratory	25/-	Specialized	Monday 20/6/2022	Tuesday 19/7/2022
294/2022/MAFWR/HQ-37	Supply & installation 2 Nos. External 4 Stroke Engines for Research Boat	25/-	Specialized	Wednesday 22/6/2022	Tuesday 19/7/2022

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above 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.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, And the bidders can contact the Esmad technical support team at the number listed below to find out how to request electronic guarantees from local banks.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968.24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

India-bound travellers urged to follow Covid-19 protocols

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](https://twitter.com/vinot_nair)

With most Indian schools in the Sultanate of Oman closing for the summer break in the coming days, many travellers are now heading to the sub-continent for annual vacation.

While all Covid-19-related protocols have been relaxed while returning to the Sultanate of Oman, some of them continue in place while travelling to India. Airlines have urged travellers to take note of the requirements when rushing to the airport to avoid any last moment glitters, which can lead to cancellation or postponement of the journey.

As per the rules, passengers need to be either fully vaccinated or must carry a negative RT-PCR test done within 72 hours of departure. Passengers under 5 years of age are exempted from the need for a PCR test or vaccination. It is mandatory for passengers flying to India to submit a self-declaration form online on the Air Suvidha portal 24 hours prior to departure and obtain confirmation.

Speaking to the Observer, an official of a budget airline said, "We cannot issue boarding passes if passengers do not have all documents with them. While there is a provision for the Air Suvidha form to be filled at the airport for a cost, PCR tests must be done 72 hours before departure if the traveller is not fully vaccinated."

"Airlines to allow boarding by only those passengers who have filled in all the information in the Self Declaration Form on the Air Suvidha portal and uploaded the negative RT-PCR test report or Covid-19 vaccination certificate of having completed the primary vaccination schedule," India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said in a statement.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (16/2022)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Last Date for Inquires Submission	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Last Date for Submission
34/2022/MM/PA-8	Supply of Irrigation Materials (Specified for SMEs)	25/- OMR	26/06/2022	11/07/2022	17/07/2022
35/2022/MM/PA-9	Supplying Water Suction Pumps	25/- OMR	26/06/2022	11/07/2022	17/07/2022

- Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.
- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.
- Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.**
- Clarifications and support:**
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
 - For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to etenderhd@mtc.gov.om or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to esnad@gstb.gov.om or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Bangladesh port depot fire kills atleast 34, injures 300

DHAKA: At least 34 people have been killed in a massive fire, believed to have been triggered by explosions, at a container depot in eastern Bangladesh, officials and firefighters said on Sunday.

The fire broke out at BM Inland Container Depot, a Dutch-Bangladesh joint venture, near the south-eastern port city of Chattogram on Saturday night after some explosions were reported, firefighting official Anisur Rahman said.

An overnight effort by firefighters was not enough to bring the flames under control. Small explosions of containers full of chemicals made the firefighting efforts difficult, he said, adding that firefighters were among the dead.

He said the firefighters traced chemicals such as hydrogen peroxide in many of the containers inside the import-export depot, located nearly 300 kilometres south-east of the capital Dhaka, and 20 kilometres away from the country's major port of Chittagong.

Army troops were called in to join the rescue operation, Rahman said. He could not give any reason for the fire.

Alauddin Talukder, a police officer at Chittagong's Medical College Hospital, said at least 32 bodies had been brought to the morgue by noon time on Sunday.



Firefighters try to extinguish a fire that broke out at a container storage facility in Sitakunda, about 40 km from the key port of Chittagong. — AFP

Five of them were identified as members of the Fire Service and Civil Defence department, said officer Shahjahan Sikder.

Television footages show firefighters trying to douse the flames using hosepipes at one point, while explosions in other parts ignited fires inside the depot.

Deaths from fire and industrial disasters are frequent in Bangladesh.

Last year, almost 40 people were killed when a fire swept

Firefighters traced chemicals such as hydrogen peroxide in many of the containers inside the depot

through a passenger ferry in December, while 52 died after a blaze trapped workers in a Dhaka food processing factory in July.

The director of the B M

Container Depot, Mujibur Rahman, said the fire's cause was still unknown. He added the facility employs about 600 people. Fires are common in Bangladesh due to lax enforcement of safety rules. In July 2021, 54 people died when a blaze ripped through a massive food-processing factory outside the capital Dhaka. In February 2020, 70 people were killed when another fire engulfed several Dhaka apartment blocks.

— dpa

Kazakhstan holds snap referendum

ALMATY: Kazakhstan voted on Sunday for a referendum to overhaul the constitution after deadly unrest in January ended the founding leader Nursultan Nazarbayev's three-decade grip on Central Asia's richest country.

The bloodshed — which grew out of peaceful protests over a spike in car fuel prices — left more than 230 people dead and prompted authorities to call in troops from a Russia-led security bloc.

The drive for a “New Kazakhstan” in the wake of the violence has come from the man that Nazarbayev hand-picked to replace him as president in 2019, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Tokayev, 69, describes the snap referendum as a shift from “super-presidential” rule that will strengthen parliament.

But it is the absence of special privileges for 81-year-old Nazarbayev that is the most eye-catching change to the constitution.

Prior to January's crisis, Tokayev was widely seen as ruling in the shadow of Nazarbayev and his super-rich relatives.

Even after stepping down as president, Nazarbayev retained the constitutional title of “Elbasy”, or “Leader of the Nation” — a role that afforded him influence over policymaking regardless of his formal position. The new constitution does away with that status.

Another amendment prevents



A man casts his vote at a polling station as part of the vote for a referendum to overhaul the constitution in Almaty. — AFP

relatives of the president from holding government positions — a clear nod to the influence of Nazarbayev's family and in-laws, who lost powerful positions in the aftermath of the violence.

Polling stations in the largest city Almaty saw a slow trickle of voters in cloudless, breezy summer conditions.

Ayan, an 18-year-old student voting for the first time, said he welcomed the former president's removal from the basic law.

“He has his place in our history textbooks, but all citizens should be equal in the constitution,” he said, after casting his vote at his university, where a small group of activists protested for the release of political prisoners and against the vote. — AFP

North Korea fires eight ballistic missiles, says Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea launched eight ballistic missiles from multiple locations on Sunday, South Korea's military said, a day after Seoul and Washington completed their first joint drills involving a US aircraft carrier in more than four years.

Pyongyang has doubled down on upgrading its weapons programme this year, despite facing crippling economic sanctions, with officials and analysts warning that the regime is preparing to carry out a fresh nuclear test.

“Our military detected eight short-range ballistic missiles fired by North Korea,” Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The missiles were launched from multiple locations over a 30-minute period, including

Sunan in capital Pyongyang, Tongchang-ri in North Pyongan province, and Hamhung in South Hamgyong province, they said.

They travelled different distances — from 110 kilometres to 670 kilometres — and flew at different altitudes of up to 90 kilometres, it added. Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said the simultaneous test-firing from multiple locations was “unusual”.

“This is absolutely unacceptable,” he added.

According to local reports, two missiles were shot from each site, likely from transporter erector launchers (TELS) — the largest number of ballistic missiles North Korea has recently launched on a single day and occasion.

Analysts say the volley of



A screen shows a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test at a railway station in Seoul. — AFP

missile launches on Sunday — one of nearly 20 weapons tests by Pyongyang so far this year — is

a pointed message for Seoul and Washington.

“It shows North Korea's

The missiles were launched from multiple locations over a 30-minute period

intention to neutralise the missile defence system of South Korea and the United States with multiple simultaneous attacks during emergency,” said Cheong Seong-jang, a researcher at the Sejong Institute.

The move comes barely a day after South Korea and the United States wrapped up large-scale, three-day exercises involving the USS Ronald Reagan, a 100,000-tonne nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

The exercises were the allies' first joint military drills since South Korea's hawkish new President Yoon Suk-yeol took office last month, and the first involving an aircraft carrier since November 2017.

Pyongyang has long protested against the joint exercises, calling them rehearsals for invasion.

“The exercise consolidated the two countries' determination to sternly respond to any North Korean provocations while demonstrating the US commitment to provide extended deterrence,” Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Go Myong-hyun, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, said Sunday's launch was likely a response to the US-South Korea manoeuvres. — AFP

BEIJING

Three Chinese astronauts dock at space station

Three Chinese astronauts docked at the country's space station, the state broadcaster said, marking a new milestone in Beijing's drive to become a major space power. The trio blasted off in a Long March-2F rocket from the Jiuquan launch centre in north-western China's Gobi desert, said broadcaster CCTV.

The team is tasked with “completing in-orbit assembly and construction of the space station”, as well as “commissioning of equipment” and conducting



scientific experiments, state-run CGTN said. The spacecraft docked at the Tiangong station after about “seven hours of flight”, CCTV reported. — AFP

PHNOM PENH

Cambodians vote in local polls

Cambodians voted in local polls as a revived opposition party attempted to dent Prime Minister Hun Sen's decades-long grip on power ahead of national elections next year. Hun Sen, one of the world's longest-serving leaders, has ruled Cambodia for more than 37 years and turned the country into a one-party state in 2018 when his party won every seat in a national election.

Voting shortly after polls opened at 7 am, the prime minister entered a school polling sta-



tion on Phnom Penh's outskirts with his wife Bun Rany. Critics and rights groups have accused him of creating a climate of fear by locking up scores of political opponents and activists. —AFP

MANILA

Volcano erupts in the Philippines

A volcano in the eastern Philippines spewed a huge, dark cloud, prompting evacuations from ash-covered towns while authorities warned of possible further eruptions. The blast from Bulusan volcano in the rural Sorsogon province lasted about 17 minutes, sending a grey plume shooting up at least one kilometre, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology. Authorities raised the alert to one on the 5-level system, indicating “low-level unrest”. “There was a



phreatic eruption of the Bulusan volcano, meaning the explosion was caused by the boiling water under the crater,” institute head Renato Solidum told local radio DZBB. — AFP



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MONDAY | JUNE 6 | 2022

7

In brief

■ PARIS



STORMS WREAK HAVOC ACROSS FRANCE

Storms across large parts of France killed one woman, wrought havoc in some vineyards and forced thousands of cub scouts to run for shelter. In contrast, the Mediterranean island of Corsica sweltered in record temperatures for the month of June.

A woman died after being trapped under a car by flash waters caused by a storm in the northern city of Rouen, the mayor's office announced. In the Landes and Gers region of southwest France, hailstones bigger than golf balls crashed down on parts of the Armagnac vineyard, local growers and officials said. — AFP

■ ATHENS



ATHENS FIREFIGHTERS BRING BLAZE UNDER CONTROL

Residents of a southern suburb of Athens returned to their homes after firefighters managed to bring under control a wildfire that had forced them to evacuate the day before, the emergency services said. "The fire has been demarcated, the residents are back in their houses", Deputy Civil Protection Minister, Evangelos Tournas, said.

Firefighters remained in the area "and will remain as long as it is needed, while aircraft will continue dropping water protectively", he said. A total of 283 firefighters in 65 vehicles, with the help of groups of bystanders, had battled overnight to bring the fire under control. — AFP

■ GENEVA



WHO SAYS 780 MONKEYPOX OUTBREAK CASES

The World Health Organization said that 780 laboratory-confirmed monkeypox cases had been reported to it from 27 non-endemic countries, while maintaining that the global risk level was moderate. The WHO said the 780 figure, for cases from May 13 to Thursday, was probably an underestimate due to limited epidemiological and laboratory information.

"It is highly likely that other countries will identify cases and there will be further spread of the virus", the UN health agency added.

Few hospitalisations have been reported, apart from patients being isolated. — AFP

Putin warns over missile deliveries

KYIV: Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Sunday that Moscow will hit new targets if the West supplies Ukraine with long-range missiles, hours after several explosions rocked the Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

If Kyiv is provided with such missiles "we will draw the appropriate conclusions and use our arms... to strike targets we haven't hit before", Putin was quoted by Russian news agencies as saying.

He did not specify which targets he meant. Putin's comments came after the US last week announced that it would supply Ukraine with advanced missile systems.

Ukrainian officials earlier on Sunday said Russian missiles hit railway infrastructure sites in the first such strikes on Kyiv since April 28.

Russia said that it had destroyed tanks supplied to Ukraine by eastern European countries during the strikes.

"High-precision, long-range missiles fired by the Russian Aerospace Forces on the outskirts of Kyiv destroyed T-72 tanks supplied by eastern European countries and other armoured vehicles that were in hangars", Russian defence ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.

One person was wounded and reporters saw several buildings with blown-out windows near one of the sites that was targeted.

Leonid, a 63-year-old local



A girl rides a kick scooter past a destroyed residential building in the village of Horenka, Kyiv region amid the Russian attack of Ukraine. — AFP

resident who used to work at the facility, said he heard three or four explosions.

"There is nothing military there but they are bombing everything", he said.

Vasyl, 43, said he heard five blasts. "People are afraid now", he said, walking back to his damaged home with two loaves of bread.

Ukrainian authorities did not want to identify the precise locations of the explosions for security reasons.

Meanwhile, in the east of the

Ukrainian authorities did not want to identify the precise locations of the explosions for security reasons

country, the battle for control of Severodonetsk raged on. The city is the largest still in Ukrainian hands in the Lugansk region of the Donbas, where Russian forces

have been advancing gradually after retreating or being beaten back from other parts of the country, including Kyiv.

Lugansk Regional Governor Serhiy Gaiday said that Russian forces had lost ground in the city and it was now "divided in two".

"The Russians were in control of about 70 per cent of the city, but have been forced back over the past two days", he said on Telegram.

"They are afraid to move freely around the city." — AFP

Pope Francis calls for 'real negotiations'

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis renewed calls on Sunday for "real negotiations" to end what he called the "increasingly dangerous escalation" of the conflict in Ukraine.

"As the fury of destruction and death rages and clashes flare, fuelling an escalation that is increasingly dangerous for all, I renew my appeal to the leaders of nations: Please do not lead humanity to destruction", the pontiff said from the window of the apostolic palace in St Peter's Square. More than a hundred days since the start of the war, the pope called for "real negotiations for a ceasefire and a solution" to end it.

