

2,800 to avail housing assistance

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said that the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday will include citizens benefiting from the housing loans programme whose monthly income is less than RO 450 with a total number of 1,083 beneficiaries and a total cost RO 20 million. The ministry explained that the housing assistance will also cover 2,800 cases at a cost of RO 70 million. **DETAILS ON P3**



P10

NADAL DOWNS
DJOKOVIC IN
LATE-NIGHT EPIC



P13

AL MOUJ MUSCAT
INVESTMENT TOPS \$3.5
BN IN 16 YEARS



P18

OMANI START-UP INTRODUCES
PRODUCT THAT CAN SERVE AS
ALTERNATIVE TO RUBBER



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY
JORDAN, SENEGAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Abdallah II of Jordan in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on the success of the surgery he underwent. In his cable, King Abdallah II expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and to grant him success, good health and welfare. His Majesty has also received a cable of thanks from President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal in reply to His Majesty greetings cable on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, President Sall expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty, wishing him good health and happiness. He also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO
PRESIDENT OF ITALY

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sergio Mattarella of the Italian Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Mattarella, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Italy further progress and prosperity. — ONA



HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO BAHRAIN KING

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, received at Sakhir Palace in Manama on Wednesday, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura. During the meeting, Al Maawali conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to King Hamad and the people of Bahrain. On his turn, King Hamad asked Al Maawali to convey his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan. **DETAILS ON P3**

Reduced visa renewal
fee comes into force

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour started implementing a decision to cut the fee charged for issuance and renewal of non-Omani manpower licenses. The fee will be slashed by more than 89 per cent for companies which comply with the target Omanisation percentage. Accordingly, the renewal fee for First Class Companies will be RO 301 for a period of two years, and in case of adherence to the target Omanisation percentage, the fee is cut down by 30 per cent to RO 211. Earlier, this class was charged a fee of as much as RO 2,001. The fee for Second Class Companies is brought down to RO 251 (compared to RO 601 to 1001 earlier), and in case of compliance with the target Omanisation percentage, the fee is cut down by 30 per cent to RO 176. The fee for

Third Class Companies is set at RO 201, and in case of compliance with the Omanisation percentage, it comes down by 30 per cent to RO 141. In the case of private non-Omani workers' licenses, the fee for recruiting 1 to 3 domestic workers is RO 101; It will be RO 141 for the employment of four or more expat workers. In the segment of farmers and livestock herders, the fee is RO 141 for recruiting not more than 3 workers, and it will be RO 241 for recruiting four or more workers. The fee for renewal of licenses for issuance and renewal of licenses for expat workers in small and medium enterprises (holders of Riyadh cards) will be RO 100 in case the number of workers ranges between 1 and 5. — ONA

Education a national priority

TOWARDS ACHIEVING OMAN VISION 2040

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said on Wednesday presided over the opening ceremony of the Educational Initiatives Forum 'Towards Achieving Oman Vision 2040'. The two-day forum is organised by the Ministry of Education represented by the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat. The forum aims to keep pace with Oman's Vision 2040 in moving towards strengthening the foundations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence. It also aims to present the most prominent educational initiatives at the level of schools in the Governorate of Muscat to generalise them and encourage the rest of the schools in the governorate to follow the same approach in adopting, developing and instilling initiatives



HH Sayyid Bilarab at the opening ceremony of the Educational Initiatives Forum.

as a solid culture, in addition to achieving partnership with public and private sector institutions in supporting and developing educational initiatives and projects of a sustainable nature. The forum also seeks to honour school administrations with individual initiatives at the governorate level. At the beginning of the forum, HH Sayyid Bilarab toured the exhibition accompanying the forum. The exhibition showcases the participating educational initiatives.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Ali al Jahwari, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat, said: "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. In an effort by the Ministry of Education to translate the lofty directives, its strategic plans included everything that would contribute to the development of the educational structure at all levels to achieve the desired goals." **TURN TO P2**

Accountability
during digital
era is crucial

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Authenticity and accountability during digital era is of extreme importance and journalists should employ more responsibility in their works was the message during the second day of the 31st IFJ World Congress held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The seminar entitled 'Omani Media in the Era of Digital Integration' dealt with a number of working papers over two sessions. The first session included a working paper entitled "The Global Industry in the Context of Digital Integration and its Challenges" presented by Dr Faten bin Ghagh, Assistant Professor of Mass Communication and Public Relations at the Department of Media at Sultan Qaboos University, during which she reviewed the present status of digital media in Oman. "It is expected that the opinions aired through videos on Internet is in the range of 76 per cent, while the power of influencers rose at a rate of 71 per cent, and the importance of the technological developments is undeniable," she said. **TURN TO P3**

Youngest pilot lands in Muscat amid record attempt

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Mac Rutherford, 16, said to be the world's youngest pilot, landed in the Sultanate of Oman as part of his mission to achieve the record for flying over the skies of 30 countries in four continents. Upon landing around 2 pm, he was welcomed at the Jetex VIP lounge of the Muscat International

Airport on Tuesday. During this solo trip, he has been to Madagascar, the Maldives, Kenya, Egypt and Greece, among others. Speaking to the media, Rutherford said that he would also be visiting the UAE, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, China, South Korea, Japan and the United States, which will be his final destination. The Civil Aviation Authority last week issued approval for the



arrival of the flight to the country. Rutherford, who has British and Belgian nationality, started his journey near the Bulgarian capital Sofia in March and is looking to clinch a Guinness World Record currently held by compatriot Travis Ludlow, who was 18, when he completed a circumnavigation in 2021. "I'm hoping, with this journey, to inspire young people to follow

their dreams," Rutherford said after clambering out of his two-seater single prop ultralight aircraft at Wilson Airport in Nairobi. "Mack is no doubt a skilled pilot. However, we do not feel comfortable pushing the age limit to the lowest possible point for journeys where a certain level of risk cannot be avoided," the company, which has been sponsoring him, said.



EDUCATION A NATIONAL PRIORITY



FROM PAGE 1

Dr Al Jahwari pointed out the keenness of the Ministry of Education to empower the teacher scientifically, cognitively, and skillfully. He said: “The ministry has created various training programmes for teachers and provided them with appropriate opportunities for creativity and innovation, as well as finding modern educational methods that help them to perform their duties to the fullest. The Directorate-General of Education in the Governorate of Muscat has intended to fuel the spirit of honourable competition to create fertile educational environments for innovation and continuous renewal.

“This two-day forum is a summary of the most prominent applied educational initiatives that have proven their effectiveness in improving and developing education. It includes 16 educational initiatives in various fields, including technology, academic achievement, community partnership, and innovation in education, achieving partnership between education and technology. It intends to motivate the leading educational cadres in the field of activating technology in education and seeks to enhance sustainability through hosting or inviting CEOs of important economic sectors in the country to adopt and develop these initiatives in the future.”

In this forum, 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.

The first day of the forum also included presentations of 6 educational initiatives at the level of schools in the Governorate of Muscat. Malak al Ghailani, a teacher at Al Mahamid School for Basic Education, presented her initiative titled ‘The Digital School’, after which Ali Hamad al Barzanji, an assistant coach at Steam Centre Muscat presented an initiative about ‘The Steam Centre Muscat Experience’.

Following them, Samia al Wahaibi, Director of Rowad Al Ola School for Basic Education presented the ‘Live Educational Broadcast’ initiative, and Aida al Salmi, Information Technology teacher at Al Ithra School for Basic Education presented an initiative ‘Technical competencies’, and Fakhr al Amiri, a physics teacher at Ahmed bin Al Numan Al Kaabi School for Basic Education, presented the ‘Social Intelligence Applications’ initiative. As many as 10 educational initiatives will be presented on Thursday.

The opening ceremony was held at Majan Hall at Al Bustan Palace Hotel in the presence of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and a number of ministers, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura.

— ONA



سلطنة عُمان
Sultanate of Oman



هيئة تنظيم الاتصالات
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

financial statements
for the last year
31 December 2021

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY				
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021				
	Note	2021 RO	2020 RO	
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property and equipment	4	9,397,855	10,099,023	
Intangible assets	5	455,409	430,926	
		<u>9,852,464</u>	<u>10,529,949</u>	
Current assets				
Trade receivables	6	1,518,529	1,306,392	
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	7	8,378,285	349,261	
Financial asset at amortised cost	8	8,504,192	18,009,863	
Cash and bank balances	9	15,114,955	16,620,125	
		<u>33,517,061</u>	<u>36,285,641</u>	
Total assets		<u>43,369,525</u>	<u>46,815,590</u>	
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Retained surplus	10	21,428,530	21,445,338	
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Deferred government contributions	11	8,337,398	5,770,131	
Employees' end of service benefits	12	2,315,154	2,640,748	
		<u>7,652,552</u>	<u>8,410,879</u>	
Current liabilities				
Contract liabilities	13	10,676,978	11,012,664	
Trade and other payables	14	3,618,465	2,946,709	
		<u>14,295,443</u>	<u>13,959,373</u>	
Total liabilities		<u>21,939,995</u>	<u>22,370,252</u>	
Total equity and liabilities		<u>43,369,525</u>	<u>46,815,590</u>	

These financial statements were approved for issue on 23-05-2022 and signed by:



CHAIRMAN



EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT

The notes on pages 8 to 26 form part of these financial statements.

Page: 4

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REGULATORY AUTHORITY

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Note	2021 RO	2020 RO	
Income				
Radio spectrum income	15	17,343,328	16,263,531	
Annual telecom fee	16	3,984,662	4,824,512	
Income from issuing numbers		716,697	1,089,464	
Postal service income		831,695	826,338	
Telecom equipment type approval income	17	426,710	338,905	
Domain name income		62,760	62,395	
Other telecom license fee		79,880	91,370	
		<u>23,445,732</u>	<u>23,516,515</u>	
Operating Expenses				
Salaries and employee related costs	18	(4,989,530)	(7,023,600)	
General and administrative expenses	19	(1,716,873)	(1,401,581)	
Consultancy fees		(613,375)	(65,657)	
Depreciation	4	(980,333)	(940,253)	
Amortization	5	(179,090)	(232,057)	
Monitoring station cost		(308,261)	(319,345)	
Donation to charitable institutions	20	(300,000)	(300,000)	
Allowance for credit losses on trade receivables	6	(35,010)	(20,187)	
Remuneration to Board of Directors		(42,250)	(36,000)	
Withholding tax		(3,918)	(2,481)	
		<u>(9,168,640)</u>	<u>(10,341,561)</u>	
Net income from operations		<u>14,277,092</u>	<u>13,174,954</u>	
Non-operating income				
Interest income	21	678,317	997,522	
Government contributions	11	432,733	432,732	
Provisions reversed during the year		9,202	4,670	
Other income	22	92,574	58,818	
		<u>1,212,826</u>	<u>1,493,742</u>	
Surplus and total comprehensive income for the year		<u>15,489,918</u>	<u>14,668,696</u>	

The notes on pages 8 to 26 form part of these financial statements.



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Raising awareness on food safety highlighted

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

“Ensuring food security is one of the major pillars of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources not only to ensure availability, stability or ability to obtain food, but also to ensure that the food consumed is safe and meets the physical needs of individuals”, said Dr Hussain bin Samh al Masrouri, Director General of the Food Safety and Quality Centre.

During a workshop on ‘Food safety and quality systems’ held on Wednesday, he confirmed that one of the most strategic objectives of the ministry is to ensure the safety and quality of food in accordance with regulations and legislation and to follow up on their implementation. This goal is adopted by the Food Safety and Quality Centre to improve the quality of work and ensure the achievement of its strategic and operational objectives.

The workshop was held at Kempinski Hotel, Al Mouj Muscat, under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The workshop will conclude on Thursday with a session on ‘food quality’.

Dr Hussain added that the food safety and quality system is one of the most important pillars that aim to protect public health and reduce healthcare costs.

“With the rapid development in techniques of production, industry and food preservation, the emergence of various manufactured food products from various sources and the great openness that the world is witnessing in the field of trade exchange, this system faces several challenges at local, regional and international levels. The challenges are in the form of lifestyle changes,



food consumption, an increase in unhealthy food handling practices, and the emergence of new biological and chemical risks.

These problems aggravate by wasting about a third of food produced globally, which is often attributed to weaknesses in food safety, and quality management along value chains, as indicated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations”, he explained.

Al Masrouri pointed out that these challenges need to be addressed by rehabilitating human cadres working in the regulatory authorities and food establishments and improving their capabilities to keep pace with the steady progress in the food industry.

He said, “Since food safety is a responsibility that begins on the farm and ends at the table. It, therefore, falls on everyone — starting with those concerned with food sources in a country of origin for imports or in farms and factories inside the country, passing through workers in the supply chains and ending with the consumer. It includes all the authorities concerned with the food safety sector, directly or indirectly. Besides, various media, including social media, play an important role in raising awareness among various segments of society of the importance of food safety and quality and healthy handling and handling methods”.

Dr Ismail bin Mohammed al Balushi, Associate Professor at the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, presented a paper entitled ‘Food Safety: Concept, Challenges and the Future’. He highlighted that safe food is defined as food that does not contain any biological, chemical, physical or other risks that affect human health, or it is food that may have those risks, but with minor levels, that does not affect the human body.

“Despite the multiplicity and diversity of risks, especially with the increasing effects of climate change, which has become evident in cases of food poisoning, and the emergence of types of microbes, which are causing cases of food poisoning at the present time, especially in the United States of America and some countries In Europe, consumer lack of awareness and producer irresponsibility remain the biggest challenge to food safety, especially in developing societies where the consumer does not know the basics of food safety”.

He added that any strategy built in food safety must first focus on enhancing consumer awareness of food safety and generating a sense of responsibility for the producer at all stages of production, starting from the selection of raw materials to the arrival of the food product to the consumer.



Oman, Bahrain renew bilateral ties



MANAMA: King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain received at Sakhr Palace on Wednesday Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis AshShura.

During the meeting, Al Maawali conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik to King Hamad and the people of Bahrian.

On his turn, King Hamad asked Al Maawali to convey his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan. The Bahraini ruler also wished the Omani people further welfare and prosperity.

King Hamad expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's pioneering role in promoting bilateral relations. He also lauded Oman's renewed renaissance led by His Majesty.

The meeting reviewed the historical relations between Oman and Bahrain. — ONA

2,800 citizens to avail of housing assistance

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning explained that the Royal directives issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday will include citizens benefiting from the housing loans programme whose monthly income is less than RO 450 with a total number of 1,083 beneficiaries and a total cost RO 20 million.

The ministry explained

that the housing assistance will also cover 2,800 cases at a cost of RO 70 million.

In comments to ONA, Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, said the ministry will soon implement the Royal directives, adding that the ministry is making stringent efforts, as part of its ongoing programmes and initiatives, to introduce multiple housing alternatives

and make them available to citizens.

It is noteworthy that the ministry has implemented the Royal directive issued by His Majesty to exempt housing loans for low-income families during the previous year which included 734 beneficiaries at an estimated cost of RO 13.540 million. A total of 1,817 cases benefited from the Royal exemption during 2021-2022. — ONA

Call to improve working conditions of journalists

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The second day of the 31st IFJ World Congress being held in Oman looked at various aspects of journalists at the workplace, from harassment to gender pay equality.

The Congress being attended by journalists from across the globe, focused on IFJ's policy on harassment and went onto presidium and committees, followed by the report of the general secretary.

Journalists discussed how the pandemic has impacted journalists in their way of working, and said there should be better remuneration for journalists who are working from home. They also pointed out that the pandemic has affected incomes.

"Worldwide, we see working conditions of journalists are going down, especially for women. The home office is really a step back because they have to cover childcare, home and work altogether. Eventually, their working time is reduced and, accordingly lose their monthly income as well as pension. So we are requesting better social conditions for women", said Renate Gensch, Ver.di, Germany.

In her presentation, Sian Jones, National Union of Journalists, UK and Ireland, addressed equal pay and understanding the gender pay gap for women at work places in the UK. She said women work for two months free. She said the successful outcome of the case of Samira Ahmed had opened the door for hundreds of other women.

"This is an important Congress for us to come together with journalists and media



workers, so we are able to share experiences working in different environments across the globe where some places are dangerous to work. In the session here, I have been talking about equal pay, where in the UK, women are paid less compared to men, on average, two months less each year. As a trade union, we want to tackle this, and we have had a successful development where we won the case of our member, Samir Ahmed, in 2020 with BBC. It was successful for her as an individual, but it also meant we could open doors for equal pay in other cases, both in BBC and other media places in the UK. It

raised the profile of equal pay as a bargaining issue", said Sian.

Sylvia Bultoc, Founder and MD, Special Eurasia from Italy, said she has come to cover the event, "It is important that the journalist community comes together and talk about important topics such as impunity and criminal actions taken against journalists across the world, which should not happen at all. The work of journalists is very important because it is their work on which our analysis is based on."

In the discussion, 'Ending Impunity' had testimonies of the families where Fabienne Mercier

Nerac from France, Sharmeli Bustios from Peru, Motasem Mortaja from Palestine and Sandhya Ekneligoda shared their stories out of pain. Motasem Mortaja talked about the day he was videoing his journalist brother reporting in Palestine while he was shot.

Motasem, who continues to be a journalist, said, "I did not know that it was the day I am going to record his death."

Meanwhile, Sandhya Ekneligoda from Sri Lanka has been looking for her husband for the last 12 years and is at IFJ to raise awareness by sharing her experience of a campaign to reach out for the whereabouts of her journalist and cartoonist husband, Prageeth Ekneligoda, who disappeared in 2010 after he wrote about corruption along with the cartoon.

"I will only grow my hair and wear a coloured dress after I know about him", she said, dressed in the black and shaved head.

Oman's FDI jumps 7.7 per cent

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

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 event host is Oman Journalists Association (OJA).

"Enhancing economic growth, diversification and mechanisation of the private sector is aimed at placing the Sultanate of Oman in the ranks of economically advanced countries, and integrated work between various sectors to develop a business environment conducive to a knowledge economy", Muhanna al Sinani said, and added, "We have a host of incentives being provided to foreign investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate of Oman, and a wide range of investment opportunities are currently in offer by the ministry to investors in addition to the services provided by the ministry to investors and exporters."

The incentives include tax and customs exemptions and a reduction in administrative fees for registration and licenses,

and some incentives in terms of reducing the rental value of leased lands and the possibility of owning land for investment for different sectors in general.

"With all these offers for foreign investors, there has been a great response. Sultanate of Oman's foreign direct investment increased by 7.7 per cent compared to December 2020, and there is an increase in the proportion of foreign direct investment thanks to a group of countries that are leaders in the investment, value the Sultanate of Oman", the DG said.

He further said among the countries, the United Arab Emirates, the Qatar, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands top the FDI list.

"We, at the MoCIIP, focus heavily on a group of countries and markets that we target according to strategies and a study report of the target markets. Based on these classifications, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion organises events from three to four countries annually."

"The ministry also attracts investments and capital in order to diversify sources of income as well as to provide opportunities for job-seekers in addition to supplying the national economy with strategic and long-term projects", Al Sinani said.

He indicated that the percentage of non-oil exported materials increased by only 69 per cent in one month, and this increase is a positive step achieved by the ministry in diversifying sources of income. Diversification of sources of income in addition to petroleum products spans around sectors such as the tourism, industry, fisheries and agricultural sectors, as well as logistics.

Accountability during digital era is crucial

FROM PAGE 1

The second paper, entitled 'The Conceptual ABCs and the nature of practices of media integration in the Sultanate of Oman' was presented by Dr Khamis Ambusaidi, Assistant Professor of Digital Communication at the University of Technology and

Applied Sciences, Nizwa.

Ambusaidi added that this paper aims to present the concept of digital journalism especially in the nature of digital integration in the context of Oman and is of great importance to the present world.

The third paper was presented by Salim al Amri, Director of Al

Wisal Radio, in which he shared the experience of Al Wisal Radio in digital integration.

He discussed the strategy Al Wisal Radio followed during the digital transformation in terms of human resources management and the challenges that the radio faced during the recent crises in the media building process.

He also reviewed the mechanisms of Al Wisal Radio in producing content and in maintaining a balance between the digital and audio aspects.

The fourth paper was about reading the structure of investment in the media industries in the Sultanate of Oman, presented by Somaya

al Yaqoubi, a journalist and researcher, in which she dealt with the formation of the economic environment for the media in Oman from the local companies and projects based on the support of individuals, in addition to the media and the government.

The second session dealt with

a number of working papers, where the first paper was titled 'Attitudes of Omani journalists towards employing social networking sites in journalistic work' an analytical field study on a sample of journalists from the newspapers and 'Oman Daily Observer' presented by the 'Observer' team.



ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

As summer has begun with rising temperatures, reports of fire incidents also started pouring in. Incidents of fire are reported in vehicles, homes, factories and warehouses. Besides them are farm fires that cause concern for everyone. Fires result in human and material losses, as they are not controlled all the time despite the best efforts of authorities.

Farm fires are one of the types that the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) frequently deals with, especially during summer. According to the authorities' latest statistics, 873 reports related to farm fires, agricultural waste and weeds were dealt with during 2021, compared to 849 reports in 2020.

Failure to follow safety guidelines is a major reason behind farm fires. The authorities call on farmers to follow safety guidelines, including keeping fertilisers and pesticides at designated places and avoiding direct sunlight, disposing of cigarette butts in a safe place and away from highly flammable materials, disposing of agricultural waste by safe methods, not setting fire for cooking and barbecuing near trees or grass and making sure it is extinguished before leaving the place, monitoring children and not leaving sources of ignition in their hands, cooperating with the competent authorities in finding easy and wide ways for the arrival of civil defence and ambulance equipment and mechanisms while responding to reports.

Another reason is the abandonment of farms and using them as places to practice some wrong behaviours. The CDAA carries out awareness programmes in various governorates to reduce fire cases. Yet, the best course of action is to eliminate the causes of these fires and follow the advice and instructions. Taking precautions is the best way to avoid a fire incident.

In the event of a fire on a farm, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority advises direct call on emergency number 9999 or the authority's operations centre at 24343666. It said in a bulletin that one should try to extinguish the fire with the available tools and prevent as much as possible from the fire reaching the nearby grasses, trees and farms. Also it is advisable to ask for help from the workers in the neighbouring farms until the arrival of firefighters to deal with the situation.

The fire service is one of the most important services provided by the authority to deal with all types of fire incidents through trained firefighting teams, in addition to the use of modern equipment and devices to protect lives and property.

The CDAA was established in accordance with Royal Decree No 3/2013 issued on January 8, 2013, and aims to provide services related to civil protection, firefighting, search and rescue, ambulance, and dealing with accidents of dangerous materials.

It sought to provide its centres in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman with many rescue devices and equipment with high technologies and specifications to keep pace with the rapid development growth in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also introduced many vehicles, cranes, hydraulic ladders, and modern equipment that contributed to land rescue operations in traffic accidents, rescue from high buildings and the expulsion of those trapped in them and those stuck in electric elevators and other rescue operations. Specialised teams were provided with the vehicles necessary to complete their work tasks to the fullest.

Through its trained and qualified cadres, it undertakes to provide its services of firefighting, ground rescue, water rescue, search and rescue, dealing with accidents of hazardous materials, ambulance services, and civil protection services with high professionalism and competence.