On Saturday, the 85-year-old pope confirmed his desire to visit Ukraine, but said he wanted to wait for "the right moment".

Tens of thousands of people have been killed, millions forced to flee and towns turned into rubble since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an all-out assault. — AFP

Three killed, 11 wounded in Philadelphia shooting

WASHINGTON: Three people were killed and 11 others wounded on Saturday after multiple shooters opened fire into a crowd in the US city of Philadelphia, according to police. The shooting took place on a busy street known for its nightlife.

Police Inspector D F Pace told reporters that two men and a woman had been killed, adding that officers responding to the incident "observed several active shooters shooting into the crowd."

"You can imagine there were hundreds of individuals enjoying South Street, as they do every single weekend, when this shooting broke out", Pace said.

He said that "numerous" officers were already on the scene when the first shots were heard, describing it as a "standard deployment" for the area on summer weekend nights.

A responding officer fired at one of the shooters, who dropped his gun and fled, though it was unclear whether the man was hit, Pace said. Local media reported that no arrests had been made. Pace said two semi-automatic handguns, one with an extended magazine, were recovered at the scene.

He added that police would have to wait until morning to review surveillance footage from nearby businesses that were closed on Saturday night.

Pace described the investigation as "fluid", saying there were still "a lot of unanswered questions." The US has been rocked by a series of high-profile shootings in recent weeks, including at a school in



New York City students stage a walkout rally at Union Square in New York to protest gun violence. — AFP

Texas, a church in California, a grocery store in New York and a hospital in Oklahoma. The incidents have collectively left dozens dead.

Bystander Joe Smith, 23, told 'The Philadelphia Inquirer' that his mind had flashed to the recent incidents when he heard the first shots ring out on Saturday. "Once it started I didn't think it was going to stop", he told the outlet. "There was guttural screaming", he added. "I just heard screams."

Another witness, Eric Walsh, described to the Inquirer scenes of people fleeing the shooting "coming off the street with blood splatters on white sneakers and skinned knees and skinned elbows."

The 'Inquirer' reported that another person was fatally shot

just blocks from the scene about two hours later, but police said that the two incidents were not believed to be linked.

During warmer months, gun violence tends to spike in the United States, where there were an estimated 393 million guns in circulation in 2020, more than the number of people.

US President Joe Biden last week forcefully called for new gun control legislation in response to the recent violence, lamenting the "everyday places that have become killing fields, battlefields here in America."

A bipartisan group of Senators met on Thursday to discuss a package of firearms controls, but Republicans have historically resisted tougher gun laws.

— AFP

Queen Elizabeth II's jubilee marked with picnics and parties

LONDON: People in Edinburgh enjoyed live music and entertainment in gardens beneath Edinburgh Castle on Sunday as part of celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Those attending the free event in West Princes Street Gardens were able to watch the Platinum Jubilee Pageant broadcast live from London, which was shown on big screens.

The celebration, which saw attendees enjoying picnics in the sun, kicked off at 12.30 pm with the band of HM Royal Marines Scotland and a special Edinburgh Festival Carnival parade.

Music from the HM Royal Marines Scotland band included their Corps of Drums, film music, Scottish melodies and virtuosos soloists.

The local Love Music Community Choir also performed, followed by the screening of the pageant later in the afternoon.

The good weather and music seemed to have brought many

out for the day, with some attendees admitting they were somewhat neutral on the Jubilee celebrations.

"We're here for the music and performers", one told the PA news agency. "We heard there was stuff on for the Jubilee, so we came to see what it was like", another said. "I'm fairly neutral to it (the Jubilee), but it is a good excuse for a party."

Edinburgh's Lord Provost Robert Aldridge said: "The Platinum Jubilee is a truly historic event and it was important to find a fitting tribute here in the capital for those who wish to come together and celebrate the occasion."

"In the tradition of Jubilee street parties our big picnic in the gardens invites citizens to come together to enjoy some fantastic local entertainment and music."

"Watching the celebrations on the big screen will be a great way for people to be involved and soak up the atmosphere of this extraordinary day." — dpa



Performers take part in the Platinum Pageant in London as part of Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee celebrations. — AFP

World Environment Day is more than tokenism



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm conference which upheld the idea of ‘Only one earth’ as part of World Environment Day, celebrated every year on June 5.

It is an apt time of the year to observe such an occasion as unprecedented heat waves have hit many parts of the northern hemisphere, and severe sandstorms affected daily life in the Middle East.

The list of impending environmental disasters only keeps increasing.

From forest fires to unseasonal rains leading to flooding and scorching of the earth, the evidence of climate change can now be perceptibly observed.

Events like tree planting and plastic recycling do go some way

to bring awareness of climactic changes, especially when done by children and young adults who can be taught the importance of being responsible for their own environment.

Educational institutions often have campaigns to mark the occasion.

World Environment Day is a reminder of the power at the grass root to make changes without waiting for governments or corporations. As the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Chief said, “It helps to amplify voices and strengthen participants’ agency to impact change”.

The 2022 campaign’s focus on living sustainably with nature, not against it is an appropriate

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY IS A MUCH NEEDED REMINDER THAT ANY SMALL CHANGE WE CAN MAKE WILL LEAD TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

reminder that, if the long term results of environmental damage cannot be reversed, at least we can learn to live with the earth that we have left, creating a sustainable world for all.

It is easy to dismiss such events as just another day in which some ceremonies could be observed, only to be forgotten the next day. In the case of the environment, however, this is just an option we

do not have. The reality of climate change is at our doorstep and ways of preventing further disaster will need urgent consideration.

Researchers from all walks of life have shown the way forward and approached the climate change challenge as an opportunity. Whether it is architecture, urban landscaping, migration patterns, or even mental health, there is no area of study which has not been impacted by the onset of climate change. These challenges call for new ways of understanding the relation of human beings with the environment, while retaining hope and possibility.

The best way to approach climate change is, perhaps, the attitude that we can all make a difference at our

very individual level. How we live a sustainable life can be discerned in the way we use electricity, plastic and packaging, water and other scarce resources like oil and coal.

Carpooling, avoiding over-consumption, responsible recycling where possible, using less electricity and generally avoiding wastage of food and other consumables are very simple tweaks to our daily routine. Others include avoiding single use water bottles, shopping for clothes more sustainably and unplugging gadgets like phones from the main sockets.

World Environment Day is a much needed reminder that any small change we can make will lead to a more sustainable future, in which we are all invested.

Video game, a refuge for war scarred Afghans

CYRIL BELAUD AND AYSHA SAFI

The crackle of gunfire. A gasp of a stranger. Explosions rumbling in the distance. In the Afghan capital of Kabul, such sounds would normally prompt panic. But they are coming from the tinny speaker of a mobile phone clutched by a young man, hunched over and absorbed in the bloody shoot ‘em up video game “PlayerUnknown’s Battlegrounds”, or PUBG.

“In this country, we are living but we are not alive,” said gamer Abdul Musawir Raufi, after peeling his gaze away from the phone screen, where his avatar duels with other players in an online arena.

“We don’t know what will happen from one moment to the next. It’s the only way to pass the time,” said the 23-year-old.

Afghanistan has been wracked by four decades of very real conflict, now largely subsided since the withdrawal of US-led troops and the return of the Taliban last year.

But in a striking irony, youngsters say the wildly popular virtual violence simulator offers respite from the turmoil of the transition and the strictures of the regime, as well as a rare channel of communication with the outside world.

Meanwhile, the Taliban — who spent the past 20 years waging their own vicious insurgency — are currently working to cut off access to PUBG, having deemed it a corrupting influence.

Since storming back to power in August, the Taliban have not curtailed entertainment as harshly as they did during their previous stint in power between 1996 and 2001, when TV, cinema, photography and kite flying were all banned.

In the capital, a few arcades and bowling alleys remain open and some sports are still being played. But music has been banned alongside female-fronted or foreign TV series.

Many Kabul residents are wary of the Taliban fighters who patrol the streets and man checkpoints, and prefer to stay at home rather than risk an outing for entertainment.

Raufi was once a keen football player, but most of the friends he played with fled the country during the chaotic mass evacuation in the final days of the international withdrawal.

“The fun we used to have, the laughing with friends... it’s all over,” he said. — AFP

The simplest response to school shootings



ROSS DOUTHAT

The writer is an American political analyst, blogger and author

To fully understand a problem like terrorism, you need to accept complexity, a sprawl of general factors — personal, historical, cultural — converging in a specific movement or a single actor.

The kind of mass-murdering, effectively-suicidal terrorism that has taken hold in America in the 23 years since Columbine is no different, even if it doesn’t wave a flag or make political demands.

The cascade of mimetic violence, the despairing anti-politics, the horribly vulnerable targets, the young men willingly becoming monsters — so much is implicated here: our media ecosystem and our education system, religion and technology and fatherhood and relations between the sexes, a tangle of roots in poisoned soil.

But an important truth about policymaking — a conservative truth, in many contexts — is that you don’t have to fully understand a problem’s roots in order to do something about it.

There’s no simple path to a future America where young men like the killer in Uvalde, Texas — may his name be blotted out — no longer seek apotheosis through mass murder. But as long as we live in this America, I want the next teenager with an obvious set of warning flags — severe familial disorder, self-harm, violent online threats — to find it much harder to turn 18 and immediately acquire a high-powered weapon.

The specificity of the problem is important. I am not interested in the liberal desire to fold the problem of Uvalde-style mass shootings, of nihilistic terrorism with a misogynist or racist edge, into a larger problem called “gun violence.”

America does indeed have a lot of gun violence, and we have had more of it in the past few years, but that violence is first and foremost a crime problem — one worsened by the easy availability of handguns but also by other novel factors, including the school closures and the police retreat that blue-state liberalism has recently encouraged.

Better enforcement of gun laws has its place in any response to the current homicide spike. But the liberals pinning for sweeping new federal gun restrictions seem to be imagining either



The makeshift memorial outside Robb Elementary School, where 19 students and two teachers were killed in a mass shooting, in Uvalde, Texas.

toothless laws that don’t affect anyone except the scrupulously law-abiding or some version of Michael Bloomberg’s aggressive-policing regime imposed all over the country, when they themselves decided that Bloombergism was authoritarian and racist.

In either case, the liberal anti-gun impulse often tends toward culture-war posturing, not an actual strategy for bringing homicide rates back down or preventing the kind of “school shootings” that are just general lawlessness spilling over onto school property.

At the same time, I also have no interest in the apparent conservative

THERE’S NO SIMPLE PATH TO A FUTURE AMERICA WHERE YOUNG MEN LIKE THE KILLER IN UVALDE, TEXAS NO LONGER SEEK APOTHEOSIS THROUGH MASS MURDER

desire — or least Ted Cruz’s desire — to turn America’s schools into a zone of overpolicing, duck-and-cover fearfulness and military-level vigilance.

Yes, there are schools in high-crime areas that need a police presence and there are school buildings well suited to have a single, secured entrance. But beyond these basics, the potential ubiquity of armed security and active-shooter drills is its own sacrifice of liberty, and even if the

right to a demilitarised childhood isn’t enumerated in the Constitution, it should be treasured and preserved.

Conservatives and libertarians should be especially aware of this given that they have spent two years arguing, reasonably, that the infliction of Covid security theatre on children does more harm than good. If that logic applies to the low risk to children from the virus, it surely applies to the low risk of school terrorism as well.

And Covid theatre, at least, did not risk spreading the virus further, whereas I strongly suspect that a constant childhood drumbeat about the risks of school massacres contributes to the dark romance of the deed — especially among those unhappy kids for whom K-12 education feels like a prison anyway, with or without metal detectors.

So don’t give me a fanciful general war on guns or a general “hardening” of elementary schools. Give me policies, the simpler the better, that would stand between some meaningful percentage of mass shooters and their arsenals.

We have a decent sense of what those policies might be. The people drawn to this kind of terrorism are overwhelmingly of a type — young, troubled, socially awkward men. They are not necessarily gun experts, prepared to retrofit any weapon they acquire for maximal lethality, nor are they necessarily experts at navigating black markets to acquire weapons they can’t get legally. And they often expose their instability and intentions in advance. — *The New York Times*

Drugs harm environment and humans alike



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

Does one's life worth being lost in a moment of worthless desires and joy. In fact, man's life is far precious than being sacrificed for things of no value at all that might take one's breath. Life is lived only once; every breath received over a lifespan should be well-invested and carefully inhaled. Once you inhale air, you cannot guarantee your ability to exhale

it out later as it could be your last breath in life. Life could come to an end any moment; it is all just a matter of how serious one is about managing life and making it more fruitful. There is no doubt that nobody likes to have a tough time or experience a hard life. Everyone longs for a happy, prosperous and successful life. Hence, all have to stay away from the things that spoil your good moments and fun time. Also, one has to always live the moment and enjoy it as much as possible.

If it is your call, you have to make it or break it; the right choice is always yours! However, as today's life is influenced by many changes, lot of people are getting trapped in extremely bad things that turn their lives into psychological, social and monetary war and misery. They become victims of their own selfish desires, slip-ups and neglect of life values.

Unfortunately, one of the most common issues that are badly affecting the lives of youth are drugs and tobacco. These psychotropic substances are widely spread these days and could easily be within reach. Many have given up their lives for being addicted to drugs. To them, it is a relief for stress, though drugs are the reason behind their failure and disappointment; drugs made some strongly believe so!

To tell the truth, addiction to drugs and tobacco is becoming a real threat to youth, families and society. Such poisons have brought cracks in the society as many parents have lost their sons; couples have got divorced and families got separated because of serious drugs crisis. The number of drug addicts is increasing every year. However, tremendous efforts and attempts have been made worldwide to combat the spread and use of drugs and tobacco.

According to World Health Organization, tobacco, for instance, kills over 8 million people annually and destroys environment and harms human health, through the cultivation, production, distribution, consumption, and post-consumer waste. Also, 84,000,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions released into air raising the global temperatures. Further, around 600,000,000 trees are chopped down for making cigarettes.

On the local front, many public and private entities, including National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances and other authorities concerned in the Sultanate of Oman are sparing no effort to combat drugs and promote awareness on the short-term and long-term harmful impacts of drugs and tobacco. Tremendous efforts have been made to combat drugs, treat those who get addicted and provide relevant health services to them.

All activities and initiatives have been offered in collective cooperation between all parties concerned including ROP, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health and others. Special state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, social, psychological and awareness programmes, comfortable homes, dedicated clinics and devoted counsellors and consultants are offered for the addicts who undergo treatment or those interested to start giving up drugs forever.

In a bid to combat the spread of drugs and tobacco in society, forces of government, individuals as well as public associations shall be joint together to fight this issue and support addicts get treated. Otherwise, drugs will violently attack youth, as victims, who mark the backbone of nations and future heroes. Public associations, sports clubs, mosques and youth camps shall start comprehensive ongoing awareness campaigns. All these institutes definitely play a vital role towards youth guidance and inspiration.



Surviving a future of heat



KRISTIE L EBI

The writer is a Professor of Global Health and Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at the University of Washington

Although nearly all heat-related deaths are preventable, heatwaves kill thousands of people worldwide every year. At this very moment, an extreme heatwave in India and Pakistan, affecting about one billion people, is “testing the limits of human survivability,” warns Chandni Singh, a lead author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Sixth Assessment Report. In April, the average maximum temperature for northwest and central India was the highest in 122 years.

This is not just a South Asian problem. In recent years, similarly extreme conditions occurred in the United States, Australia, Europe, Scandinavia, and Japan, resulting in thousands of hospitalisations and excess deaths. Extreme heat is also linked to increases in premature births, low birthweight babies, and stillbirths; reductions in worker productivity; higher rates of chronic kidney disease of unknown origin; and increases in suicide.

Extreme temperatures are thus an “all of society” problem. Such conditions not only harm human health; they also have detrimental effects on infrastructure, crop yields, and poultry mortality, threatening livelihoods and undermining food security. The 2021 heat dome in the Pacific Northwest and western Canada was a case in point.

It was an event that would have been virtually impossible without climate change. Temperature extremes were about 5° Celsius above previous records, causing approximately 1,000 excess deaths and a 69-fold increase in heat-related hospitalisations. Yields from wheat and cherry crops plummeted, and millions of mussels, clams, and oysters were cooked in their ocean habitats, threatening food security and livelihoods for indigenous peoples and low-income communities.

Already, nearly 40 per cent of heat-related deaths are attributable to climate change. And because climate change is expected to increase the frequency, intensity, and duration of heatwaves, the need for additional measures to protect people will only become more urgent. Without immediate and significant investment to enhance community and health-system resilience, the deaths associated with heat exposure will increase.

Well-communicated, evidence-based action plans are needed to keep people cool and reduce hospitalisations and deaths. In addition to early-warning and response systems, longer-term planning is needed for life on a warmer planet. That means providing more blue and green

spaces, changing building materials, and focusing on ways to cool people, rather than the surrounding environment.

Early-warning and response systems require more than just a single threshold for determining the start of a heatwave. Effective systems also should include collaborative processes to ensure that interventions account for local capacities and constraints. Health ministries will need to work closely with (among others) hydrometeorological services, police and fire departments, emergency services, agencies responsible for elder care, and trusted voices for vulnerable populations (such as adults over 65) and marginalised communities.

Resources should not be a barrier. Effective early-warning systems already exist worldwide, including in low-

adaptive, planners should adopt timelines for reviewing changes at the beginning and end of the summer season, while also developing regional collaborations to ensure consistent messaging. There will also be a greater role for tiered early-warning systems that account for multiple thresholds, such as temperature readings combined with local knowledge of particularly vulnerable populations.

For example, initial warnings might be issued several days before the peak of a heatwave to alert at-risk groups such as older adults, young children, and pregnant women. A second set of warnings could then be issued at somewhat higher temperatures for outdoor workers and people engaged in sports or related activities, followed by a third set of warnings for the general public at the usual threshold for declaring a heatwave. These warnings would need to be paired with effective communications, so that people are properly motivated to take the appropriate measures to stay cool.

Even after these improvements, early-warning systems should then be stress-tested to determine their robustness to unprecedented heat. This could be done through desk-based exercises to identify weaknesses. Stress tests should incorporate not just heatwaves but also compound risks such as back-to-back events: a heatwave combined with a wildfire; or a heatwave coinciding with a pandemic, as the Pacific Northwest experienced in 2021. Vulnerability mapping can be an effective tool to help decision-makers determine where interventions are needed most to protect human health and well-being.

A much warmer future requires urgent and immediate investments that capitalise on best practices and lessons learned from existing heat adaptation plans. Proven models need to be scaled up to enhance resilience and sustainability. Unprecedentedly higher temperatures are survivable, but not unless we prepare for them. *@Project Syndicate, 2021*

UNPRECEDENTED EXTREME-HEAT EPISODES LIKE THE HEATWAVE IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN THIS SPRING AND THE 2021 HEAT DOME IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST ARE A PREVIEW OF WHAT AWAITS US ON A WARMING PLANET. UNLESS WE IMPROVE OUR EARLY-WARNING AND RESPONSE SYSTEMS, THE NUMBER OF EXCESS DEATHS EACH YEAR WILL INCREASE

resource settings such as Ahmedabad, India. Moreover, organisations like the Global Heat Health Information Network are collecting and sharing data on local and national experiences and best practices. The demand for additional guidance is growing rapidly, in tandem with the increasing frequency and severity of heatwaves.

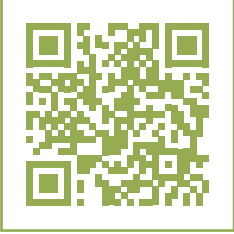
But most of today’s early-warning systems do not explicitly account for the risks of a changing climate. To be more



In April, the average maximum temperature for northwest and central India was the highest in 122 years.

sport

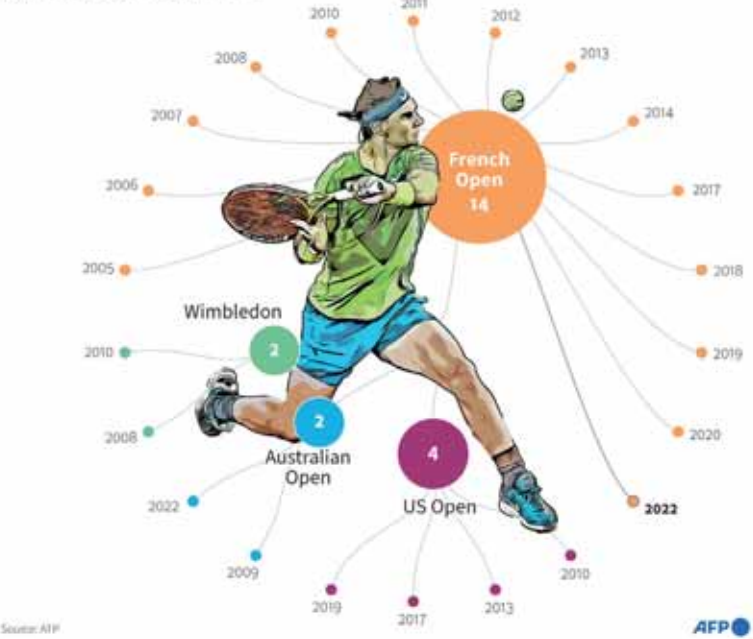
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NADAL WINS 14TH FRENCH OPEN AND 22ND GRAND SLAM

KING OF CLAY KEEPS HIS CROWN

The 22 Grand Slam titles of Rafael Nadal



PARIS: Rafael Nadal won a 14th French Open and record-extending 22nd Grand Slam title on Sunday with a straight-sets rout of Casper Ruud to become the oldest male champion at Roland Garros and he vowed to “keep fighting”.

In a disappointing final, 36-year-old Nadal won 6-3, 6-3, 6-0 with victory coming 17 years to the day since he claimed his first French Open as a 19-year-old in 2005.

Nadal won the last 11 games of the final and is now two Slams ahead of old rivals Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer with Sunday’s victory coming against all the odds.

Nadal, the oldest winner in Paris since a 34-year-old Andre Gimeno in 1972, had not been certain of taking part after a chronic left foot injury, which has plagued him throughout his career, flared up again.

He also needed the best part of a gruelling 12 hours to see off Felix Auger-Aliassime, Novak Djokovic and Alexander Zverev in the previous three rounds.

“I don’t know what I would do in terms of injuries if it wasn’t for the team, my family and everyone around me,” said Nadal.

“I would’ve already retired much before if it wasn’t for you.

“I never believed, that I’d be here at 36, being competitive again. Being here, means a lot to me on the most important court in my career. It helps me to keep going.

“For me, it’s incredible to play here. It’s an incredible feeling. I don’t know what can happen in

the future, but I’m going to keep fighting to try to keep going.”

His two-hour 18-minute win on Sunday took his record at the tournament to 112 wins against just three losses and also put him halfway to a rare calendar men’s Grand Slam last achieved by Rod Laver in 1969.

“The most important thing is to congratulate Rafa,” said Ruud.

TRUE CHAMPION

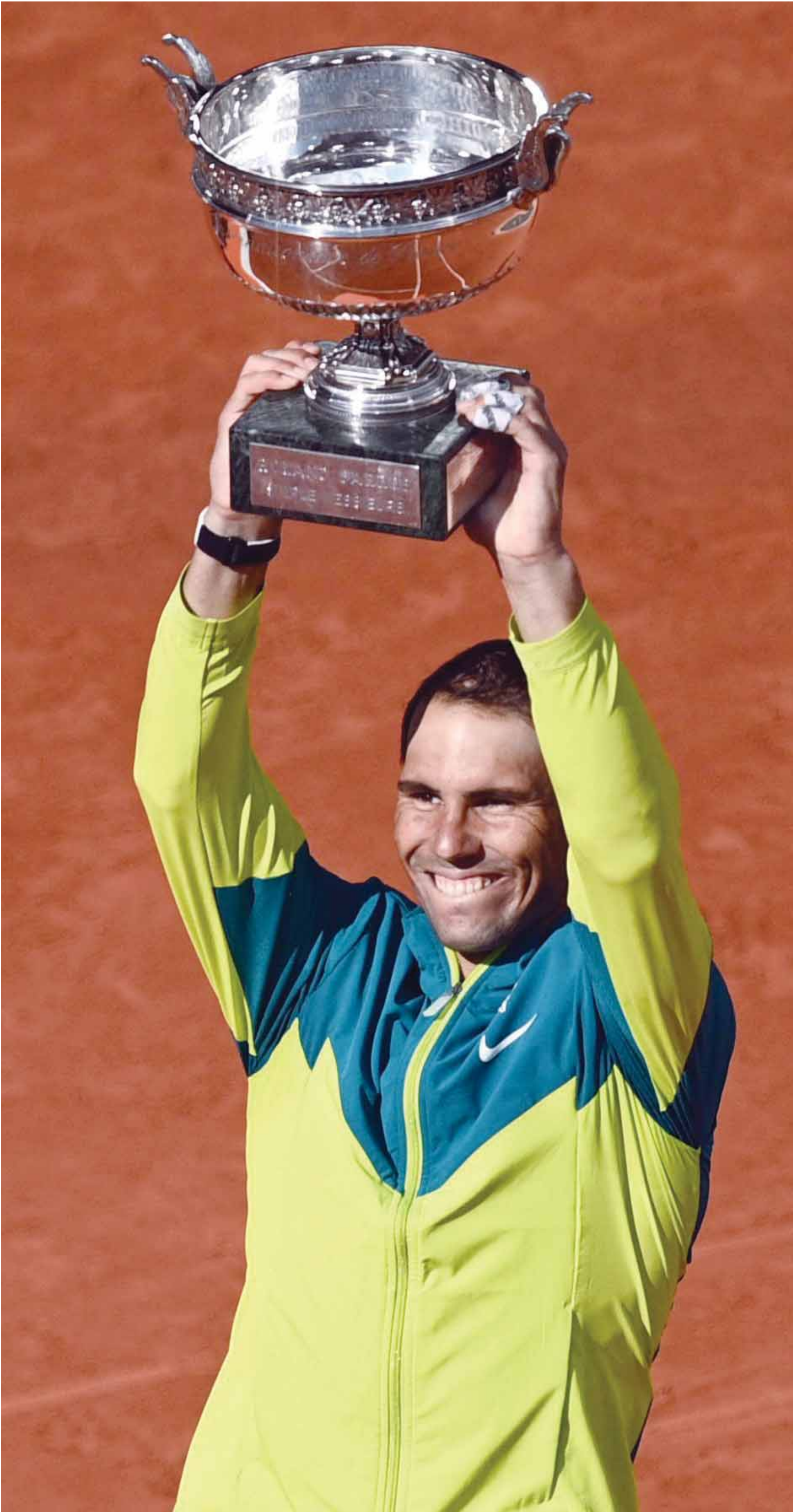
“You are a true champion. This is the first time I have faced you so now I know what it’s like to be the victim! There will be many others.

“You have taken me into your academy with open arms and you are a true inspiration to me. We all hope you continue for some more time.”

Nadal, unbeaten in 13 previous finals in Paris and playing in his 30th Grand Slam decider, got off to a flying start against Ruud, the first Norwegian man to feature in a championship match at the majors.