Averting farm fires

Failure to follow safety guidelines is a major reason behind farm fires. In the event of a fire on a farm, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority advises direct call on emergency number 9999 or the authority's operations centre at 24343666



Sultanate of Oman
The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary

Re-Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to Re-submit the following tender:

Re-Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
16/2022	Renting a Building of the Courts Complex in Wilayat Sur	09/06/2022	04/07/2022	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	RO. 25/-

The specifications shall be as follows:

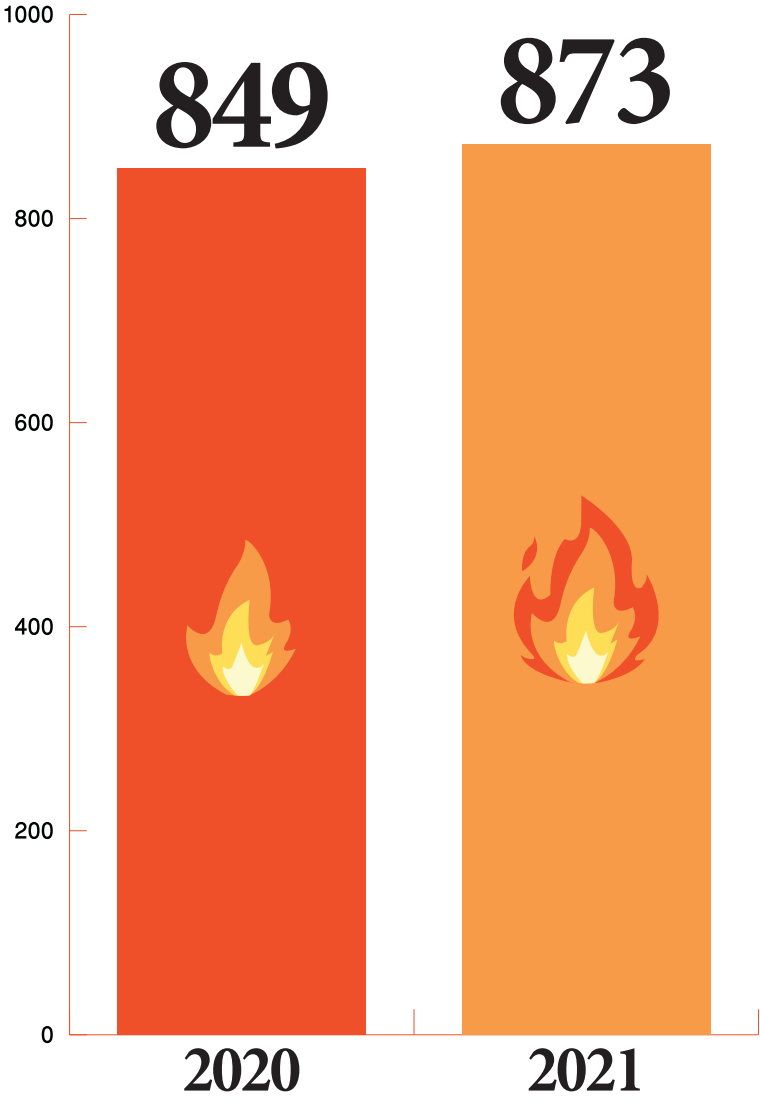
- The location of the building should be clearly visible, easily accessible, and suitable for security, in an open site.
- It is preferable that the building is under construction or that the age of the building does not exceed five years.
- Provided that there is sufficient space for parking for employees and visitors.
- The ground floor should be open (not divided from the inside to make the courtrooms)
- The upper floors should be open or the apartment space is wide to facilitate the division of offices.
- The number of elevators in the building shall not be less than two.
- Providing air-conditioning devices for the building and infrastructure, such as a computer network and a telephone exchange.
- The owner of the building should be fully prepared and agree to make any modifications and additions (whether structural or technical) in the building in proportion to the nature of the work.
- The building area should be about 7000 square meters.
- The original maps and drawings of the building and all guarantees related to building materials, devices and equipment are attached to the building, in addition to the civil defense certificate.
- The owner of the building shall undertake all kinds of maintenance during the contract period.

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:
Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Comparison of reports related to farm fires, agricultural waste and weeds during the 2020 and 2021.



An enlightening event on renewable energy



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JUNE 1

The solar energy Wahaj team at Um Al Fadl School for Basic Education organised an event at Bait Al Sabah Birkat Al Mouz recently under the auspices of Ahmed bin Nasser al Abri, member of Majlis Ash'shura and representative of Nizwa.

Welcoming the gathering, Moosa bin Khalifa al Nabhani, head of the Innovations and Scientific Olympiad Department, talked about the project's objectives which included promoting the use of renewable energy. Whether it be for road lighting or other projects where clean energy can be tapped, Al Nabhani urged them to make use of renewable energy sources in the villages of Birkat Al Mouz.

The audience was shown a visual presentation of the Wahaj Solar Project. The evening also witnessed discussion sessions on five topics. Salim bin Saif al Alawi, assistant coach at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences



(Nizwa Technology), presented the first and second topics.

The first topic dealt with different types of renewable energy systems while the second examined the optimal use of renewable energy in the Omani environment. He pointed out that renewable energy comes from natural sources and processes that are constantly renewed, and hence called sustainable energy.

He also referred to the natural resources and how they are

adapted to produce the various renewable energy systems that man has harnessed for various purposes. He also talked about how the people can benefit from these natural resources in the Omani environment to produce renewable energy.

Dr Harith bin Mohammad al Azri, Assistant Professor of Physics, Department of Mathematical and Physical Sciences in the College of Science and Arts at the University of Nizwa, presented the remaining three topics.

The topics were about the role of the government in spreading the culture of solar energy. He talked about the availability of renewable energy technology in the country and its future.

The session was moderated by Ahmed bin Marhoon al Busaidy, Senior Specialist of qualified care in the Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Ahmed bin Nasser al Abri honoured the participants, speakers and sponsors of the event.

National intellectual property issues discussed

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, represented by the National Intellectual Property Office, organised a workshop on the national plan for intellectual property, on Wednesday.

The workshop aimed to review the current situation of various intellectual property sectors and propose ways to develop intellectual property services in the Sultanate of Oman. It was attended by a group of innovators, representatives of the private sector, entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

Engineer Khalid bin Hamoud al Hinai, Director of the National Intellectual Property Office, said the intellectual property



sector serves various segments of beneficiaries including inventors and innovators, authors, entrepreneurs, owners of small enterprises, emerging institutions and investors from international and local companies.

He stressed that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion seeks to create institutional integration that focuses on reading the reality of innovation and intellectual property in the Sultanate of Oman in order to develop a strong infrastructure to diversify the government economy and create a dynamic intellectual property ecosystem and align all legislation to Oman Vision 2040.

Sultanate of Oman

The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary

Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to Submit the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
28/2022	Rent a Building for Primary Court & The Notary Public Department in the Wilayat of Liwa	23/06/2022	11/07/2022	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	RO. 25/-

The specifications shall be as follows:

- The location of the building should be clearly visible, easily accessible, and suitable for security, in an open site.
- It is preferable that the building is under construction or that the age of the building does not exceed five years.
- Provided that there is sufficient space for parking for employees and visitors.
- The ground floor should be open (not divided from the inside to make the courtrooms)
- The upper floors should be open or the apartment space is wide to facilitate the division of offices.
- The number of elevators in the building shall not be less than two.
- Providing air-conditioning devices for the building and infrastructure, such as a computer network and a telephone exchange.
- The owner of the building should be fully prepared and agree to make any modifications and additions (whether structural or technical) in the building in proportion to the nature of the work.
- The building area should be about 3500 square meters.
- The original maps and drawings of the building and all guarantees related to building materials, devices and equipment are attached to the building, in addition to the civil defense certificate.
- The owner of the building shall undertake all kinds of maintenance during the contract period.

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

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Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

SQU Road in Al Khoudh to be dualised

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE1

Muscat Municipality will implement a project for the dualisation of Sultan Qaboos University Road in Al Khoudh area of Seeb.

The project is significant as the road is one of the busiest in the capital as it also caters to the students and teachers of SQU.

"The project has been launched to accommodate the increasing traffic in Al Khoudh area and on the road near the vicinity of Sultan Qaboos University, which is also home to several educational, health and commercial facilities, and residential neighbourhoods. This project will be completed in the last quarter of 2023."

As per the statement released by Muscat Municipality, the dualisation project will start from the roundabout in District Six in Al Khoudh to the traffic lights intersection in front of Gate No 2 of Sultan Qaboos University.

The project includes the construction of two lanes on each direction with a length of 3.5 km in each, the construction of sidewalks for pedestrians along the road in both directions with a total length of 7 km, and side barriers and stormwater canals.

The project also includes converting the existing roundabout in Al Khoudh Sixth District area into a four-way intersection with signal lights, in addition to constructing a new signal-controlled intersection in front of the entrance to Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
67/2022	Supply and installation of a solar energy system for (8) buildings of Omani Women Associations in the Governorates of South and North Al Sharqiyah	Companies specialized in the field of Electro mechanical that are registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with excellent or first degree	Tuesday 21-6-2022 01:00 PM	Monday 11-7-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On Thursday 02/06/2022.

❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

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

www.mosd.gov.om

Sultan Qaboos University

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University announces their desire to sell used furniture and their in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used furniture in auction stores and receive the bidding on Sunday and Monday 05-06/06/2022 from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 07,08, 09/06/2022 from 09:00 am to 04:00 pm.
- The used furniture are sold in their current condition, and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) Omani riyals will be imposed for each day after 12/06/2022.

Notes:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact 24141272.



Yemen truce hangs in balance as extension talks falter

SANAA: A fragile UN-brokered truce between the Yemeni government and Ansar Allah fighters hung in the balance on Wednesday as talks on renewing it hit trouble, threatening the humanitarian gains of the past two months.

Aid agencies and Western governments have urged Yemen's warring parties to extend the truce, which has significantly reduced the intensity of fighting in a conflict the United Nations says has triggered the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But with just one day before the truce expires, there was no sign of any breakthrough in UN-backed talks.

A Yemeni aircraft left the capital Sanaa for Cairo on the first commercial flight between the two cities since 2016, the latest gain from the truce deal.

The office of the United Nations special envoy for Yemen said there were 77 people on board the Yemenia flight from Sanaa airport, which has been closed to commercial flights for nearly six years.

It is the seventh such flight since the truce went into effect on April 2. The six previous flights had all been to the Jordanian



Talks on extending the ceasefire 'haven't ended yet but seem to be in a bit of trouble'

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD,
US ambassador to the United Nations

capital Amman.

Yemen has been gripped by conflict since the fighters overran Sanaa in 2014, triggering a military intervention in support of the beleaguered government the following year.

On May 16, a Yemenia plane



Loading docks at the port of Yemen's Red Sea coastal city of Hodeidah, around 230 kilometres west of the capital. — AFP

carrying 126 passengers, including critically ill hospital patients and their relatives, became the first commercial flight to leave Sanaa since August 2016.

Air traffic into the fighter-held capital has been largely halted by a blockade, but there have been exemptions for aid flights that are a key lifeline for the population. Despite accusations of violations from both the coalition and

Ansar Allah fighters, the truce has significantly reduced levels of violence.

The Ansar Allah fighters have said they are considering renewing the ceasefire amid UN efforts to extend the truce.

But on Tuesday, the US warned the truce talks were in "trouble" as it pushed for an extension to help support millions of people at risk.

Talks on extending the ceasefire

"haven't ended yet but seem to be in a bit of trouble", the US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said.

Aid agencies have urged Yemen's warring parties to extend the truce, saying it had "positive humanitarian impacts".