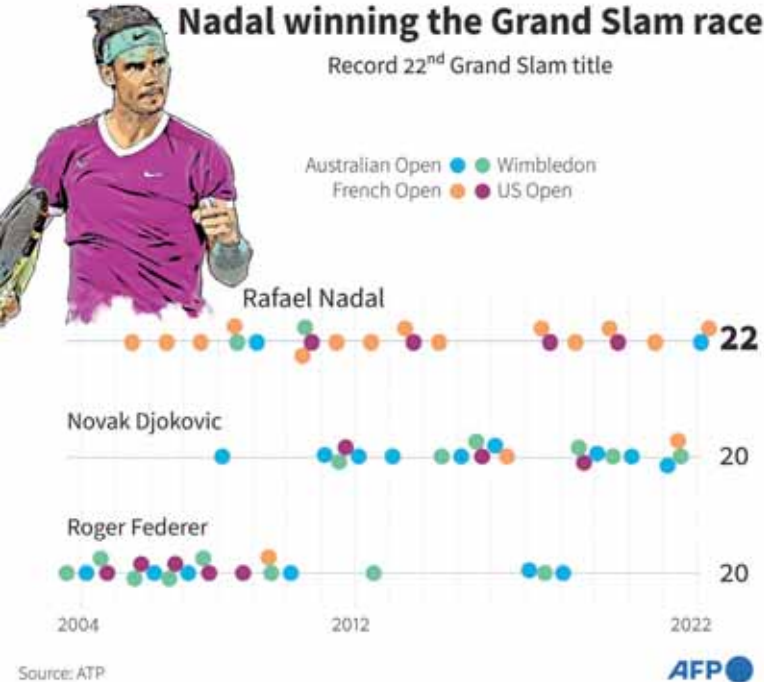
He broke for 2-0 and even though he handed the break straight back courtesy of a two uncharacteristic double faults, he was quickly back in front again for 3-1. The Spaniard wrapped up the opener in 49 minutes against his 23-year-old opponent who has trained at his academy in Manacor since 2018.

World number eight Ruud, the in-form player on clay since the start of 2020 with 66 wins on the surface, was under siege again in the second set, having to fight off three break points in the opening game. — AFP



Nadal winning the Grand Slam race

Record 22nd Grand Slam title





Root hits ton as England go one up

ANDY JALIL AT LORD’S

With a magnificent unbeaten 26th Test century, Joe Root led England to a comfortable five-wicket win to take a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series against world champions New Zealand.

At start of play on the fourth day with England resuming their second innings on 216 for five and in need of a further 61 for victory, New Zealand, bowling in overcast conditions might have somewhat fancied their chances.

But the calmness and control that Root and Ben Foakes displayed, ensured that the tourists would struggle for wickets they so urgently needed. Root, on 77 overnight and Foakes on 9, went about their task watchfully but missed no chances of keeping the scoreboard moving. They went for singles and twos when the opportunity was there and waited for the loose balls – there weren’t many – to hit fours.

Speaking of fours, the finest from Foakes was the one he guided between point and backward square leg off Kyle Jamieson, who was brought early into the attack after just one over after his excellent spell the previous day when he had four of the five England wickets that had fallen. The shot from Foakes took England to 235 for 5. He soon followed it with a powerful drive to the long-on off the same bowler to get to 22.

England scored 27 in the first half hour and were batting with increased confidence. Root got into the nineties with a beautiful square drive for 4 off Jamieson but his next four went behind off the bottom edge, luckily missing the stumps, it took him to 96.

After two singles, the second of which brought up the hundred of the sixth wicket partnership, Root clipped a shot to mid-wicket for two to reach three figures and became the 14th batsman to

reach 10,000 Test runs and the second Englishman to do so, after Alastair Cook.

Foakes, who had given the former England captain excellent support in the partnership had meanwhile progressed to 32 from 92 balls. Roots last two scoring shots went for fours, the first, a drive to mid-off, took him to 111

and England to 275 for five.

Finally came the match-winning shot as Root pulled Tim Southee to the mid-wicket boundary. His unbeaten 115 came from 170 balls in two minutes under five-and-a half hours at the crease.

Root said : “It feels good for us to win a Test match. It feels like such a long time. Great to start strongly under Ben (Stokes) and Brandon (McCullum, coach) and a great chance for us to kick on. It feels like it should be in many ways. There’s things we did through the pandemic to keep the game going, it feels good to have it back to how it should be.”

He added: “It was quite emotional, to be honest with you. It was very special. A lot of people will talk about my personal performances, run-wise, but its never enjoyable when you are losing. For us to start like this under Ben’s leadership, it’s a really exciting time.”

SCOREBOARD	
New Zealand 1st Innings	132
England 1st Innings	141
New Zealand 2nd Innings	285
England 2nd Innings	
A Lees b Jamieson	20
Z Crawley c Southee b Jamieson	9
O Pope b Boult	10
J Root not out	115
J Bairstow b Jamieson	16
B Stokes c Blundell b Jamieson	54
B Foakes not out	32
Extras (lb6, lb9, nb2, w6)	23
Total (5 wkts, 78.5 overs)	279
Fall of wickets:	1-31, 2-32, 3-46, 4-69, 5-159
Bowling:	Southee 23.5-5-87-0; Boult 24-3-73-1, Jamieson 25-4-79-4, De Grandhomme 3.5-1-3-0, Mitchell 0.1-0-0-0, Patel 2-0-22-0

Tired England beaten in Hungary, Italy hold Germany 1-1

PARIS: A tired England side went down to a surprise 1-0 defeat in Hungary in the Uefa Nations League on Saturday, while Germany had to come from behind to draw 1-1 with an inexperienced Italy team.

RB Leipzig star Dominik Szoboszlai scored the only goal of the game from the penalty spot in the second half in Budapest as Hungary beat England for the first time since 1962.

Defeat on penalties to Italy in the European Championship final last year was the only time Gareth Southgate’s side had been beaten in their previous 22 games.

“We proved at Euro 2020 what we’re capable of doing against the best, and we’ve shown this again. The tough thing will be to repeat this”, Hungary captain Adam Szalai told broadcaster M4 Sport.

England’s line-up featured debuts for Leicester City full-back James Justin and West Ham United forward Jarrod Bowen, but the visitors failed to trouble the hosts, who were roared on by a 30,000 crowd largely consisting of schoolchildren.

“They are bitterly disappointed because we want to keep winning matches. If we want to be a team right at the top tier of football,



England midfielder Declan Rice (R) and Hungary midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai vie for the ball during the Uefa Nations League match at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, Hungary. – AFP

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE RESULTS ON SATURDAY			
LEAGUE A, GROUP 3		Finland 1 (Pukki 45+1-pen) Bosnia and Herzegovina 1 (Prevljak 90+3)	
In Budapest		Montenegro 2 (Mugosa 66, Marko Vukcevic 87)	
Hungary 1 (Szoboszlai 66-pen) England 0		Romania 0	
In Bologna, Italy		LEAGUE C, GROUP 1	
Italy 1 (Pellegri 70) Germany 1 (Kimmich 73)		Lithuania 0 Luxembourg 2 (Sinani 44, 78)	
LEAGUE B, GROUP 1		Turkey 4 (Cengiz Under 37, Halil Dervisoglu 47, Serdar Dursun 82, Merih Demiral 85) Faroe Islands 0	
Armenia 1 (Spetsyan 74) Republic of Ireland 0			
League B, Group 3			

we need to come here and win”, said England Manager Gareth Southgate, before conceding that fatigue played a role. “It has been a long season. The heat was a factor and took a lot out of the players.”

Hungary were forced to play the game behind closed doors due to the behaviour of fans during their home matches at Euro 2020.

However, Uefa guidelines allow children under the age of 14 to be given free tickets under such circumstances and the Hungarian Football Federation took full advantage. The goal came in the 66th minute, with Szoboszlai beating Jordan Pickford from the spot after England substitute Reece James was adjudged to have fouled Zsolt Nagy.

Southgate’s men will next face Germany and Italy, who played out an entertaining stalemate in Bologna in Saturday’s other League A, Group 3 game.

Roma captain Lorenzo Pellegrini gave a much-changed Italy team the lead 20 minutes from time when he turned in a superb cross from teenage debutant Wilfried Gnonto.

Gnonto, 18, had just been sent on after impressing in FC Zurich’s run to this season’s Swiss Super League title. — AFP

Oman Cricket launches T10 Indoor Bash

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket announces the launch of the long awaited T10Indoor Bash 2022 commencing on June 16 until June 24 at the Indoor Academy Facility at Oman Cricket in Al Amerat. The tournament format provides the teams an opportunity to play minimum two matches in the league stage before advancing to the next round. The matches will be played on Thursday evenings and Friday throughout the day.

Oman Cricket Academy’s state-of-the-art 7-lane Indoor facility gives an opportunity to everyone interested to play cricket and experiencing a different level of game competitiveness and uniqueness exploring all aspects of the game and providing the corporates, weekend cricketers, youth cricket teams and league cricketers a mesmerising experience to enjoy the game of indoor cricket.

Oman Cricket visionises



the growth of Indoor Cricket further expanding this format to a mega event targeting 100+ teams locally in the near future. It also hopes to host international competitive indoor cricket at Oman Cricket Academy.

Registrations have started for the T10 Indoor Bash and will be closed based on first come first serve basis on or before June 9. For enquiries and registration, contact Shreyash Kankal +968 98856884 (Phone and Whatsapp).

Afghanistan rise to third in World Cup Super League



HARARE: Batsmen Rahmat Shah and Hashmatullah Shahidi and all-rounder Mohammad Nabi starred as Afghanistan climbed to third in the Cricket World Cup Super League after a 60-run one-day international victory over Zimbabwe in Harare on Saturday.

Securing 10 points from the win at Harare Sports Club lifted the tourists above India and Australia in the standings and left them trailing only leaders Bangladesh and second-placed England.

The top eight finishers in the Super League gain direct qualification to the 2023 Cricket World Cup in India.

Put in to bat after losing the toss, Afghanistan posted 276-5 in 50 overs with Shah (94) and captain Shahidi (88) setting up the triumph after a shaky start that left the visitors 38-2.

Blessing Muzarabani was the pick of the Zimbabwe bowlers, taking 4-52, including the wickets of Shah and Shahidi, who had added 181 runs for the third wicket.

Zimbabwe were always behind the required run rate and were all out for 216 off the final ball of the innings with Sikandar Raza (67), debutant Innocent Kaia (39) and captain Craig Ervine (30) the best batsmen.

Nabi was the most impressive Afghan bowler, finishing with 4-34 and Rashid Khan (2-39) and Fazal Haq Farooqi (2-41) were the best of the rest.

The convincing victory gave Afghanistan a 16-10 lead in ODIs

between the countries. Both teams are looking to recover from recent ODI series losses — Zimbabwe to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan to Bangladesh.

The six-match tour, originally scheduled for two years ago, finally began after two postponements, first because of the coronavirus pandemic and then due a shortage of broadcasting equipment.

There will be two more ODI matches on June 6 and 9 followed by three Twenty 20 internationals on June 11, 12 and 14 with Harare Sports Club hosting all six games.

— AFP

SCOREBOARD	
AFGHANISTAN	
R Gurbaz c Ervine b Chivanga	17
I Zadran c and b Muzarabani	5
R Shah c Chakabva b Muzarabani	94
H Shahidi c Tiripano b Muzarabani	88
M Nabi c Shumba b Muzarabani	11
N Zadran not out	3
R Khan not out	39
Extras (lb5, lb1, nb1, w13)	20
Total (5 wkts, 50 overs)	276
Fall of wickets:	1-21, 2-38, 3-219, 4-232, 5-234
Bowling:	Muzarabani 9-0-52-4; Chatara 10-2-61-0; Chivanga 7-0-41-1; Tiripano 5-0-26-0; Madhevere 6-0-22-0; Burl 6-0-24-0; Raza 7-0-44-0
ZIMBABWE	
I Kaia lbw Nabi	39
R Chakabva c N. Zadran b Farooqi	1
C Ervine c and b Omarzai	30
W Madhevere c and b Nabi	11
S Raza lbw Khan	67
M Shumba c Gurbaz b Nabi	5
R Burl c Nabi	13
D Tiripano b Khan	15
T Chatara c Nabi b Farooqi	8
B Muzarabani b Ahmad	10
T Chivanga not out	0
Extras (lb1, lb7, w9)	17
Total (all out, 50 overs)	216
Fall of wickets:	1-5, 2-66, 3-91, 4-104, 5-124, 6-164, 7-196, 8-203, 9-216
Bowling:	Farooqi 9-1-41-2; Ahmad 9-1-27-1, Omarzai 6-0-24-1; Ur Rahman 6-0-43-0, Khan 10-0-39-2; Nabi 10-0-34-4

Al Faisal seals stunning win in Paul Ricard



The triumphant Al Manar trio at Paul Ricard.

PAUL RICARD, FRANCE: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, Germany's Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe's Axcil Jeffries sealed a stunning victory in the Silver category and finished a superb seventh overall at the six-hour Paul Ricard 1000 km, round two of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS. They now lead the prestigious endurance series by two points.

The trio teamed up to drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 running under the Al Manar Racing by HRT banner for the second time and held third place for long periods before moving up to take the lead and the eventual win in the latter stages of the demanding race on the French circuit.

Al Zubair said: "It was a very good race, with P7 overall and P1 in Silver. This is definitely something to be very proud of. It's our second

race in the championship and, with such experienced drivers and 18 Pro line-ups, it's definitely a special result for us. We are happy and it's a great way to go into the next round at Spa. We are excited for that."

The trio had qualified the Mercedes in third place for the Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS round that started at 18.00 hrs and finished at midnight. Al Zubair took the wheel for the first stint and the Omani stayed out on the track for the first two hours of the race, the talented youngster holding fourth after 19 laps and moving back up to third after 27 laps and just under an hour of the race.

By the end of the first hour, he was out in front in the Silver category, before dropping back to third after 42 laps and around 80 minutes of the race. The Mercedes

2022 FANATEC GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE SILVER CHAMPIONSHIP – CURRENT POSITIONS:	
1. Al Faisal al Zubair/Axcil Jeffries/Fabian Schiller	43 pts
2. Benjamin Goethe/Thomas Neubauer/Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer	41 pts
3. Thomas Drouet/Tommaso Mosca/Casper Stevenson	24 pts
4. Louis Proctor/Finlay Hutchinson/Diego Menchaca	23 pts
5. Aurelian Panis/Cesar Gazeau/Nicolas Baert	21 pts

maintained third through the driver change, where Al Zubair was replaced by Jeffries, who also maintained third behind the Attempto Racing Audi and the Akkodis ASP Mercedes through 102 laps and three and a half hours of the race.