"As organisations working across Yemen, we have seen the positive humanitarian impacts of the truce", more than 30

aid agencies, including Save The Children, Oxfam and the Norwegian Refugee Council, said in a joint statement.

They said the reopening of Sanaa airport to commercial flights had allowed hundreds of patients in "critical need of lifesaving medical treatment outside of the country" to finally receive it.

The truce has also seen oil tankers docking in the port of Hodeidah, potentially easing fuel shortages in Sanaa and elsewhere.

But a provision for the fighters to ease their siege of Yemen's third-largest city Ta'ez has yet to be implemented, to the anger of both the government and residents, who have held repeated protests in recent weeks.

The head of Yemen's presidential leadership council, Rashad al Alimi, discussed the implementation of the truce with UN chief Antonio Guterres by telephone on Tuesday.

He urged the UN chief to "redouble the pressure on the Ansar Allah fighters to abide by its commitments to the truce, including opening roads to Ta'ez", the official Saba news agency reported.

— AFP

Hundreds in Sudan call for dismissal of UN mission

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of Sudanese protesters including supporters of groups rallied on Wednesday in front of the United Nations mission in Khartoum to call for its dismissal, correspondents said.

The protests were endorsed by groups that have criticised efforts by UN envoy Volker Perthes to resolve the political crisis in Sudan since last year's military coup.

Protesters chanted outside the headquarters of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan, or UNITAMS, in Khartoum. Others called on Perthes to "leave".

On Tuesday, Mohamed Ali al Gizouli accused Perthes of "interfering" in Sudan's internal affairs during a seminar titled "the negative impact of the UN mission on the launch of Sudanese dialogue".

Last month, Perthes said the political stalemate was "impacting the security situation" and "continues to exact a heavy socio-economic toll" in Sudan.

Sudan has been rocked by deepening unrest since an October 25 coup staged by army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan, which sparked regular anti-coup protests across much of the country. — AFP



A woman chants slogans as people gather for a protest outside the UN mission in Sudan's capital Khartoum. — AFP

India calls for collective action on food security

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
[@patkaushal](#)

In the wake of global concern over the Russia-Ukraine war and subsequent disturbance in the supply chain of food materials, India has called for a "global collective action" to address the issues of food security and economic decline at an international meet.

Media reports cited Indian Union Minister of State for External Affairs, V Muraleedharan's (pictured) statement at the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC), in which the minister explained India's position on suspension of wheat export and suggestions that can make the supply chain sustainable.

The crux of his statement revolved around global cooperation to ensure food security and eradicate hunger in the run-up to 2030. "The Global South has been adversely impacted both by the conflict itself, as well as by various measures put in place in response. If the conflict does not give way



to a meaningful path of dialogue and diplomacy immediately, there can be severe repercussions in the global economy which will derail the efforts of the Global South to secure food security and eradicate hunger in the run-up to 2030", news agency ANI quoted Muraleedharan as saying.

The minister expressed his views at the UNSC's open debate on 'Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Conflict and Food Security'. Suggesting a solution to the current supply chain imbalance, he said, "The solution to these challenges lies in global collective action. No single country can, on its own, handle such complex collateral ramifications. We need to work collectively, and we need to work together. In this context, let me

submit the following eight points for this Council's consideration." The minister directly referenced the export of wheat and India's recent decision to impose export restrictions.

He spoke about India's domestic initiatives to ensure access to food and put emphasis on the fact that "India is running the world's largest food-based safety net programme.

"Let me reaffirm that these measures allow for export on the basis of approvals to those countries who are required to meet their food security demands.

This will be done at the request of the concerned governments. Such a policy will ensure that we will truly respond to those who are most in need", the minister said.

He put emphasis on the affordability and accessibility of food grains and said, "It is necessary for all of us to adequately appreciate the importance of equity, affordability and accessibility when it comes to food grains. We have already seen how these principles were disregarded in the case of Covid-19 vaccines.

Four killed as quakes hit southwest China

BEIJING: At least four people are dead and 14 others injured after two earthquakes hit southwestern China on Wednesday, state media reported. A shallow 6.1-magnitude quake hit a sparsely populated area in Sichuan province about 100 kilometres west of provincial capital Chengdu, broadcaster CCTV said.

It was followed three minutes later by a second quake of magnitude 4.5 in a nearby county where the deaths and injuries occurred, according to CCTV.

Footage obtained by the broadcaster showed dozens of schoolchildren screaming and ducking under desks as their building started to shake, before dashing out of the classroom with arms over their heads. Another video posted on social media by state-run broadcaster CGTN appeared to show the first quake sparking a landslide that damaged cars and left rocks and soil strewn over a road.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

KOLKATA

Police probe death of star Bollywood singer at 53

Indian police said on Wednesday they are investigating the death of star Bollywood singer Krishnakumar Kunnath, popularly known as KK, who died at age 53 after a concert. The singer died after performing at a college festival in Kolkata, prompting a wave of tributes.

He was rushed to hospital from his hotel at around 10:30 pm, where doctors pronounced him dead. Aroop Biswas, a government minister in West Bengal, said KK had died of a



"suspected cardiac arrest".

But police said they are probing whether he died an "unnatural death", with media reports saying there were injuries to his face and head. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq faces further power cuts

Iraq has failed to pay \$1.6 billion owed to neighbouring Iran for gas imports, a debt needed to guarantee further supplies critical to prevent worsening power cuts, Baghdad's authorities said. Payment of the debt was a key requirement to ensure energy supplies for Iraq's power plants during the intense heat of the upcoming summer months. "Iran had demanded the payment by Iraq of its financial obligations for the payment of the gas", Iraq's electricity ministry



said. However, due to "the delay in the adoption of the budget", as well as parliamentary blockages stalling a bill aimed to guarantee debt payments in the electricity sector, this led to 'delays'. — AFP

COLOMBO

Lanka port switches to pedal power

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka's main seaport unveiled a free bicycle service, allowing workers to navigate the facility without petrol-powered vehicles, as the island nation struggles with unprecedented fuel shortages. The island nation is experiencing its worst financial meltdown since independence, leaving authorities struggling to pay for adequate supplies of vital imports. Motorists are forced to spend hours or even days waiting for rationed fuel at gas stations.



The bicycle initiative was aimed at conserving petrol in the Colombo deep-sea container port, Sri Lanka Ports Authority Chairman Prasantha Jayamanna said. — AFP



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In brief

■ DAKAR



SENEGAL LAUNCHES CONTESTED WATER DESALINATION SCHEME

Senegal has kicked off work to build the country's first water desalination plant, a scheme contested by critics as costly and an environmental peril. President Macky Sall ceremonially launched work to build a plant in Dakar's Mamelles district aimed at easing the capital's chronic water shortage. Sall said the "complex and unprecedented project" was a key phase in an infrastructure scheme designed to catapult Senegal to emerging-economy status by 2035.

The coastal facility will desalinate water from the Atlantic, with a peak capacity of 100,000 cubic metres per day.

— AFP

■ OAXACA



11 DEAD AFTER HURRICANE AGATHA HITS MEXICO

At least 33 people remained missing and 11 were confirmed dead on Wednesday after Hurricane Agatha swept through Mexico, local officials said. The storm made landfall along Mexico's Pacific coast, the strongest since record keeping began in 1949, according to the US National Hurricane Center (NHC). It triggered heavy rains and deadly flooding. "There are 33 (people) missing and 11 deaths basically in the upper area of the coast," Oaxaca state governor Alejandro Murat said in a video call on Wednesday. Two people aged 18 and 21 years old died when part of a hill collapsed in Santa Catarina Xanagüa. — AFP

■ NICOSIA



GREECE, CYPRUS, EASE COVID MEASURES

Greece and Cyprus relaxed their Covid restrictions ahead of their crucial summer tourist seasons. Both relaxed their mask mandates, while keeping them in place for public transport in cities, retirement homes and hospitals. The government in Cyprus decided last week to lift all restrictions at airports ahead of the hot summer season. Travellers heading there are no longer required to show a certificate of vaccination or recovery or to take a PCR test. Greece has already suspended compulsory Covid tests for travellers arriving with a European vaccination certificate.

— AFP

■ QUEEN CELEBRATES PLATINUM JUBILEE



People gather at The Mall, in London, as the Union flags flutter in the wind ahead of the Platinum Jubilee's celebrations for Britain's Queen. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II has been on the throne since she was 25, an ever-present figure for the lives of most people in Britain, as well as one of the most recognisable people around the world. She will celebrate her Platinum Jubilee over four days from Thursday June 2nd, for her 70 years of reign. — AFP

US to send rocket systems to Ukraine

SOLEDAR: Ukraine looked close to losing the key eastern city of Severodonetsk to Russian forces but was boosted on Wednesday by the US decision to send more advanced rocket systems to help with its defence.

"The Russians control 70 per cent of Severodonetsk," Lugansk region governor Sergiy Gaiday announced on Telegram, adding that Ukrainian forces were withdrawing to prepared positions.

"If in two or three days, the Russians take control of Severodonetsk, they will install artillery and mortars and will bombard more intensely Lysychansk," the city across the river, which Gaiday said remained under Kyiv's control.

One of the industrial hubs on Russia's path to taking the eastern Lugansk region, Severodonetsk has become a target of massive Russian firepower since the failed attempt to capture Kyiv.

But in a boost for the outgunned Ukrainian military, President Joe Biden confirmed that more US weaponry was on the way to allow them to "more precisely strike key targets" in Ukraine.

The new weapon is the Himars multiple launch rocket system, or MLRS: a mobile unit that can



A woman collects belongings in the rubble of their house after a strike destroyed three houses in the city of Sloviansk in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

simultaneously launch multiple precision-guided missiles.

They are the centrepiece of a \$700-million package being unveiled that also includes air-surveillance radar, more Javelin short-range anti-tank rockets, artillery ammunition, helicopters, vehicles and spare parts, a US official said.

With a range of about 50 miles, they will allow Ukrainian forces to strike further behind Russian lines.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Washington of

The new weapon is the Himars multiple launch rocket system, a mobile unit that can simultaneously launch multiple precision-guided missiles

"adding fuel to the fire," saying "such supplies" did not encourage Kyiv to resume peace talks.

In an article in the New York Times, Biden insisted: "We are not

encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders."

He wrote: "We do not seek a war between Nato and Russia.

"As much as I disagree with Mr (President Vladimir) Putin, and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow."

While some analysts have suggested the Himars could be a "game-changer", others caution they should not be expected to suddenly turn the tables, not least because Ukrainian troops need time to learn how to use them

effectively.

What they may do is improve morale.

"If you know you have a heavy weapon behind you, everyone's spirits rise," one Ukrainian fighter on the frontline said before the announcement.

On the eastern frontline in Donbas, Ukrainian towns are being subjected to near-constant shelling from Russian forces. Moscow said on Wednesday it had no information on the death of a French journalist killed this week while covering the evacuation of civilians in the east of the country.

West of Severodonetsk, in the city of Sloviansk, journalists saw buildings destroyed by a rocket attack in which three people died and six others were hurt.

And on Wednesday, at least one person died and two others were injured in Soledar, between Sloviansk and Severodonetsk.

The European Union has also sent weapons and cash for Ukraine, while levelling unprecedented economic sanctions on Moscow.

Germany said on Wednesday it would deliver an air defence system capable of shielding a major city from Russian air raids, although it will take months to get to the frontline.

—AFP

Danes vote on joining EU's defence policy

COPENHAGEN: With the war in Ukraine forcing countries in Europe to rethink their security policy, Denmark voted on Wednesday in a referendum on whether to join the EU's common defence policy 30 years after opting out.

The vote in the traditionally Eurosceptic Scandinavian country of 5.5 million people comes on the heels of neighbouring Finland's and Sweden's historic applications for Nato membership.

"I'm voting yes with all my heart," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said as she cast her ballot in her hometown of Vaerloose, on the outskirts of Copenhagen.

"Even if Denmark is a fantastic country — in my eyes the best country in the world — we are



Danish Prime Minister Frederiksen casts her ballot at a polling station near Copenhagen. — AFP

still a small country, and too small to stand alone in a very, very insecure world," she said.

The defence opt-out means

that the Scandinavian country, a founding member of Nato, does not participate in EU foreign policy where defence is concerned and does not contribute troops to EU military missions.

More than 65 per cent of Denmark's 4.3 million eligible voters are expected to vote in favour of dropping the exemption, suggested an opinion poll published on Sunday.

Analysts' predictions have been cautious, however, given low-voter turnout expected in a country that has often said "no" to greater EU integration, most recently in 2015.

At Copenhagen's city hall, voting was busy in the early morning as Danes hurried to cast their ballots on their way to work.

"I think that these kinds of votes are even more important

than earlier. In times of war it's obviously important to state if you feel that you want to join this type of community or not," Molly Stensgaard, a 55-year-old scriptwriter, said.

Mads Adam, a 24-year-old political science student, agreed.

"History changes and it affects us here in Denmark, and obviously we have to react to that."

By midday, more than 25 per cent of voters had cast their ballots, according to a survey of polling stations conducted by Danish news agency Ritzau. Denmark has been an EU member since 1973, but it put the brakes on transferring more power to Brussels in 1992 when 50.7 per cent of Danes rejected the Maastricht Treaty, the EU's founding treaty.

— AFP

Egypt oppn figure walks free: Official

CAIRO: A presidential pardon on Wednesday saw Egyptian opposition figure Yahya Abdelhadi released from jail after three years, a lawyer said, making him the country's latest political prisoner to have his sentence curtailed.

The pardon for Abdelhadi — comes after an announcement days earlier that 11 political prisoners would be released by an order from the prosecution.

Lawyer Tareq al Awadi, a member of a committee formed in April to review the cases of prisoners eligible for presidential pardons, announced Abdelhadi's release in a Twitter post.

— AFP

The Arctic’s tricky quest for sustainable tourism



Pierre-Henry Deshayes

The writer is a Norway correspondent at AFP

Home to polar bears, the midnight sun and the northern lights, a Norwegian archipelago perched high in the Arctic is trying to find a way to profit from its pristine wilderness without ruining it.

The Svalbard archipelago, located 1,300 kilometres from the North Pole and reachable by commercial airline flights, offers visitors vast expanses of untouched nature, with majestic mountains, glaciers and frozen fjords.

Or, the fjords used to be frozen. Svalbard is now on the frontline of climate change, with the Arctic warming three times faster than the planet.

The local coal mines — the original reason for human settlements here — have closed one after the other over the years, and tourism has become one of the main pillars of the local economy, along with scientific research.

“It’s always hard to defend because we know that tourism worldwide creates challenges to all the places people visit, but

also in the bigger climate change perspective”, acknowledged Ronny Brunvoll, the head of tourism board Visit Svalbard.

“But we can’t stop people from travelling. We can’t stop people from visiting each other, so we have to find solutions”, he said.

Around 140,000 people visit these latitudes each year, according to pre-pandemic data, where 65 per cent of the land is protected. Like the 3,000 local residents, visitors must follow strict rules that bar them from disturbing the animals — tracking a polar bear can lead to a big fine — or picking flowers in an ecosystem almost devoid of vegetation.

“You are really confronted with nature. There are not a lot of places like this left”, said Frederique Barraja, a French photographer on one of her frequent trips to the region. “It attracts people, like all rare places. But these places remain fragile, so you have to be respectful when you visit them.”

Ultra-polluting heavy fuel,

ULTRA-POLLUTING HEAVY FUEL, COMMONLY USED BY LARGE CRUISE SHIPS, HAS BEEN BANNED IN THE ARCHIPELAGO SINCE THE START OF THE YEAR

commonly used by large cruise ships, has been banned in the archipelago since the start of the year, ahead of a ban to be progressively implemented across the Arctic as of 2024.

The ban may be another nail in the coffin for the controversial cruise ships that sail into the region.

The biggest of the behemoths can drop off up to 5,000 passengers in Longyearbyen, the archipelago’s modest main town whose infrastructure, such as roads and toilets, is not designed to accommodate such

large crowds. With tourism here already attracting a rather exclusive clientele, some operators are going further than regulations require, such as Norwegian cruise line Hurtigruten which aims to become “the most environmental tour operator in the world”.

Sustainability “shouldn’t be a competitive advantage”, said a senior executive with the group, Henrik Lund. “It should just give a right to play.”

The company banned single-use plastics back in 2018, and now offers outings on electric snowmobiles.

It also recently launched excursions on board a small cutting-edge hybrid vessel, the Kvitbjorn (Polar Bear, in Norwegian), combining a diesel motor and electric batteries.

“In the idyllic exploration areas, we go full electric. We go silent and we don’t have any combustion fumes”, said Johan Inden, head of marine engine maker Volvo Penta.

But electrification efforts in the archipelago are currently hobbled

by the fact that electricity comes from a coal plant — a fossil energy source that contributes to global warming.

“Electrification makes sense, regardless of the energy source”, insisted Christian Eriksen of the Norwegian environmental group Bellona.

Regardless of whether it comes from “dirty” or “clean” sources, electricity “makes it possible either way to reduce emissions”, Eriksen said, citing a study on electric cars that came to the same conclusion.

Longyearbyen plans to close the plant by the autumn of 2023, invest in renewable energies and reduce its emissions by 80 per cent by 2030.

But Brunvoll, the head of the tourism board, noted the main problem is travel. “Even when addressing the things we can do locally, like the emissions from snowmobiles or cars, we must still acknowledge that the really big problem is the transport to and from Svalbard, both in tourism but also for us locals”, he said. — AFP

Survival, hope and desperation in Ukraine’s war of attrition

DMITRY ZAKS

A retired doctor pulling weeds from her flower garden in the heart of the Ukraine war zone had a maxim: Men with guns come and go but life is never-ending. Valentyna Prys’s life was filled with the types of painful contradictions shared by scores of other families in the fourth month of Russia’s war.

She loved Russia but no longer spoke to her Moscow relatives because they refused to believe the Kremlin could unleash the type of devastation that had ruined her town of Barvinkove.

The 71-year-old’s remaining neighbours — too poor or sick to flee — came from older generations that had halcyon memories of an orderly Soviet life.

The ghostly streets outside her front door were patrolled by tense Ukrainian soldiers who were fighting for their country’s survival in a region where the locals’ sympathies were split.

And the town itself was almost equidistant from one front, where Ukraine’s outgunned forces were pushing back the Russians near Kharkiv, and another, where they were retreating near Severodonetsk.

“I am trying to keep going”, Prys said after looking up with a smile from her weedy follower arrangement.

“For us, this war is temporary, but life is eternal.”

Russia’s assault has turned into a war of attrition that has seen very little ground change hands — but a whole lot of it get destroyed.

Ukraine’s resolve and breakdowns in Russian logistics and morale have forced the Kremlin to focus almost all its energy on the capture of a ruined industrial corner of the east.

The Russians are slowly fighting their way through the smouldering remains of Severodonetsk after pounding its highrises and factories from all sides with artillery.

The pulverised chemical production centre is still believed to hold thousands of trapped families in basements with almost no access to medicine or water.

Severodonetsk’s more intact coal mining neighbour Lysychansk represents Ukraine’s last pocket of control in the smaller of the two regions comprising the Donbas war zone.

— AFP

A heat wave’s lamented victim: The mango, India’s king of fruits



Suhasini Raj

The writer has worked for over a decade with Indian and international news outlets

No fruit in India is as universally loved and as eagerly anticipated as the mango, which, for one brief window each year, cools and sweetens the long days of summer.

Mangoes are added to kebabs, used to sour dishes and pureed with mint to make refreshing drinks. Connoisseurs argue fervently about which of India’s dozens of varieties — each with a distinct flavour, colour and texture — are best and disagree politely about the correct way to eat the fruit: By cutting it into slices or by sucking the juice straight from the top.

But this year, this centuries-old ritual is imperiled. As blistering heat has struck northern India weeks earlier than usual, mango crops have been devastated, threatening a way of life for the thousands of small farmers who grow the fruit and the millions more who consume it.

The heatwave is a vivid example of the challenge India faces in ensuring its food security as the effects of climate change worsen, compounding its difficulties in raising agricultural productivity to international standards to feed a growing population of nearly 1.4 billion.

The dangers of a hotter future are achingly visible on a small farm in Malihabad, a prime northern mango-growing district, where Mohammed Aslam tends about 500 trees.

A few months ago, his mango trees were the picture of health, their deep green leaves glistening above the well-hydrated soil and their branches bearing perfect clusters of white flowers. Then India experienced its hottest March in 122 years of record-keeping, with temperatures averaging nearly 92 degrees Fahrenheit and soaring as high as 104. The mango flowers withered and died before bearing fruit.

Virtually none of Aslam’s trees, spread over 4 acres, produced

INDIA IS THE WORLD’S LARGEST MANGO PRODUCER, ACCOUNTING FOR NEARLY 50 PER CENT OF THE GLOBAL CROP

mangoes. In a normal year, they would have yielded more than 25,000 pounds of fruit. “I have never witnessed this phenomenon before in my lifetime”, he said as he looked over his farm in the state of Uttar Pradesh one recent afternoon, lamenting the thousands of dollars he stood to lose on the failed harvest.

Aslam is one of hundreds of farmers who have watched helplessly as the intense heat of March continued into the hottest April in 50 years and then carried on into May. Climate scientists, in a report issued, said the chances of such a heatwave in India had increased by at least 30 times

since the 19th century. The heat has far exceeded the optimal temperature for fertilisation of mango trees, which is around 77 degrees Fahrenheit, said Dheeraj Kumar Tiwari, a scientist at an agricultural university in Uttar Pradesh. India is the world’s largest mango producer, accounting for nearly 50 per cent of the global crop. Much of it is consumed domestically, but the country exports tens of millions of dollars’ worth of mangoes each year to the UAE, Britain, Germany and the United States. Over the past decade, India has been trying to penetrate markets in other European Union countries as well.

In the past, export growth has been limited by the higher costs of Indian mangoes compared with those from countries like Brazil, Peru, Israel and Pakistan. India has been striving to increase productivity, which would lower costs.

Even before the extreme heat, India’s mango exports had been badly damaged by the supply chain disruptions of the pandemic, with shipments abroad shrinking by almost 50 per cent last year.

—New York Times



Zubair Ahmed, a third-generation mango farmer, inspecting raw mangoes in his orchard in Malihabad, India.

In Chicago, Ukrainians recount escaping war

ANGIE LEVENTIS LOURGOS

Each time a police siren wailed or an air-plane whirred overhead, Olena Raczkiewicz would relive the terror of her last few days in Ukraine, when Russian tanks and bombs besieged her country.

This sensation lasted for the first month or so after her late February escape from Kiev. Everyday innocuous sounds could bring up memories of an air raid alert or rockets launching and plunge her into a state of turmoil.

Although she's now in Chicago and safe, the trauma of fleeing her home amid war still lingers.

"I feel panic inside", said 43-year-old Raczkiewicz, closing her eyes and shaking her head as if to rid her mind of the brutal images. "I'm strong. I can try to control it. But it impacts your psychological and emotional state."

On March 10, she arrived here with her husband, two young sons and a few pieces of clothing and possessions, the only vestiges of their old life. The family is among the more than 6.7 million Ukrainians estimated to have fled their country since Russian war on Ukraine in February, swelling an ever-increasing diaspora in Europe and overseas.

President Joe Biden has pledged to welcome 100,000 Ukrainians and others fleeing Russian aggression to the United States, as the war continues into its fourth month.