Schiller took over for the final stint and the German was able to move to the front heading into

the final hour, with 150 laps on the board and the Akkodis ASP Mercedes a mere 7.652 seconds behind in second place and the Team WRT Audi a further 11 seconds adrift.

Schiller extended the gap to 10.562 seconds after 158 laps and reached the chequered flag after 176 laps to secure the win.

The Al Manar Racing trio

had finished fourth in the Silver category in the free practice session, with a fastest lap of 1min 55.544 sec putting them a mere 0.624 sec off the fastest time set by Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer, Benjamin Goethe and Thomas Neubauer in their Team WRT Audi R8 LMS.

Al Zubair, Schiller and Jeffries faired better in the pre-qualifying session and a lap of 1min 54.902 sec put them second in the Silver category behind Marius Zug, Nicolas Scholl and Alex Aka in their Attempto Racing Audi R8 LMS.

The all-important three qualifying sessions took place on Saturday morning. Michele Beretta, Yuki Nemoto and Benja Hites topped the Silver times in Q1 with a best tour of 1min 54.500 sec in their VSR Lamborghini Huracan. Al Zubair, Schiller and

Jeffries were classified in fourth with a best run of 1min 54.859 sec.

The Al Manar Racing trio were down in eighth in the Q2 session with a lap of 1min 54.750 sec, with Konsta Lappalainen, Tuomas Tujula and Stuart White topping the Silver category times in an Emil Frey Racing Lamborghini.

Simmenauer, Goethe and Neubauer ran fastest in Q3 and the third fastest lap of 1 min 54.304 sec put Al Zubair, Schiller and Jeffries up to third in the session.

With the lap times combined from the three qualifying sessions, the Al Manar Racing Mercedes qualified in third in the Silver category behind the Team WRT Audi and the Emil Frey Racing Lamborghini. They were also classified in a highly respectable 13th place on the 53-car grid.

The 24 Hours of Spa takes place on July 28-31.

AL ZUBAIR TEAMS UP WITH SCHILLER AND JEFFRIES TO TOP SILVER CATEGORY AND FINISH SEVENTH OVERALL AT THE SIX-HOUR PAUL RICARD 1000 KM, ROUND TWO OF THE FANATEC GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE



Success for Al Zubair, Schiller and Jeffries at Paul Ricard.

Quartararo claims Catalonia title to extend lead

MONTMELO, Spain: France's world champion Fabio Quartararo extended his lead in this season's title race after winning the Catalonia MotoGP on Sunday helped by an astonishing error by his closest pursuer Aleix Espargaro.

The Frenchman's joy contrasted starkly to Aprilia rider Espargaro, who had a nightmare of a race from start to finish.

Having started on pole he was passed by Quartararo on the first bend — a lead the 23-year-old Frenchman would never relinquish — and then as the race reached its climax he raised his arms thinking he had finished second only to realise there was a still a lap to go.

His misfortune allowed compatriot Jorge Martin to take second with his Ducati Primac team-mate Frenchman Johann Zarco taking third.

Quartararo increased his lead from eight points to 22 after nine rounds of the championship.



Yamaha French rider Fabio Quartararo celebrates on the podium after winning the Moto Grand Prix de Catalunya at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo. – AFP

Little wonder he bore a broad grin on his face as he climbed off his Yamaha — who he committed to for an extra two years on Thursday.

"I am so pleased, this was an incredible race," said Quartararo.

"I pushed hard from the start and kept it up to the finish.

"With this win and my second place in Mugello last Sunday these are two great results as I feared the worst beforehand. Life is good, we have worked hard."

Martin was delighted with his second spot after a largely disappointing season.



"It has been a tough season so I am delighted with this podium finish", said Martin. "I thought I would find it hard to finish with one of my tyre's giving me trouble so I just conserved my energy. Then I saw Aleix slowing and I thought he had a mechanical problem but then

realised he had made a mistake. That was an unexpected bonus."

PUT MY FOOT DOWN

Zarco too reflected on his good fortune, though, timely as it is expected he is set to extend his contract with Ducati-Primac.

"That was a bit lucky with what happened at the end of the race", said Zarco. "I did not expect that! I was very tired as the race came to a close. I saw him (Espargaro) raise his arms and there was little doubt in my mind maybe the race is over.

"However, I saw Martin was still racing at full speed so I put my foot down."

Even better for Quartararo was neither of his Italian rivals who loom large in the championship standings finished.

Francesco Bagnaia — who won the Italian MotoGP last weekend — slipped to fourth in the standings behind Zarco following his first bend exit. Bagnaia's Ducati came crashing to the ground after Japanese rider Takaaki Nakagami fell and his helmet connected with the Italian's bike.

Bagnaia slid across the track and took out Alex Rins on his Suzuki — fortunately all three were reported to be okay. — AFP



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Promising potential for Open Banking in Oman

5 MAJOR BENEFITS: Besides igniting new investment opportunities, Open Banking has the potential to create employment, advance financial inclusion and support economic growth: OBA

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Open Banking — a tech-driven service that is transforming the banking and financial services industry globally — will soon become a reality in the Sultanate of Oman.

Last week, the Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Tahir Salim al Amri, confirmed that Open Banking is among a raft of landmark initiatives that are currently ‘works in progress’ in preparation or their formal roll-out as part of ongoing efforts to modernise the country’s banking industry.

The announcement was hailed



by Oman Banks Association (OBA), the representative grouping of licensed banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking soon after Al Amri made the announcement at the New Age Banking Summit, hosted by UMS Events last week, OBA’s CEO, Ali Hassan Moosa (pictured), said Open Banking — when eventually introduced in the Sultanate of Oman — will unleash a plethora of benefits for the wider national economy.

“Open Banking promotes the value chain in the financial services industry because it not only makes use of banks but also third party platforms to provide services. Consequently,



it creates new companies and new jobs, opens up investment opportunities and advances financial inclusion — thereby supporting economic growth when it reaches its full potential”, he said.

A rapidly expanding multi-billion dollar industry globally, Open Banking enables banks to collaborate with third-party payment service and financial service providers to create a smoother user experience for consumers. This is made possible through the use of application programming interfaces (APIs).

Given its exponential growth, Open Banking is projected to reach a market value of over \$43 billion by 2026, say experts. “Customers expect seamless integration between devices, channels and services”, said Ali Hassan Moosa.

“A good API strategy will help banks to create a first class customer experience and enhance revenues”, he noted, cited in this regard examples of international banks that have seen their customer portfolios balloon following the adoption of Open Banking.

In the Gulf region, a number of GCC states have already made headway in the roll-out of Open Banking, says Moosa.

The Central Bank of Bahrain, for example, is due to complete later this month the roll-out of a two-phase framework for Open Banking, which will enable additional payment services, such as local and international standing orders, future dated payments and batch payments.

Saudi Arabia is witnessing a “breakout year” with the launch of a number of fintech Open Banking applications. As many

as 35 fintech companies have so far been licensed by the Saudi Central Bank as part of its fintech regulatory sandbox, he said.

In neighbouring UAE, the Dubai Financial Services Authority recently licensed Tarabut Gateway to provide the first regulated Open Banking platform with account Initiation and payment services, he said.

Earlier, Moosa welcomed the Omani Central Bank’s initiative to enable digital onboarding of customers — an online or virtual process of opening accounts without requiring clients to be physically present.

Digital onboarding, while complex from the legal and regulatory standpoints, is nonetheless achievable, he noted.

The efficiency of various processes underpinning digital onboarding, such as Real Time ID Verification, Selfie Capture and Verification, Device Verification, Facial and Fingerprint Biometrics, Omnichannel Integration, Interactive Forms, eSignatures and Instant Approvals, is vital for its successful adoption, he added.

Plan for development of Salalah’s Al Mughsayl Beach

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

Al Mughsayl Beach, one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most spectacular waterfront attractions, will be further developed to drive tourist traffic and investment inflows into this popular destination in Dhofar Governorate.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism announced in a post on Sunday that the project will be implemented in collaboration with Omran Group and Dhofar Governorate. The ‘Observer’ has learnt that the development will cover a roughly 300,000 sq metre area on either side of the beachfront attraction.

It is proposed to be implemented in two phases, an official said.

Located about a half-hour’s drive from Salalah City, Al Mughsayl Beach attracts tens of thousands of tourists and visitors during the khareef season when its famous blowholes — cavities in the limestone rock that spew plumes of seawater high into the air — become active.

Together with its soaring limestone cliffs overlooking the Arabian Sea, white-sand



beachfront and unique cave-like structure — known as Marneef Cave, Al Mughsayl is a must-visit destination for khareef tourists.

Now, with a view to developing the beachfront into all-year attraction, not limited to the khareef season alone, the Ministry

NOW, WITH A VIEW TO DEVELOPING THE BEACHFRONT INTO ALL-YEAR ATTRACTION, NOT LIMITED TO THE KHAREEF SEASON ALONE, THE MINISTRY HAS UNVEILED PLANS FOR A FACELIFT THAT WILL ENSURE A STEADY FLOW OF TOURISTS ROUND THE YEAR.

has unveiled plans for a facelift that will ensure a steady flow of tourists round the year.

Planned for implementation in two phases, the first phase includes facilities catering primarily to families.

Thus, in addition to ample car parking space, the development will also feature an area for entertainment, kiosks selling food and beverages, restaurants and eateries, an extended walkway along the way, gazebos for picnicking, among other amenities.

In Phase 1, investments will focus on marine sports and an adventure park. ‘Conde Nest Traveller’, a prestigious international magazine, has included Al Mughsayl Beach in its ranking of 30 top beaches worldwide.

RO 14m contract for construction of Duqm fisheries complex



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

International Seafood Company, a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), has inked a construction contract with a leading local contractor to establish a complex for canning tuna, sardines and other seafood products at a cost of RO 14 million.

The complex will be built within the Fisheries Industries Zone (FIZ) in Duqm as part of land usufruct signed with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The factory, designed in accordance with the highest international quality and food safety specifications and standards, will have a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes

annually, subject to future expansion and scheduled for commercial production by 2024.

This project — which is one of the outputs of the Tanfeeth Programme — is in line with Oman’s Vision 2040, as it will achieve the country’s vision of economic diversification by maximising the return from the fisheries landing that the Sultanate of Oman abounds and localising the value-added chain of fish products before exporting to global markets.

The project will positively support Oman’s GDP through local supply chains, from which many Omani small and medium companies will benefit, that will enhance investment opportunities in the sector and create many specialised and business support job opportunities.

Asyad Express partners with Tanzania Posts

E-commerce: Oman Post and Asyad Express to introduce e-locker solutions in Tanzania

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

Asyad Group, represented by Oman Post and Asyad Express, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Tanzania Posts Corporation (TPC) to promote last-mile services and e-commerce solutions between the two countries.

Aligned with the strategic direction to improve access to the rapidly developing African market, the MoU was signed by Nasser al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, and Macrice Daniel Mbodo, Postmaster General of TPC. The MoU addresses several key themes, including experience and



knowledge transfer, particularly to introduce e-locker solutions in Tanzania.

A new postal stamp is also set to be launched celebrating the rich cultural connections and shared history between the Sultanate and Tanzania. Stamps and other items will be available for purchase via the e-stores of Oman Post and TPC.

Highlighting the significance of the new strategic partnership, Nasser al Sharji, CEO of Oman Post & Asyad Express, said: “this

memorandum is an excellent first step towards advancing door-to-door delivery capabilities to support international shipping in collaboration with TPC.

We plan to utilize this cooperation to launch services in African markets which will unlock bilateral trade opportunities and allow us to deploy additional commercial and logistics offerings, with a key focus on e-commerce activities in the rapidly growing Tanzanian market.”

“The significance of this agreement is multifaceted as it will enable us to support e-commerce shopping from Africa with improved last-mile delivery, in addition to postal and logistics services offered in Oman,”

Al Sharji added. “We will leverage this arrangement to open new investment channels for Omani private companies and SMEs to enter the Tanzanian markets and, subsequently, expand to neighboring African

markets. In return, Oman Post and Asyad Express will transfer knowledge and provide innovative solutions to TPC under this exciting partnership.”

Macrice Daniel Mbodo, Postmaster General of Tanzania Posts Corporation, welcomed the new memorandum and said: “the rapid growth of e-commerce is undoubtedly changing the nature of postal work.

Asyad, represented by Oman Post and Asyad Express, is the leading provider of e-commerce supply chain solutions in Oman, and we will work closely together under this partnership to transform the services of TPC to meet our customers’ expectations.

TPC plays a key role in the economic and social development of the country, and we are pleased to add value to our offering and connect the Tanzanian and Omani markets with advanced e-commerce solutions.”

Ominvest receives excellence in investment award

MUSCAT: Ominvest recently received the “Excellence in Investment” award at the seventh edition of the New Age Banking Summit.

The summit, which was held under the patronage of Tahir al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, highlighted the opportunities and challenges faced by Oman’s banking industry, and focused on the adoption of new technologies that will help Omani banks keep pace with the evolving financial ecosystem in the digital age.

It was recognised at the Summit that Ominvest’s investments in quality assets across diversified sectors; creation of scalable platforms within business verticals; excellence in acquisitions and mergers; creating value and synergies within group companies; producing healthy



cashflows, and a track record of uninterrupted dividends are among the key considerations for which the company won the “Excellence in Investment” award.

Commenting on the award received by Ominvest at the summit, AbdulAziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest said, “We are honoured and delighted to receive the award for ‘Excellence in Investment’ for the second time and I sincerely thank our esteemed regulators for their continued support and guidance, which has been paramount to our success over the years.

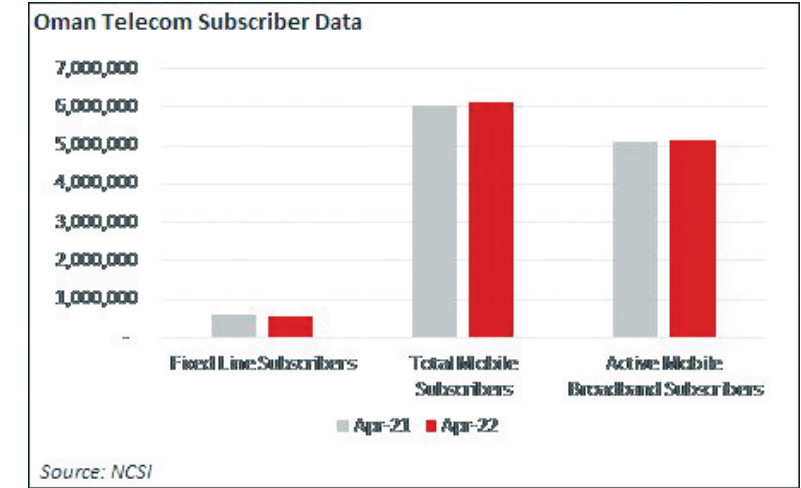
I also thank our esteemed board of directors for their vision

and leadership, and our dedicated employees for their integrity and hard work. The crucial support from our internal and external stakeholders has enabled us to be a highly purpose-driven and successful organisation.

This award is also a testament to our commitment and dedication to creating value for all our stakeholders.”

Representing Ominvest in the Summit’s panel discussion on ‘The Future of Banking and Financial Services’, Badar al Shanfari, Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Ominvest shared high insights on the impact of latest global economic trends on Oman’s banking and financial industry, the company’s approach to making investments in FinTech and the importance it places on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices.

MSX closes the week positive, supported by all indices



MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week positive by 0.61 per cent. All indices closed the week up. The Services index ended the week higher by 1.21 per cent. The Industrial Index and Financial index closed lower by 0.14 per cent and 0.87 per cent respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed up by 0.93 per cent.

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company signed an agreement with i6 Group for using the world’s first end-to-end aviation fuel management platform ‘Fusion6’, an into-plane refuelling management platform allowing for complete real-time visibility and management of ground fuelling operations.

The technology will be rolled out at Muscat International Airport, also expanding i6’s presence throughout the Middle East. Other Middle Eastern airports already taking advantage of i6 technology include Dubai International Airport and Bahrain International Airport.

Oman Telecom Sector Data for April, reveals that fixed line subscribers are down 2.6 per cent while mobile subscribers are up 1.7 per cent. Within mobile, prepaid subscribers are down 3.4 per cent while postpaid subscribers are higher by 24.3 per cent YoY. Active Mobile broadband subscribers are up by 2.2 per cent. Penetration levels are lower at the end of April 2022 as compared to April 2021.

Value of traded property in Oman went down by 28 per cent in April 2022 to RO 146.6m compared to RO 202.7m in April 2021. Traded value of mortgage contracts MoM went down by 22 per cent to RO 73m compared to RO 93m in same period last year.

Traded value of sale contracts declined by 33 per cent to RO 73m compared to RO 109m YoY. Number of properties issued in April also declined by 17 per cent to 15,133 compared to 18,329 in April 2021.

The Foreign Direct Investment in the Sultanate of Oman has jumped 7.7 per cent compared to December 2020, and a wider chunk of potential FDI is currently in the pipeline, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

Speaking to the members of the global media at the International Conference for Journalists, 31st Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Muhanna bin Ali al Sinani, Acting Director of the Investment Promotion Department, said a plethora of initiatives are being implemented in various sectors of the ministry to improve the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman to create a competitive business environment.

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has attracted and localised 130 industrial, commercial and service projects during the first quarter of 2022 with an investment value touching RO 64 million and a total area of 818,000 sqm, informed Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

Courtesy: U-Capital

Omantel, Huawei sign MoU to launch Smart Office solutions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

Omantel introduced its Smart Office solutions during Comex with cooperation of Huawei for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman at their booth in the Sultanate of Oman’s leading ICT Show.

The showcase of the Smart Office solution highlights the strong demand for advanced digital solutions in the Sultanate of Oman and aims to facilitate smarter and more efficient collaboration.

Baha Mohamed Ridha al Lawati, VP Enterprise Unit at Omantel said: “As Oman’s leading ICT solutions provider, we understand the need of our customers to focus on their business and productivity while allowing us to digitally evolve their business with the value added ICT solutions we offer.

With our partner Huawei, we bring some of the most advanced ICT tools and solutions to



Oman that will transform how individuals, SME, and enterprises collaborate.

During Comex, our customers, partners and visitors experienced our smart offices solutions coupled with 5G & the seamless integration it offers among all their collaboration touch points, and the simplicity in deploying it in their office with a feasible payment structure.”

Chen Jianhan, Huawei Oman CEO, said: “The integrated Huawei Smart Office solution is at the forefront of ecosystem services as it creates a seamless digital experience that enables new productivity levels for our enterprise customers and enhances efficient collaboration. This partnership with Omantel extends our longstanding relationship to explore how digital transformation can enable customers to meet new demands.”

The Smart Office brings together the computing and mobile ecosystem to connect and share capabilities and resources.

Omantel showcased various Smart Office scenarios that improve the user experience, productivity and optimise meetings at its Comex stand.

These include multi-screen collaboration with seamless interaction between the intelligent whiteboard, laptop & tablets. The smart interactive whiteboard ‘IdeaHub’ is a multi-platform that allows video conferencing solutions across multiple platforms and sits at the heart of the Smart Office. Visitors experienced its advanced capabilities at the stand, including voice tracking and an intelligent camera that identifies and focuses on the speaker. The IdeaHub also features low latency writing, auto-correction, and multiuser writing support, while users can send whiteboard content directly to their email. The key highlight of this solution is customer can pay overtime over multiple packages to suit the various demands as they grow rather than a onetime payment.



GCC states adopt harmonised labelling of chemicals

Major milestone: GPCA announces first regional GHS Standard in collaboration with GCC Standardisation Organization

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 5

The Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA), the voice of the chemical and petrochemical industry in the Arabian Gulf, and the GCC Standardisation Organization (GSO), the regional organisation for national standardisation bodies of GCC states, are pleased to announce the successful publication of the first regional Global Harmonised System standard on the occasion of World Environment Day 2022.

The standard, entitled GSO 2654:2021 'Global Harmonised



System (GHS) in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' was developed by GPCA and adopted by GSO with immediate effect on the territories of all six GCC states.

Its adoption marks a major milestone for the chemical

and petrochemical sector in the Arabian Gulf, as it will help to build momentum to collectively implement the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) in the region.

GHS was developed by the United Nations as a single worldwide system for classifying and communicating the hazardous properties of industrial and consumer chemicals.

Transporting hazardous

chemicals can pose a significant risk to people and the environment. As a major hub for the production and export of chemicals and petrochemicals, it is particularly important for the GCC region to have robust EHS&S standards that would prevent the devastating impact of chemical accidents and successfully communicate the hazards associated with chemical transportation.

To put things in perspective the GCC chemical industry produced 150 million tonnes of products worth \$54.1 billion in 2020.

This figure is estimated to be significantly higher in 2022 as a result of a buoyant market, which saw petrochemical demand and product prices grow significantly.

As the first of its kind in the GCC region, GSO 2654:2021 will become the standard for product stewardship and will help to dramatically transform the environment, health, safety,

and security (EHS&S) landscape across the entire chemical and petrochemical value chain.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary-General, GPCA, commented: "GPCA is proud to announce the culmination of our joint work with the GSO over several years into the region's first GHS standard. This comprehensive benchmark has been adapted to serve the region with its unique requirements and continue to ensure the healthy EHS&S performance of the GCC industry on a global scale.

Working together towards one unified standard will ensure we continue to improve on our product safety record across the chemicals value chain, where every player – however big or small – will have the power to make a difference towards a more sustainable and safer future for the region, our roads and our communities."

Online criminal forums: A corporate network



DAVIS KALLUKARAN

Online criminal forums have existed for many years, but today those networks are thriving in part because of the unique circumstances brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

They look more like a corporate network now. This is a real threat. With people increasingly living their lives online, fraudsters have never had easier access to potential victims. Covid-19 has only accelerated that trend.

Indeed, business is booming for cybercriminals now focused on high-value organisations.

Paul Kilby, Editor in Chief of the ACFE Fraud Magazine, in an article published last November, noted: "The more fragmented workplace has gone hand in hand with increased inter-connectivity, what we call the Internet of things.

Everything from fridges to home security systems and other devices in the houses are increasingly linked to the Internet and each other, which expands possible entry points for fraudsters. A whole ecosystem is now available to fraudsters seeking opportunities in cyberspace.

"Ransomware-as-a-Service" or "Malware-as-a-Service" (better known as RaaS and MaaS) are new names for businesses selling malicious software, passwords and other services on dark net marketplaces."

The Kaseya story

In July last year, employees at US-based software company Kaseya started receiving reports of suspicious activity. Third parties, customers and Kaseya's monitoring systems were noticing strange behaviour on their computer systems.

Little did they know that this was the start of what would soon be described as the biggest single ransomware attack on record.

As a precautionary measure, the company quickly shut down



the servers that ran its remote monitoring and management software, which it sells to managed service providers. But the damage had been done.

Kaseya executives soon realised that they were the latest victims of a cybercrime spree that has spread across the globe in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The breach only impacted about 50 of Kaseya's 37,000 customers worldwide, but its reach was far wider. The ransomware coursing through Kaseya's network had spread to around 1,500 businesses, and the hackers were demanding \$70 million to restore all systems back to health.

Victims included a pharmacy chain, a gas station chain, the state railway and public broadcaster SVT — all in Sweden — as well as IT services companies in Germany and the Netherlands.

The cyberattack also brought down cash registers and self-service check-out machines at Swedish supermarket chain Coop, forcing it to close over half of its 800 stores.

It even shut down a Maryland town's Internet services

The Kaseya attack may have been exceptional in its reach and the amount of ransom demanded, but in the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world has seen surges in cybercrime and cyber fraud as the shift to remote work better enables these offenses where they labour on less-protected laptops and in multiple locations.

We all have to take a step back and realise this is the world we live in, and it is forcing us to look at ourselves as well, recommitting ourselves to every possible

E-commerce, digital infrastructure, cloud, the move to online, the move to remote network — we all knew this was the future. But no one knew though that the future would happen in 12 months. That's what Covid did. This movement has accelerated our businesses and the overall security industry. The more people online, the more security required.

ROBERT HERJAVEC

Founder & Group CEO,
Herjavec Group

consideration that is there.

Robert Herjavec, Founder & CEO of Herjavec Group says "E-commerce, digital infrastructure, cloud, the move to online, the move to remote network — we all knew this was the future. But no one knew though that the future would happen in 12 months. That's what Covid did. This movement has accelerated our businesses and the overall security industry. The more people online, the more security required."

This cybercrime world is now impacting the everyday world. In the past, you may have had a credit card stolen or been the victim of identity theft. Now cybercrime has matured to such a point that

it impacts the general population. It is all over the media. It is no longer just isolated incidences.

Indeed, cybercriminals and fraudsters are becoming better at poking holes in cyber defences and spreading malware across multiple organisations through so-called supply-chain attacks.

No matter how strong their defences, organisations that are part of a supply chain remain vulnerable as fraudsters seek to exploit the weakest link amid a network of companies that regularly conduct business with each other.

As companies have bolstered their defences, they have often overlooked the many third parties that regularly interact with them.

Many of these third parties are smaller with limited security. The challenge is how you enforce your corporate standard on a third party that may not have the same resources or policies.

The amount of fraud reported that goes through these channels is significant, especially from banks and large enterprises, and it is only going to get worse because of the hybrid and remote work models which have expanded significantly as a result of the pandemic.

The cost of a breach goes far beyond the ransom paid — its downtime, its brand integrity and loss, and loss of faith from consumers and partners. I think one of the key goals for security leaders should be to move away from a prevention mindset and to focus on early detection.

(Davis Kallukaran is Managing Partner, Crowe Oman and Past President of ACFE Oman chapter)

Italian National Day celebrations attract large turnout



MUSCAT: Around 400 guests attended the Italian National Day reception hosted by the Ambassador of Italy in Muscat, Federica Favi, at the Diplomatic Club last week. The celebration was held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, accompanied by an official delegation including high profile members of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, Sultan's Armed forces, Foreign Ministry and other government entities.

The reception highlighted 50 years of friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation in many fields, from culture to economy, from people to people contacts to technology.

On this occasion, the Italian Ambassador stated: "I am very grateful to the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said and to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for their affection and friendship for Italy and to all the Omanis who work with Italy on a daily basis, to those

who choose Italy for their leisure, business, cultural activities or education. Today, we celebrate half a century of long-lasting and promising bilateral relations, for a common, tireless commitment to international peace and security, prosperity, justice and human development."

This year's Italian National Day celebration was supported by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Diplomatic Club, Muscat String Quartet, the Omani-Italian Friendship Association "TOIFA", Dhofar Automotive representing "Alfa Romeo and Fiat", Al Rofoof Hotel Supplies & Trading representing finest Italian Coffee from Illy Café, the delightful Italian cheese by Almarsa Gourmet, Al Maya International representing "Lago", Al Seer representing "Ferrero and Nutella", Catering Solutions Trading representing "Barilla and Pomi", Tunes Trading & Services, and Intercontinental Muscat Hotel.



Ukraine war helps China’s coal addiction stack up

Russia’s war on Ukraine is blackening China’s decarbonisation drive. President Xi Jinping’s administration is ramping up domestic output to avoid power cuts, embracing the fossil fuel more tightly as wealthy nations bid aggressively to replace Moscow’s natural gas supplies. It’s a rational financial choice for the top polluter. Europe’s scramble for alternatives to Russian gas is causing global prices to soar, diverting shipments from Asia. April imports of liquified natural gas (LNG) into Europe and Turkey jumped 20 per cent from the previous month to a record 11.59 million metric tonnes, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Buyers are shunning Russia’s piped supply and those from Poland and elsewhere are being cut off for refusing to pay in roubles. The benchmark front-month gas contract hit around 87 euros/MWh on Tuesday, up about 250 per cent compared to May 2021.

While China has scooped up deeply discounted Russian oil, gas and coal, official data shows the country’s wider overall imports of all three have fallen between January and April year-on-year, despite a slight increase in power generation over the period.