IT'S UNCLEAR HOW MANY UKRAINIANS HAVE ALREADY SETTLED IN THE CHICAGO AREA SINCE THE WAR BEGAN, IN PART BECAUSE THERE ARE VARIOUS PATHS TO ENTER THE COUNTRY. SOME HAVE COME ON VISAS, REUNITING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Mayor Lori Lightfoot has also vowed to support those seeking refuge in Chicago. It's unclear how many Ukrainians have already settled in the Chicago area since the war began, in part because there are various paths to enter the country. Some have come on visas, reuniting with family and friends. Others have arrived through Mexico, seeking asylum at the

southern border.

Raczkiewicz recounted her family's perilous two-week journey from Kiev, speaking in a mix of English and Ukrainian, with the help of an interpreter.

"You live all your life, your beautiful life, in the same city", she said. "You have your friends. You have your relatives. You go to your job and now some country decided to bomb your city. What do you do? You have one hour to run away. What do you do? It's horrible. Horrible."

Blasts from Russian missiles rocked the Ukrainian capital on February 24. Air raid sirens blared at daybreak.

"Go to the bath", Raczkiewicz recalled screaming at her sons.

The boys — ages 11 and 6 — jumped in their apartment's bathtub and covered the back of their heads with their hands, she said.

The family tried to evacuate that day, but the streets and trains were so congested because everyone else was trying to escape at the same time. They initially returned home.

"You don't know what you must do", she said. "Run? Where run? In which direction do you run? Stay? With kids?"

The next day, she read social media posts from a neighbour who spotted tanks on the street. Russian tanks.

The family got into their car and left for good, with bombs exploding behind them at a distance.

They saw a tank up ahead. Then another. And another. Raczkiewicz recalled holding her breath, wondering which side the military vehicles were on.

"This was Ukrainian tanks", she realised, relieved, though the site of the caravan still frightened her sons in the back seat. They drove for 22 hours to Lviv in western Ukraine — a trip that normally takes a third of that time — arriving around 7 am on February 26. At first, they thought they might be able to stay therein the apartment of a friend or perhaps soon return to Kiev. They hadn't planned to go to the United States. But after a little over a week, there were no signs the fighting would dissipate. — dpa



Getting deglobalisation right



Joseph E Stiglitz

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank, chair of the US President's Council of Economic Advisers and co-chair of the High-Level Commission on Carbon Prices

The World Economic Forum's first meeting in more than two years was markedly different from the many previous Davos conferences that I have attended since 1995. It was not just that the bright snow and clear skies of January were replaced by bare ski slopes and a gloomy May drizzle. Rather, it was that a forum traditionally committed to championing globalisation was primarily concerned with globalisation's failures: Broken supply chains, food- and energy-price inflation, and an intellectual-property (IP) regime that left billions without Covid-19 vaccines just so that a few drug companies could earn billions in extra profits.

Among the proposed responses to these problems are to "reshore" or "friend-shore" production and to enact "industrial policies to increase country capacities to produce." Gone are the days when everyone seemed to be working for a world without borders; suddenly, everyone recognises that at least some national borders are key to economic development and security.

For one-time advocates of unfettered globalisation, this volte face has resulted in cognitive dissonance, because the new suite of policy proposals implies that longstanding rules of the international trading system will be bent or broken. Unable to reconcile friend-shoring with the principle of free and non-discriminatory trade, most of the business and political leaders at Davos resorted to platitudes. There was little soul searching about how and why things have gone so wrong, or about the flawed, hyper-optimistic reasoning that prevailed during globalisation's heyday.

Of course, the problem is not just globalisation. Our entire market economy has shown a lack of resilience. We essentially built cars without spare tyres — knocking a few dollars off the price today while paying little mind to future exigencies. Just-in-time inventory systems were marvelous innovations as long as the economy faced only minor perturbations; but they were a disaster in the face of Covid-19 shutdowns, creating supply-shortage cascades (such as when a dearth of microchips led to a dearth of new cars).

As I warned in my 2006 book, Making Globalisation Work, markets do a terrible job of "pricing" risk (for the same reason that they don't price carbon dioxide emissions). Consider Germany, which chose to make its economy dependent on gas deliveries from Russia, an obviously unreliable trading partner. Now, it is facing consequences that were both predictable and predicted. As Adam

Smith recognised in the eighteenth century, capitalism is not a self-sustaining system, because there is a natural tendency towards monopoly. However, since US president Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher ushered in an era of "deregulation", increasing market concentration has become the norm, and not just in high-profile sectors like e-commerce and social media. The disastrous shortage of baby formula in the United States this spring was itself the result of monopolisation. After Abbott was forced to suspend production over safety concerns, Americans soon realised that just one company accounts for almost half of the US supply.

The political ramifications of globalisation's failures were also on full display at Davos this year. When Russia went to war with Ukraine, the Kremlin was immediately and almost universally condemned. But three months later, emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) have adopted more ambiguous positions. Many point to America's hypocrisy in demanding accountability for Russia's war, even though it invaded Iraq under false pretenses in 2003.

EMDCs also emphasise the more recent history of vaccine nationalism by Europe and the US, which has been sustained through World Trade Organization IP provisions that were foisted on them 30 years ago. And it is EMDCs that are now bearing the brunt of higher food and energy prices. Combined with historical injustices, these recent developments have discredited Western advocacy of democracy and international rule of law.

To be sure, many countries that refuse to support America's defence of democracy are not democratic anyway. But other countries are, and America's standing to lead that fight has been undermined by

its own failures — from systemic racism and the Trump administration's flirtation with authoritarians to the Republican Party's persistent attempts to suppress voting and divert attention from the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol.

The best way forward for the US would be to show greater solidarity with EMDCs by helping them to manage the surging costs of food and energy. This could be done by reallocating rich countries' special drawing rights (the International Monetary Fund's reserve asset), and by supporting a strong Covid-19 IP waiver at the WTO.

Moreover, high food and energy prices are likely to cause debt crises in many poor countries, further compounding the tragic inequities of the pandemic. If the US and Europe want to show real global leadership, they will stop siding with the big banks and creditors that enticed countries to take on more debt than they could bear.

After four decades of championing globalisation, it is clear that the Davos crowd mismanaged things. It promised prosperity for developed and developing countries alike. But while corporate giants in the Global North grew rich, processes that could have made everyone better off instead made enemies everywhere. "Trickle-down economics", the claim that enriching the wealthy would automatically benefit all, was a swindle — an idea that had neither theory nor evidence behind it.

This year's Davos meeting was a missed opportunity. It could have been an occasion for serious reflection on the decisions and policies that brought the world to where it is today.

Now that globalisation has peaked, we can only hope that we do better at managing its decline than we did at managing its rise.

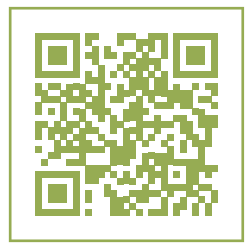
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The political ramifications of globalisation's failures were also on full display at Davos this year.

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NADAL DOWNS DJOKOVIC IN LATE-NIGHT EPIC IN PARIS



Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts after a point against Serbia's Novak Djokovic during the French Open quarterfinal at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris. — AFP

PARIS: Rafael Nadal edged a late-night classic against old rival Novak Djokovic in the early hours of Wednesday in four sets to reach his 15th French Open semifinal.

The 13-time Roland Garros champion won the pair's 59th career meeting 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) after a four-hour-and-12-minute quarterfinal on a raucous Court Philippe Chatrier.

Nadal sealed his eighth victory in 10 French Open matches against last year's winner Djokovic at 1:16 am local time (23:16 GMT Tuesday) to set up a last-four clash with third seed Alexander Zverev on Friday.

"I'm very emotional. For me it's incredible to play here," said Nadal.

"Playing against him is always an amazing challenge... To win against Novak, there is only one way, to play your best from the first point until the last."

The 35-year-old has lost just

three of his 113 matches on the Paris clay since his 2005 title-winning debut and now only trails Djokovic 30-29 in their career head-to-head.

The Spaniard, seeded fifth, remains on course for a record-extending 22nd Grand Slam title after lifting this year's Australian Open, which Djokovic missed after being deported from the country over his Covid vaccination status.

Djokovic overturned a double-break deficit to take an 88-minute second set and missed two set points when serving for the fourth to force a decider.

The world number one will rue those missed chances while he waits until Wimbledon for his next opportunity to take his Slam tally to 21.

"Congratulations to Rafa, he was better in the important moments," said Djokovic.

"He showed why he was a great

champion. Well done to him and his team, he deserves it."

Nadal was a slight underdog heading into the match after being taken to five sets in the previous round by Felix Auger-Aliassime and he had even hinted it could be his last appearance in Paris due to a persistent foot injury.

The colder, slower conditions of the night session were also expected to favour Djokovic.

But the 'King of clay' smashed 57 winners in a trademark performance to delight the crowd as he gained revenge for his semifinal loss to the same opponent 12 months ago.

The 35-year-old has lost just three of his 113 matches on the Paris clay since his 2005 title winning debut

NADAL MAKES FAST START

The spectators quickly realised they were not going to be disappointed, as Nadal broke in a bruising 10-minute opening game before saving two break points to open a 3-1 lead.

A crushing forehand winner in the fifth game gave Nadal a double break and he went on to serve out the opener with relative ease, ending his opponent's winning run of 22 sets.

The first game of the second set was even longer than the first, but the result was the same as Nadal took his sixth break point.

A string of unforced errors

from Djokovic and Nadal's cute winner at the net saw the reigning champion a double break behind again.

Djokovic finally took a break point for the first time when Nadal netted a drop shot, before winning another gruelling return game — in which Nadal was given a warning for a time violation — on his fifth break point to level the set.

Opportunities came and went for both players, but Nadal fired long as Djokovic took his second set point in the 10th game.

Nadal came out fighting though and broke, to love, in the first game for the third successive set.

Djokovic saw another break point come and go before giving up his own serve again to slip 4-1 adrift.

Nadal served out for a two-sets-to-one lead in game eight as Djokovic blazed wide on the second set point, with the clock

ticking past midnight and shivering fans reaching for blankets to keep warm.

Djokovic missed a simple shot early in the fourth set and lashed out at the net in frustration, drawing deafening boos from the crowd. The top seed immediately refocused though and broke serve for a 2-0 lead when a hotly-contested line call went in his favour.

Djokovic had the chance to send the match into a decider on his own serve.

But Nadal saved two set points before gobbling up a second break point with a trademark forehand winner.

Nadal made a rapid start to the crucial tie-break to race into a 6-1 advantage.

Djokovic managed to save three of the match points, but Nadal got over the line at the fourth time of asking. — AFP

Poland's Swiatek extends winning run to semifinals

PARIS: Iga Swiatek powered into the French Open semifinals on Wednesday as a comfortable victory over American Jessica Pegula extended the world number one's winning streak to 33 matches.

The Polish star cruised to a 6-3, 6-2 win on Court Philippe Chatrier to set up a last-four meeting with Daria Kasatkina on Thursday.

Swiatek will equal Venus Williams' record for the longest unbeaten run for a women's player in the 21st century if she wins a second Roland Garros title this week. But she said she still feels nervous before big matches despite appearing in almost unbeatable form.

"I do (feel nervous)," said Swiatek. "If I stop feeling nervous than something weird is going on..."

"Sometimes stress is a positive thing as it makes you more tense and more active."

The top seed, who turned 21 on Tuesday, won her only Grand Slam title so far in Paris two years ago.

She has won five consecutive tournaments this year, including four WTA 1,000 titles.

Despite not being at her best, Swiatek still hit 30 winners in an ultimately one-sided match.