So even if domestic demand remains subdued as Covid-19 lockdowns ease, China could face power shortages during the northern hemisphere summer. That would be a political red line that Xi has warned officials against crossing after pursuit of carbon reduction goals contributed to last year’s embarrassing power crunch.

Turning back to its own rich and cheap reserves makes economic sense: China relies on coal for 60 per cent of its energy, of which domestic output accounts for 90 per cent. By consolidating state giants including China Shenhua Energy, Beijing has increased its control over the sector.

Since May, China’s benchmark 5,500 kilocalorie per kilogram thermal coal at the Qinhuangdao Port has been capped at 1,155 yuan (\$173) a tonne for spot cargoes, less than half the price of a close equivalent exported out of Australia’s port of Newcastle.

China’s new goal to add 300 million tonnes of coal capacity this year, a 7 per cent annual jump in output, is translating to rigid daily production targets in the main producing provinces such as Inner Mongolia.



Turning back to its own rich and cheap reserves makes economic sense: China relies on coal for 60 per cent of its energy, of which domestic output accounts for 90 per cent.



FISHING ALONE

A man fishes in the waters of river Yamuna, in Allahabad, India. — AFP

Europe’s oil embargo is not enough



SEIRGEI GURIEV The author, a former chief economist of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, is professor of Economics at Sciences Po.

RUSSIA, MEANWHILE, HAS LOST MUCH OF ITS MODERN MILITARY EQUIPMENT, AND WESTERN SANCTIONS HAVE LEFT IT UNABLE TO REPLENISH ITS STOCKS.

Vladimir Putin needs petrodollars, and he needs them now. Many expected Russia’s president to issue a formal declaration of war on Ukraine, a move that would permit the full mobilisation of Russia’s reserve forces.

But while Putin may want to send more soldiers to Ukraine, he cannot afford to do so. Will the European Union’s newly announced oil embargo force him to wind down the attack?

Already, the Kremlin has toned down its propaganda. There is no more talk of taking Kyiv. Putin’s only goal now, apparently, is to occupy the eastern Donbas region. But even there, Putin is not guaranteed victory, as that is where Ukraine has launched its so-called Joint Forces Operation, which includes its best-trained military units, increasingly armed with advanced Western military equipment.

Russia, meanwhile, has lost much of its modern military equipment, and Western sanctions have left it unable to replenish its stocks. With few options, Russia is now unpacking Soviet-era tanks.

The only way Putin can make up for the lack of equipment is to send more soldiers. But drafting new conscripts is an unpopular idea, so Putin has resorted to paying people to fight for Russia, and no pittance, either.

Recruits are now reportedly receiving \$3,000 — \$5,000 per month. But, the recent decision to scrap the age limit for army recruits suggests that even the prospect of earning pay that is an order of magnitude higher than the average wage in the median Russian region is not attracting enough

fighters.

Recently published budget data from Russia’s finance ministry suggests that Putin can hardly afford to cover the war’s mounting costs. The data confirm, first, that the war has been expensive, with military spending having increased by almost 130 per cent last month, to 630 billion roubles (\$10.2 billion), or 6 per cent of annual GDP on a prorated basis.

The data also show that Russia ran a fiscal deficit of more than 260 billion roubles in April, or 2.5 per cent of GDP when prorated to annual figures. While global oil prices are very high, Russia has been selling its oil at a huge discount, accepting \$70 per barrel for Urals crude in recent weeks, 30 per cent below the market price, while overall output is set to decline by 10 per cent this year.

Meanwhile, non-hydrocarbon revenues have plummeted, leaving oil and gas taxes accounting for more than 60 per cent of fiscal revenues, compared to less than 40 per cent a year ago.

Putin’s dependence on petrodollars means that, by announcing an embargo on about 90 per cent of Russian oil imports within the next 6-8 months, the European Union is hitting Russia where it hurts. Putin is now all but certain to face a major fiscal crisis within a year, making it difficult to sustain his war in Ukraine, let alone invade another country.

The problem is that the embargo will help Putin in the short term. The mere announcement of it has already caused oil prices to spike. That is why Europe should complement its oil embargo with

additional, immediate measures. Two options stand out.

The first, which Ricardo Hausmann proposed immediately after the attack, and which others have shown can be implemented quickly, is a high tariff on Russian oil imports. This approach makes perfect economic sense. Every euro spent on Russian oil helps Putin finance his violent campaign in Ukraine.

This is a “blood externality”, and should be priced accordingly. Part of the amount paid by buyers of Russian hydrocarbons should be transferred to Ukraine as reparations or stored in special escrow accounts until reparations are formally awarded.

But at a time when European households are facing soaring energy costs, there is little political appetite for an oil tax. With this in mind, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi has proposed an alternative solution: a price cap.

Under this proposal, which the European Council has instructed the Commission to assess, Western countries would pay a lower price for Russian oil and gas, and impose secondary sanctions

on third parties that pay Russia more. A price cap could be implemented immediately, say, at \$70 per barrel, and lowered by about \$10 each month the war continues. Yes, Putin could refuse to sell oil at this price. But, given that he is already desperate enough to sell to China and India at steep discounts, and today’s energy prices far exceed production costs, this seems unlikely.

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Managing inventories a headache for US businesses

JULIETTE MICHEL

More than two years into the Covid-19 pandemic, American businesses are still struggling to manage their inventories in a feast-or-famine cycle caused by fickle consumer demand.

“We have way too much inventory right now,” said Ginny Pasqualone, chief executive of Sparkledots, a children’s clothing manufacturer.

“It’s important that we have a large selection of merchandise that our clients can choose from,” she said, but store traffic has been hit by inflation concerns, with some customers “very scared that they’re not going to survive

another recession.” For now, Sparkledots is holding more goods in inventory, but that ties up company capital and limits its ability to add to its 18-worker staff.

“It sucks our growth for the future,” Pasqualone said. Such is the dilemma affecting businesses of all sizes. Large store chains like Walmart, Target and Macy’s have acknowledged in recent weeks that they misread consumer patterns, leaving them with excess supplies of appliances, casual clothing and bicycles.

Bicycles were a hot commodity early in the pandemic, prompting surprisingly large orders, said Wayne Sosin, owner of Worksmen Cycles, a New York manufacturer best known for its tricycles.

“Retailers bought whatever they could

as if bike sales would continue to have unprecedented demand,” Sosin said. “It was so obvious to me that (this) would not last.” Still, Sosin said demand remains strong in some parts of the business, placing stress on supplies of some key bicycle parts.

Torrid consumer demand since 2020 fuelled by government pandemic relief programmes has led to product shortages and backlogs in seaports. “The business can no longer count on the idea that you’re going to have this easy, just-in-time inventory and that you can only keep stock on hand that you need,” said Phil Levy, an economist for logistics company Flexport.

Companies are unsure how much the outsized buying during the pandemic

will persist and for which goods.

“The way we tend to predict things is by looking at past patterns,” Levy said. “But we don’t have data on how the consumers behaved during the five recent major modern pandemics.” In the most recent quarter, the big-box chain Target saw sales of appliances, clothing and other goods slow as consumers shifted spending to travel and other service-oriented consumption.

“We didn’t anticipate the magnitude of that shift,” Target Chief Executive Brian Cornell said on an analyst conference call. As a result, Target had bought too many televisions and too much outdoor furniture.

Similarly, department-store chain Macy’s was caught off guard by a 20 per

cent drop in sales of casual clothing and housewares in the most recent period, compared with the prior quarter.

At the same time, “supply chain constraints relaxed,” unexpectedly boosting deliveries of merchandise, said Macy’s Chief Executive Jeffrey Gennette. Retailers have adopted different strategies for dealing with a glut of goods. Target has moved some of its goods outside of stores into temporary storage facilities, while liquidating seasonal merchandise no longer in demand.

Others plan to offer more discounted items. Apparel chain Urban Outfitters expects promotions to increase “not just in the second quarter, but throughout the year and into the holiday season,” said Chief Executive Richard Hayne. — AFP

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Inspiring others to travel: Exploring new cultures, new cuisines



David Hoffmann, a global traveler who has been to over 1,000 destinations, visited the Sultanate of Oman recently. He was blown away by the Sultanate of Oman and the diversity the country offers. David inspires others to get out and know what this world has to offer, meeting new faces, experiencing new memories, food and tonnes of life lessons. Read what he felt while in Oman and how he likes to be back again after learning Arabic.... **P20**

Sudan band's music empowers sidelined ethnic group

NOUREDDINE JABER, a musician with a unique part-guitar, part-tamboura instrument, is giving voice to Sudan's long-marginalised eastern communities through a new album.

Hailing from the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, Jaber belongs to the Beja people, a group of nomadic herders and breeders with unique languages, culture, food and music.

They have borne the weight of disenfranchisement especially under autocratic president Omar al-Bashir who was ousted in 2019.

But the title of his first album, due out later in June, conveys a different message: "Beja Power."

During Bashir's three-decade rule, non-Arab groups complained that his government allowed Arab culture to dominate, giving little representation to the country's many ethnic minorities.

Also known as "Noori", Jaber grew up devouring the rich heritage of distinct tunes of the Beja people who trace their

roots back millennia.

Though he first formed his band in 2006, it was only in recent months that he was able to record his first album, at the age of 47.

"Beja music is the window to the struggles of its people," said Jaber, who called his six-member band "Dorpa", which means "the band of the mountains" in Bedawit, a Beja language.

"The Beja have long been marginalised and we are trying to convey their voice through music."

Though their region is a maritime trade hub known for its lush fertile fields, and rich gold mines, it is also one of the most impoverished parts of Sudan, itself one of the poorest countries in the world.

At a studio in Omdurman, the capital Khartoum's twin city, Jaber leads his band through rehearsal, producing a mellow, toe-tapping sound somewhat similar to jazz.

"Let's play the 'Saagama'," Jaber tells his bandmates: a bassist, saxophonist,

rhythm guitarist, bongos player, and a conga drummer.

In his hand he holds his unique "tambo-guitar", an instrument he fashioned from a guitar neck and his father's vintage tamboura, a type of lyre played in East Africa. Jaber's invention is embossed with small shells and a map of Africa.

VERY SPECIAL RHYTHM

"S a a g a m a", which means migration in Bedawit, is one of the album's most evocative tracks, inspired by ancient melodies from Sudan's east. Unlike him, the rest of the band all hail from different parts of ethnically diverse Sudan. They say it took them years to learn the Beja music scales and tones, traditionally played on drums and the tamboura.

"I've never been to east Sudan. I only learned the music from Noori," conga player Mohamed Abdelazim said.

"The way they play drums in the east is different, very distinct. It has its own very special rhythm."

According to Jaber, the Beja's under-



representation in Sudanese culture is part of why many fail to recognise their music.

Under Bashir, he said, "the rule was for the Arab culture to prevail while other African ethnicities fade."

Beja musicians regularly faced restrictions, with authorities often stopping their performances.

"It could be for anything, lack of permits or because the audience were mixed groups" of men and women together, in contrast to those of Arab performers, Jaber said.

Abdelhalim Adam, the band's bassist, is originally from the ethnic Folani tribe of the Darfur region, on the other side of the

country in Sudan's west.

For him, joining the band was particularly meaningful.

"The Beja's struggle is similar to our tribes in North Darfur," Adam said. "They are as marginalised."

Darfur was ravaged by civil war that began in 2003 when ethnic minority rebels took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated government, which unleashed the Janjaweed militia blamed for atrocities. Hundreds of thousands were killed and millions have been displaced since. The Beja also rebelled against Bashir's government for more than a decade. Communities in the east then joined nationwide calls for his ouster in the protests which began in 2018.

A glimmer of hope shone following Bashir's overthrow and the installation of a fragile transition to civilian rule which pledged to end marginalisation in Sudan.

But even then, Beja tribes complained of marginalisation.

Last year, they blockaded the main seaport of Port Sudan shortly before a military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan upended Sudan's transition.

As Beja tribes continue to call for wider representation, Jaber has zeroed in on music as his avenue to highlight the struggles of his people.

"It's an effective way for our story to travel and attract the world's attention," he says. And it is also a way "to preserve our heritage." -- AFP

READ

LEAN IN BY SHERYL SANDBERG

Lean In digs deep into gender inequality and why women are still underrepresented as a valuable part of our global workforce, showing how they unintentionally hold themselves back, as well as outlining ways for us to enable and support them.