The 11th seed Pegula has also enjoyed a fine season but is still waiting to reach a maiden major semi-final after also losing in the last eight at the previous two Australian Opens.

Another dominant display from the Pole looked likely when Swiatek broke in the first game and then led 40-0 in the second.



Poland's Iga Swiatek plays a return to US' Jessica Pegula during the women's quarterfinal at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris. — AFP

But Pegula reeled off five straight points to break straight back and signal the world's best player may not have it all her own way.

Swiatek played an excellent return game to move 4-3 in front,

before wrapping up the opening set by completing a run of four successive games as Pegula mishit wide. She saved a break point early in the second set before opening up a 3-1 lead herself with a backhand winner up the line.

Pegula managed to save three match points in the eighth game as she tried to make Swiatek serve the match out, but the former champion sealed victory with another perfectly-placed backhand.

Kasatkina, playing in her third career quarter-final at the Slams but first since 2018, has made the semis without dropping a set.

Kudermetova was in her first quarterfinal at the majors and the tension was apparent as she committed 50 unforced errors and

had to save 12 of 17 break points.

"You could see that the match was really nervous and tight, especially the tie-break," said Kasatkina, a former junior champion in Paris.

"The last few points were super-tight. I'm happy at the end that I won. I'm happy to be in the semis for the first time.

She added: "My box were pretty nervous, especially at the end. Thank you guys and keep calm - it's OK!" The 25-year-old Kudermetova needed a medical timeout at 5-6 in the second set and battled to save four match points in the tie-break. — AFP

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS Women (quarterfinals)

Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Jessica Pegula (USA x11) 6-3, 6-2; Daria Kasatkina (x20) bt Veronika Kudermetova (x29) 6-4, 7-6 (7/5)

NEW SKIPPER STOKES WANTS ENGLAND TO FEEL 'FREE'

Broad, Anderson recalled for first Test

LONDON: New England captain Ben Stokes said he wanted everyone in the side to "feel free" under his leadership as James Anderson and Stuart Broad were recalled for the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's starting on Thursday.

Stokes has taken over as skipper from Joe Root, with England on a woeful run of one win in 17 Tests.

But the all-rounder told reporters at Lord's on Wednesday: "There's been a lot of talk about a 'reset', which is a word I don't like. "I just see it as a completely blank canvas. I just want everyone to feel free under my captaincy."

"This is our time and we are going to dictate how things go forward. Everyone is starting fresh."

Anderson, 39 and Broad, 35, England's two most successful bowlers of all time, with a combined 1,177 wickets between them, were both controversially left out of the squad for a 1-0 series loss in the West Indies earlier this year.

But they return for the first match under England's new leadership duo of Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum, the former New Zealand captain, in an XI named on Wednesday -- a day ahead of schedule.

England have also given a debut to fast bowler Matthew Potts, a county colleague of Stokes at Durham.

Potts gets his chance ahead of fellow squad member Craig Overton, after an injury crisis



deprived England of several fast bowlers including Mark Wood, Chris Woakes, Ollie Robinson and Jofra Archer.

The 23-year-old has been selected on the back of a fine start to the county season, having taken 35 wickets for Durham in his opening six County Championship matches.

"He's been outstanding in the games I've played," said Stokes of Potts. "It's not been all plain sailing for bowlers and he's created things out of nowhere."

England had previously removed some of the doubt surrounding their side for this opening match of a three-Test series by indicating Jonny Bairstow would bat at number five, with Ollie Pope pencilled in at first-wicket down.

That means the in-form Harry Brook, a Yorkshire colleague of Bairstow, must wait for his Test debut.

Brook has scored 840 runs at a colossal average of 140 so far this campaign but has been unable to

find a place in a familiar-looking top six.

England are currently bottom of the World Test Championship table with New Zealand the reigning World Test champions after defeating India in last year's inaugural final at Southampton.

That success came just over a week after tourists New Zealand had wrapped up a 1-0 win in a two-Test series away to England.

NICHOLLS RULED OUT

New Zealand captain Kane

Williamson, also speaking at Lord's on Wednesday, did not announce his XI but confirmed top-order batsman Henry Nicholls had been ruled out with a calf strain.

Nicholls' place will be taken by Daryl Mitchell.

Star batsman Williamson was coy over whether experienced left-arm quick Trent Boult would play at Lord's, having only recently arrived in England following Indian Premier League duty.

"We need to look at the surface in terms of our bowling make-up," said Williamson. "He (Boult) needs to get through training today, obviously he's just arrived."

"He's keen as but there are a number of things to consider. He's a world-class player but we've got great variety in our bowling attack." — AFP

ENGLAND XI: Zak Crawley, Alex Lees, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Stokes (capt), Ben Foakes (wkt), Matthew Potts, Jack Leach, Stuart Broad, James Anderson

■ OMAN'S AL GHILANI CLINCHES FREE DIVING WORLD TITLE



Omani diver Omar al Ghilani snatched the first place in the World Cup for Free Diving among 17 divers from 14 countries, at Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt. It was achieved with the Asian record for the third time in the dual fins with a depth of 92m CWTB in the tournament.

Mominul steps down as Bangladesh Test captain

DHAKA: Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque said he was stepping down from his position on Tuesday to focus on his batting, after a poor run of form so far this year.

The 30-year-old announced his decision during a meeting with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chiefs at the home of board president Nazmul Hassan.

His batting has come under heavy criticism after the country's Test series loss to Sri Lanka earlier this month. There have been calls for his resignation ahead of next month's tour of the West Indies.

"I just told them I am unable to contribute to the side as a captain and failed to motivate the team. So I feel it is better if someone else is given the responsibility," Mominul told reporters after the meeting.

"I feel that if I can concentrate on my batting it will be good for me as well as for the team."

Mominul has scored just one half-century and accumulated 162 runs in six Test matches in 2022.

His form deserted him after an innings of 88 in Bangladesh's shock eight-wicket win over New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in January.

He scored just 11 runs in three innings in the recent series against Sri Lanka, which Bangladesh lost 0-1.

He said BCB president Nazmul requested that he carry on during



Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan (R) and Mominul Haque (C) talk during the fourth day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. — AFP

the meeting, but that he expressed his reluctance.

Mominul's mentor and coach, Nazmul Abedin Fahim, said that the captaincy had "affected his batting to a certain extent".

"So, I think he should get rid of this load to return to form as a batsman," he added.

Mominul has scored 3,525 runs in 53 Tests, with 11 centuries -- the highest by any Bangladeshi batsman.

The BCB appointed Mominul as Test captain for the West Indies tour, but there is speculation locally that Shakib Al Hasan will be reappointed Test captain.

Mominul took over from Shakib in November 2019 after

the latter was banned by the International Cricket Council for his failure to report corrupt approaches.

A board official had earlier in the morning said they were open to changing captain for the series if Mominul wished.

"Mominul was given the captaincy at a crisis moment. We have to give him some respect. If he decides to quit, we will look for a replacement," cricket operations chief Jalal Yunus said.

The team will leave for West Indies on June 5.

Bangladesh will also play three Twenty20 internationals and three one-day internationals during the tour. — AFP

Oman Sail wins best sports organiser award



Gold winner for the 'Best Sports Event Organiser' category.



Silver winner in 'Best Sport Event' category.

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has been awarded gold in the category of 'Best Sport Event Organiser' and silver in the category of 'Best Sport Event of The Year' at the prestigious Middle East Sports Industry Awards 2022 (SPIA). The awards were in recognition for successfully delivering three Asian and three world sailing championships during 2021.

Joining the leading sports events, initiatives and organisers from across the region, Oman Sail CEO Dr Khamis al Jabri received the trophies on behalf of the organisation at a gala reception at the W Hotel in Dubai.

Dr Khamis said: "Winning two awards, judged by our industry peers, is a great recognition of the scale and quality of the work done by our entire team. We are rightfully proud of our achievement and the positive impact our work had on the nation in 2021. Oman's reputation as a world class destination for major events within the international sport industry has now been firmly established, and this reward

signifies the high level of expertise within the Oman Sail team, which is proudly 96 per cent Omanised. The level of trust placed in us by the Class Associations, sailing authorities and the global sailing community is now being shared by the wider industry."

Oman Sail was nominated for both 'Best Sports Event Organiser' and 'Best Sports Event' following an exceptional year. The organisation utilised over 13 years of international event management experience to deliver nine major sailing events, a nationwide community sailing festival and an environmental protection programme that culminated in Oman Sail setting a new Guinness World Records. In the category of 'Best Sports Event of the Year, Oman Sail was awarded silver behind the Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Formula 1 Grand Prix who took the gold.

In total, Oman Sail's event hosting in 2021 attracted over 2,500 international competitors to the country, accounting for 7,800 hotel room nights and contributing



over RO 2.8 million directly to the national economy.

Oman Sail are already deep in planning for events that will take place between October and December 2022, including the Arab Sailing Championships, the RS Venture Connect ParaSailing World Championships and the RC44 Oman Cup, ensuring that

Oman will continue to showcase it's world class venues for major global sports events.

Organised by Sport 360X, the Sport Industry Awards (SPIA) recognises the achievements of the sporting industry across the Middle East in 18 categories.

The winners were announced at a gala awards ceremony on May 31

at the W Hotel in Dubai.

HIGHLIGHTS

Barcelo Musannah Resort played host to the Asian and African Sailing Olympic Qualification event in April 2021, bringing 456 Sailors from 46 nations to Oman to decide qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Following the completion of the Games in Tokyo in August, the eyes of the sailing world moved to Oman where three World and two Asian sailing championship events were staged, in addition to two of Oman Sail's signature events.

October 2021 saw the start of a busy final quarter of the year as Oman Sail hosted the 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships and Musannah Race Week - which included a Para Sailing event for the first time - before welcoming the 2021 49er & 49er FX Asian Championships and the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships.

The annual premier event, Sailing Arabia - The Tour, began in Musannah on 24 November and

ran through to 5 December with teams competing from 4 different nations. The penultimate event of 2021 was the ICLA 6 World Championships, where Oman Sail once again offered a COVID safe venue for some of the world's best sailors and the perfect preparation for the management team prior to the start of the Youth Sailing World Championships.

The Youth Sailing World Championships attracted over 800 international guests, including 357 sailors, making it the largest ever edition of this annual event. The Championships also witnessed another landmark achievement as Oman Sail set a new Guinness World Records title for the Most Nationalities Collecting Litter in a single location. Under supervision by an adjudicator from Guinness World Records, participants at the Youth Sailing World Championships, including sailors, Oman Sail officials and staff at Barcelo Musannah Resort broke a new record with 73 nationalities collecting over 344kg of litter at Musannah public beach.

Al Zubair returns to action in GT Challenge at Paul Ricard

PAUL RICARD, France: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair returns to action after a two-month break to take part in the Silver category at this weekend's Paul Ricard 1000 km, round two of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS.

Al Zubair teams up with Germany's Fabian Schiller and Zimbabwe's Axcil Jeffries to drive a Mercedes-AMG GT3 running under the Al Manar Racing by HRT banner. Once again a round of the series has attracted a massive entry and the trio will face fierce competition during the six-hour, 1000 km endurance race on the demanding French circuit.

They completed 94 laps of the demanding Italian Imola circuit at the opening race in early April and reached the finish in fifth position. Victory in the Silver category that weekend fell to Team WRT's Thomas Neubauer, Benjamin Goethe and Jean-Baptiste Simmenauer in an Audi R8 LMS.

Al Zubair said: "Round two of the GT World Challenge Endurance and it's been quite a



long break from the first round, around two months. I am really looking forward to this round. Paul Ricard is a track I feel comfortable at. It's not my favourite but I've done well here and we've tested on it. We are hoping to go out there and get

some good results this weekend. "We have a strong team line-up. We had some issues with the car in Imola, mostly in regards to the tyres. But, hopefully, the feedback we gave to the engineers and the whole team, we will be able to get back to some good

results this weekend and get the momentum going for the rest of the championship."