NOBEL PRIZE

Nobel Prize-winning Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov is putting his award medalion on the auction bloc to raise money for refugees fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Online bidding started on Wednesday. They will be accepted through June 20, according to auction house Heritage Auctions, based in Dallas, Texas. Proceeds will be given to UNICEF for its work with Ukrainian refugees. --dpa



ENTERTAINMENT

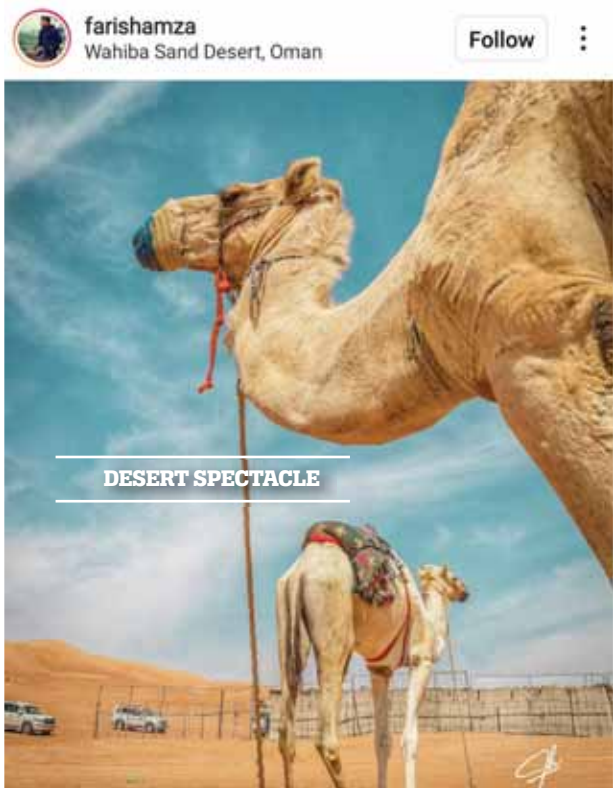
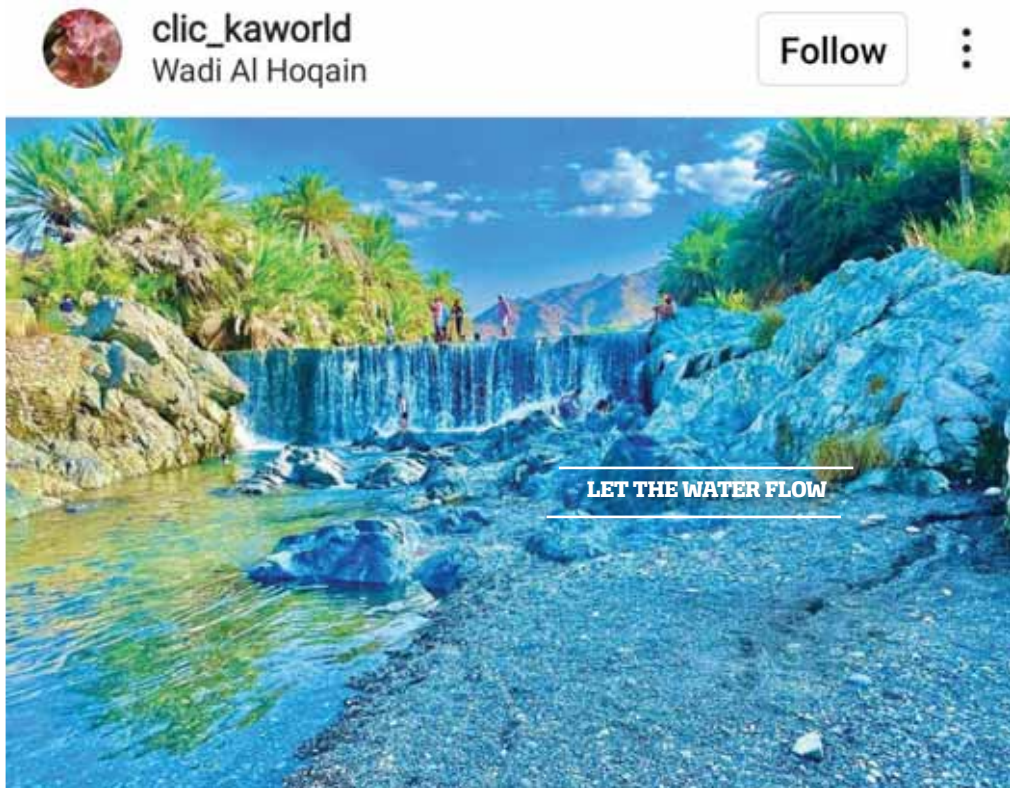
French film legend Catherine Deneuve will receive an honorary award at the 79th Venice Film Festival, organisers said Wednesday. The star is to be given a Golden Lion lifetime achievement award at the world's oldest film festival, which runs from August 31 to September 10. --AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Shakira and Gerard Pique confirm they are to separate



COLOMBIAN SINGER Shakira and FC Barcelona defender Gerard Pique are separating, the couple confirmed in a statement via their PR agency on Saturday, June 4, seen by Reuters.
"We regret to confirm that we are separating. For the well-being of our children, who are our highest priority, we ask that you respect their privacy," the statement said.
Shakira, 45, and Pique, 35, have been together since 2011 and have two children. They met shortly before the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, when he featured in the music video for Shakira's "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)", the tournament's official song.
The "Hips Don't Lie" singer is facing a trial over alleged tax fraud charges in Spain after she lost an appeal on May 26. Prosecutors claim she failed to pay up to 14.5 million euros (\$15.54 million) in tax on income earned between 2012 and 2014.
Her legal team said in statement they will keep defending her case with solid legal arguments.
"Shakira's conduct on tax matters has always been impeccable in all the countries she had to pay taxes and she has trusted and followed faithfully the recommendations of the best specialists and advisers," the statement said. — Reuters

CHANGING WORLD

Saudi women move from behind wheel to under the hood



AN AUTO REPAIR garage in Saudi Arabia is turning to an untapped source for new car mechanics: Saudi women, who just four years ago weren't even allowed to drive.
At the Petromin Express garage in Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast, new female recruits check oil and change tyres alongside their male counterparts, part of a nationwide push to bring more women into the workforce.
Yet the women trainees have, perhaps inevitably, encountered a host of barriers as they enter a field that is male-dominated the world over — and even more so in the kingdom.
Several told AFP their first months on the job have brought flashes of self-doubt, scepticism from relatives and outright hostility from some customers.
One "old man" who came by the garage immediately ordered all the women out, saying he didn't want them going near his car, recalled recruit Ghada Ahmad.
"At the beginning, it's normal not to trust us, because I'm a woman and he doesn't trust my work as a woman," said Ahmad, wearing grease-streaked white gloves and a long blue overcoat.
"It's something new for them... After years of only seeing men, now comes a woman."
As she struggled to learn the basics, Ahmad had moments when she wondered if such men might have a point.
"I used to go home with swollen hands, crying and saying: 'This job is not for me. It looks like their words were correct,'" she recalled.
But as her skills improved, so did her confidence — aided by other customers who were more encouraging.
"One man came and said: 'I'm very proud of you. You are honouring us. You are a crown on our heads.'"
HELPFUL HUSBANDS
Expanding women's rights is central to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 agenda, intended to diversify the oil-dependent economy.
The highest-profile change came in 2018, when the kingdom ended a decades-old ban on women driving.
The country has also eased so-called 'guardianship' rules that give men arbitrary authority over female relatives.
Yet women mechanics in Jeddah said they could never have started working without their husbands' consent.
Ola Flimban, a 44-year-old mother of four, first heard about the jobs from a social media post, and immediately asked her husband, Rafat Flimban, if she could apply.
Rafat agreed and helped his wife prepare for the interview by teaching her the names of spare parts.
"Now she has experience in different car types, how to change oil, how to check cars. She's even checking my car," he said.
The support at home has made it easier for Ola to deal with wary customers at the garage.
"They are surprised that girls work in this field, and ask us to explain how we fell in love with this field," she said.
"That is the most common question."
As she spoke, 20-year-old Mechaal drove up in his silver

sedan for an oil change.
He admitted being "shocked" that the task would be carried out by a woman, but he soon came around.
"If they are here, it must mean they are trained," he said, "and maybe they understand my car better than me."
Petromin vice president Tariq Javed said his company was "confident that this initiative will encourage more women to join the automotive industry in all stages".
The company says its training covers "all express services, including oil, battery, tyres, A/C, and other automotive requirements".
"We make girls feel relaxed. Perhaps the biggest winners from the firm's initiative are the city's women drivers."
"We make girls feel relaxed when we operate on their cars," said 30-year-old Angham Jeddawi, who has been at the garage for six months.
"Some girls feel shy when dealing with men. They don't know how to talk with them, and they don't know what will be done with the car. But with us they are free to talk a lot."
For Jeddawi, the job has fulfilled a lifelong goal she once thought impossible.
"My dream was to enter the automobile sector, but for a Saudi woman this field was not available. So when the opportunity came, I applied straight away," she said.
The knowledge she's gained has encouraged her to hit the road herself.
She has been studying for her driving test and hopes to have a licence within a month.
"If I face a problem in the middle of the road, now I know how to react," she said. — AFP

ART

In Dakar, Rwandan director breathes life into plundered African art



IN RWANDAN playwright Dorcy Rugamba's latest work, a young African steps into an austere European museum and tells an ancient mask he is looking for the soul of Africa.
The artefact comes to life as a woman.
"You will find neither the truth about your ancestors, nor your past -- here Africa is extinguished," it responds, with shrill laughter.
The unconventional performance, "Supreme Remains", premiered at this year's Biennale of Contemporary African Art being held in the Senegalese capital Dakar until June 21.
"If you follow me, I will take you on a tour of the rivers that led us from your ancestors to these places," says the mask, played by the French actress Nathalie Vairac.
But, she warns, "we will have to walk through mud."
As she leads the museum visitor through one large room after another, she invites audience members to examine the blind spots in the official narrative of colonial history.
In one, they meet a scientist from the late 19th century who measured skulls hoping to prove alleged European superiority. In another, they encounter a Belgian army general -- based on a real historical figure -- who kept the skulls of three African dignitaries at home.
Rugamba, the play's director, said the performance was rooted in history.
"Scientists ordered human remains from the conquerors by the thousands, which were then used to develop racial theories and stereotypes," he said.
AGE OF DISQUIET
Towards the end of the tour, spectators find themselves among the rolling hills of Rwanda for an initiation ceremony.
The character of the museum visitor learns to "unlearn the past".
French academic Benedicte Savoy said she was "overwhelmed" by the performance.
"It seemed to convey in just one hour things that we normally have to read in hundreds of pages," she said at a debate after a performance last week.
She and the Senegalese writer Felwine Sarr published a landmark report on the restitution of African cultural heritage in late 2018.
Sarr said much progress had been made since, as what was once a niche topic had made its way into public debate.
"Now museums have to be transparent and reflect on so-called ethnographic collections -- it's unprecedented," he said.
"These museums have entered an age of disquiet."
In November 2021, France returned 26 artefacts to Benin.
The works -- part of the royal treasures of Abomey that colonial troops looted in 1892 -- had been held in the Musee du Quai Branly in Paris.
An exhibition of the returned treasures recently attracted nearly 200,000 visitors to Benin's city of Cotonou in just 40 days, according to the authorities.
MOVE FORWARD
Hundreds of thousands of African works of art continue to be held in Western museums and private collections, but there have been mounting calls for them to hand back the colonial spoils.
Sarr said he welcomed African nations demanding restitution. In 2019, "seven West African countries requested the equivalent of 10,000 objects, including countries that were at war and that you would expect to have other concerns," he said. The Biennale's symposium last week featured a debate on how to re-invest meaning into returned artefacts and reconnect them to contemporary Africa.
"If we believe an object to have historical, artistic value and that it must be there to tell a story, then we should put it in a museum," said Sarr.
But objects that have ritual functions can be returned to communities, while those that researchers would like to study can go to universities or art centres, he added.
Dialika Haile Sane, a screenwriter in her thirties, said she felt the "full force" of emotion while watching the theatrical performance. She said there was no reason artworks should not be returned to "where they were born". "If we don't reclaim what belongs to us, we can't really move forward," she said. — AFP



Inspiring others to travel: Exploring new cultures, new cuisines

By Liju Cherian
@lijucherianoman

'AS-SALAAM-ALAIKUM,' answers a 9 am phone call from Muscat to Miami in the US. David Hoffmann replies to the call and starts the conversation in his typical Arabic accent. This outlandish world traveller who was recently in Oman begins to recollect his love for Omanis and the local food he tasted.

"Mishkak, shawarma, camel meat and halwa were some of the best dishes I had ever eaten, and shuwa and Zarubian rice were another level", says David, who is addicted to exploring new cultures, diving into a new food and often ventures the off-the-beaten-path, with one-of-a-kind local experiences.

An entrepreneur and travel addict, David explored non-stop to create video guides about unique destinations in Oman. He has over a million followers on YouTube @davidsbeenhere.

The Sultanate of Oman was one of his top places to visit in the Middle East and he first started talking to Ahmed bin Ali bin Habib al Lawati, his Omani friend back in 2019 and finally made it this year after the pandemic. Since launching David's Been Here in 2008, he has travelled to over 1,300 cities across 88 countries on six continents.

A trusted voice in the world of travel, David documents his adventures on his website and web shows inspiring others to explore beyond their backyards and leave their mark on the world.

He spent 10 days in Oman which blew his mind. "Each day was amazing. I was really blown away by how diverse the country is", says David.

Starting out from Muscat he headed out to Rimal al Sharqiya

for 24 hours, which he says was an 'incredible experience.' He then finished his trip to Nizwa, Sur and Salalah. "Each one was so unique, it's hard to pick a favourite. But I loved getting to experience the culture and learn about the history of these places, as well as enjoy the local food. I would love to go back to Oman and explore more someday", he recollects.

Ahmed who arranged the trip says he expects the videos will always remain a source of knowledge about Oman. "They (videos) help reach out to a specific group of people to educate them on Oman as a beautiful country and attract further tourism interest."

David's first impression of Oman was its beauty and the incredible people.

"It is a beautiful place and the cuisine is off the charts amazing, but the thing that makes Oman truly special is the people. They're so humble and welcoming, treating me like a king, and made me truly fall in love with the country", he explains.

"Omani people were some of the friendliest and most welcoming", he says. "The culture is absolutely beautiful, and the cuisines outstanding. I also got my first taste of Zanzibari food, which had my mouth watering all day. The mix of Arabian, African, and South Asian cultures is truly unique which I never really experienced. There was always something new to explore. It feels like I barely scratched the surface of what Oman is all about that makes me want to go back", explains David.

Getting to the Bedouin camp in Rimal al Sharqiya sands was an amazing experience for him.

"The Bedouins cooked some mouthwatering food for us, which I loved. I got to see the

camels that they raise for beauty, meat, racing and milk, and then we went dune bashing, which is always a thrill. I also liked walking around the desert, but I didn't realise how scorching the sand would be. Of course, sleeping under the stars was unreal and peaceful."

It was the most welcoming country he ever visited. Presently visiting Iran and Shiraz, David is very excited as it has been on his list for many years. He has plans to visit Guyana later this year, as well as possibly some Caribbean islands, Egypt, and a good chance of exploring Vietnam with Max McFarlin, his friend, in September.

Travel and family are a huge part of his life, but outside of them, he is a big movie fan. He loves anything to do with Star Wars and the Marvel Cinematic Universe being his favourites.

He also loves working out with his trainer and buddy Julian, and learning new languages. Arabic is one of the languages he wants to learn, so the next time he travels to Oman, he hopes to be able to use it.

"My goal is to inspire others to get out, out of their small world to see, feel and to know what this world has to offer — new faces, new memories, new foods and of course tonnes of life lessons", concludes David.