A 90-minute free practice session for the Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS gets under way at 14.20hrs on Friday afternoon. Crews will then

benefit from a pre-qualifying session, starting at 19.20hrs.

The weekend's race meeting is shared with the GT4 European Series, Lamborghini Trofeo and Formula Regional Championship by Alpine. Fanatec GT World Challenge entrants return to

the circuit for their one-hour qualifying session, starting at 11.30hrs on Saturday.

The six-hour, Paul Ricard 1000 km endurance race then takes centre stage from 18.00hrs on Saturday evening and finishes at midnight.



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Al Mouj Muscat investment tops \$3.5 bn in 16 years

Fuelling growth: Oman's premium lifestyle destination pulls in foreign direct investment of \$844 million, encouraged by freehold home ownership.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman's premier lifestyle destination, has so far invested around \$3.5 billion in its sprawling development – a sizable sum that has also had a significant knock-on effect on the country's socio-economic growth.

An overview of this beneficial impact on the wider national economy was shared by top officials of Al Mouj Muscat at a press conference held on Wednesday, June 1, 2022.

The media briefing, led by Nasser al Sheibani (pictured), CEO, detailed how Al Mouj Muscat has become an engine for diversified growth. To date, it has created an impressive property portfolio, luxury hotels, business parks, 20,000 sqm of retail space and world-class amenities, which has seen the value of its assets grow by 777 per cent. With \$3.5 billion in total development costs, the majority of which is spent in the local economy, its impact is securing the next chapter of growth for the Sultanate of Oman.

The premium lifestyle destination has also attracted foreign direct investment of \$844 million, encouraged by freehold home ownership. In addition it has a prominent reputation when it comes to corporate social

People and knowledge transfer to Omanis remain at the heart of Al Mouj Muscat's mission. In 2022, the project recorded 2,200 permanent jobs, which is set to expand to 5,500 upon project completion. It boasts 75 per cent Omanisation, from which 40 per cent of the leadership team consists of women, giving Omanis the ideal platform to showcase talent and develop skills.

NASSER AL SHEIBANI
CEO, Al Mouj Muscat

responsibility, totalling RO 4.5 million through the years.

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Al Mouj Muscat is a joint venture between OMRAN, Tanmia and Majid Al Futtaim,



a partnership that combines the government's long-term strategic vision with private sector expertise in retail, leisure and communities.

Majid Al Futtaim shares the government's commitment to deliver the aims of Oman Vision 2040, and since 2001, it has been investing in shopping

Integrated Tourism Complex can have in Oman. We promised to deliver a mixed-use destination that will position Oman as the ideal place for Foreign Direct Investment and Tourism. Through commitment and good governance, we have brought to life its potential and its unmatched success is a blueprint for growth."

Speaking at the event, Hawazen Esber, CEO of Communities at Majid Al Futtaim, commented: "We are fully supportive of the government's plans to diversify the economy and through our partnership at Al Mouj Muscat, we have witnessed the incredible impact that a leading lifestyle destination can create for people and business.

By working together, we have created something unique, a community with a true sense of belonging and of purpose, and

one that will benefit Muscat and Oman for generations to come.

"Al Mouj Muscat has set a significant precedence. It is a blueprint for how joint ventures can impact so positively on people, on Oman and across the region."

Established in 2006, Al Mouj Muscat was tasked with establishing the nation's first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC), with the aim of contributing to growth in tourism, employment, development, opportunities for enterprise and economic diversification.

Today, 75 per cent of the project is complete and Al Mouj has exceeded expectations and delivered a remarkable impact for the Sultanate of Oman and its people, gains which it credits to the power of its unique partnership.

Al Mouj's impact on tourism has been significant, with growth in tourism a key component of Oman Vision 2040. The lifestyle destination now attracts almost 4 million visitors per year. The Kempinski Muscat and Mysk Al Mouj by Shaza are two hotels currently operating with a total of 582 hotel rooms.

Upcoming projects in their opening phase, such as St Regis Resort Al Mouj Muscat and Al Mouj Rayhaan by Rotana, will bring the grand total of rooms to over 2,000 post completion.

The award-winning development is also now home to 8,000 residents from 85 countries. With world-class luxury amenities including a 400-berth marina, a world-renowned golf course, 85 retail outlets and a dedicated Community Hub, Masjid and nursery, residents enjoy an unrivalled lifestyle.

Petrochem giant Alpek concludes acquisition of OCTAL

LEVERAGING GROWTH:
Incorporating high-value PET sheet business into its portfolio ahead of schedule

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Mexican-headquartered petrochemicals conglomerate Alpek announced on Wednesday, June 1, 2022, that it has received all necessary approvals from the regulatory authorities and has finalised its acquisition of Oman-based OCTAL Holding SAOC.

Pursuant to the purchase agreement, Alpek acquired 100 per cent of the shares of OCTAL for \$620 million on a debt-free basis. Financing was secured through a mix of free cash flow generated from existing businesses and dedicated bank loans.



Alpek will assume control of OCTAL's operations starting on June 1, 2022.

The company expects an accretive EBITDA effect of approximately \$120 million from these assets throughout the remainder of 2022, largely based on the better-than-expected polyester market conditions prevalent in recent months.

This would increase the company's Comparable EBITDA Guidance to \$1,370 million and Reported EBITDA Guidance to \$1,485 million.

"We are pleased to have concluded this acquisition ahead of the expected timeline," stated José de Jesús Valdez, Alpek's CEO. "We are excited to welcome OCTAL's management team

and employees into our family, leveraging their long-standing relationships with customers, their diverse backgrounds, and technical proficiency to drive the Company's long-term growth."

Alpek is a leading petrochemical company operating two business segments: Polyester (PTA, PET, rPET, and polyester fibers), and Plastics & Chemicals

(polypropylene, expandable styrenics, and other specialty & industrial chemicals).

Alpek is a leading producer of PTA, PET resin and PET sheet worldwide, one of the largest rPET producers in the Americas, the third largest expandable polystyrene manufacturer worldwide, and the only producer of polypropylene in Mexico.

THE COMPANY EXPECTS AN ACCRETIVE EBITDA EFFECT OF APPROXIMATELY \$120 MILLION FROM THESE ASSETS THROUGHOUT THE REMAINDER OF 2022, LARGELY BASED ON THE BETTER-THAN-EXPECTED POLYESTER MARKET CONDITIONS PREVALENT IN RECENT MONTHS.

In 2021, Alpek reported revenues of \$7.7 billion and comparable EBITDA of \$962 million. The Company operates 35 plants across the United States, Mexico, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom, and employs over 6,500 people. Alpek is a publicly traded company listed on the Mexican Stock Exchange.

Omantel wins excellence in telecom at Comex Awards

MUSCAT: Omantel remains leader in telecom and ICT by the virtue of several factors including innovation, creativity, tech-based solutions, savings and productivity. These factors have once again led to Omantel winning the “Excellence in Telecom” category at the Comex 2022 Awards held during the recent Comex Week in Muscat.

The award measures achievements made by contending companies in innovation, customer service, sustainable approaches, vision and strategic manoeuvres that have led to enhanced service delivery.

“The award recognises Omantel’s expanding coverage, its tech solutions bouquet and its infrastructural might, which collectively are leading Oman’s telecom landscape. Telecom is so much more than just communication and phone connections. It is a constantly



evolving ecosystem that needs to be nurtured and expanded. Omantel has been playing this part for years and continues to excel in everything that it stands for — the people and the economy of Oman, said Aladdin Baitfadhil,”

Omantel’s Chief Commercial Officer, who received the award. Omantel has been bringing competitive pricing, new products and services, market leadership and operational excellence. Omantel’s most important

stakeholders, its customers, benefit from the Company’s superior service, unmatched coverage, affordable bundles, privacy and much more. It’s telecom affiliates benefit from great supply chain management and prudent ICT

infrastructure investment. Omantel was the strongest contender for the award, given its accomplishments, especially in the past two years, which have been difficult due to the pandemic. The Company continued to stride ahead with its evolved offerings as an integrated telecom service provider covering the needs of people and economic sectors and thus, helping them bounce back with more resilience. These innovative solutions turned the tide towards a more digitally enhanced society with ICT forming the backbone for a stronger, more sustainable future for Oman. Omantel’s ICT repertoire encompasses three broad segments, which are Data Centre Services, Software Services and Managed Services. Omantel has been deploying 4iR technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence, Smart cities,

blockchain, and most recently, the 5G network. The Company was the first telecom operator in Oman to launch 5G for mobile phones in 2021. The award also is a nod to Omantel’s initiatives on Intelligent Public Infrastructure, Smart Building Management Solutions, Digital Banking and Healthcare Services Infrastructure, High Performance Computing, Machine Learning, Big Data Analytics, Deep Learning and Smart Contracts. Omantel is the Sultanate of Oman’s first and leading integrated telecommunications and ICT services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While striving to ensure optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.

NBO merchant app transforms payments experience



MUSCAT: Helping businesses meet the needs of its customers, today and in the future, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Merchant App has transformed the payments experience. As people preferring to do payment digitally, the easy-to-use mobile-based platform allows merchants to receive payments simply by scanning a QR Code on the customer’s mobile phone and E wallet or by requesting payment from their customer through the mobile number, whether they are in store or shopping from home. From taxi drivers, gas delivery services and water tankers, to restaurants, street vendors, markets, business-owners of all kinds can enhance their digital capabilities, reach a broader market, and simply do better business.

Falling in line with the government’s requirement for commercial outlets to switch to electronic channels as part of its cashless payment scheme, the app allows merchants to provide a seamless buyer journey. With no set-up fees or monthly charges, accessing the mobile-based solution is as easy to obtain a business license and then stopping by the nearest NBO branch. The latest in a line of digital innovations, the Merchant App is helping NBO meet the needs of a constantly evolving market, while bringing new levels of connectivity to business and retail customers across the country.

Sohar International wins fastest growing bank, recognised for excellence in digital transformation

MUSCAT: Demonstrating exemplary progress in key areas of operations, Sohar International has remained persistent in fulfilling the goals defined in its growth, expansion, and digital transformation strategies. Fuelled by innovation, customer-centricity, and the inherent zeal to offer world-class financial products and services to the Omani society, Sohar International was ranked by the highly coveted Best Banks Survey as the ‘Fastest Growing Bank’ in the Large Banks Category. The results of the survey are declared after a stringent analysis of various factors and are, therefore, one of the most sought-after accolades in the banking industry. At the same event, the bank was also applauded for achieving ‘Excellence in Digital Transformation’. The bank won the two accolades at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards, held under the seventh edition of



the New Age Banking Summit (NABS). Sohar International has been registering accelerated development across all parameters in the past year while setting new benchmarks in the digital realm. Receiving the coveted awards at the highly anticipated banking event was the Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International — Ahmed al Musalmi. The summit, which

was hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani honoured Tahir al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman as the Chief Guest and keynote speaker, took place on May 31, 2022 at Al Bustan Palace. The summit also witnessed the participation of over 150 delegates from more than 100 BFSI and technology companies, including leaders of the top 10 banks in Oman.

United Securities wins award for excellence in asset management and brokerage



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s leading financial investment advisory and securities business, United Securities has won the distinguished ‘Excellence in Asset Management and Brokerage Award’, at the recently organised New Age Banking Summit (NABS) that was held under the auspices of Tahir al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman; who was also the keynote speaker of the event. United Securities has won top honour at the Awards for its exemplary performance in asset management and brokerage. The recognition comes close on the heels of its recent awards win at the ‘Top Omani Brand’ (Investments category) and ‘Oman Forum Sustainability Award’ (Leadership in Financial

Investments) events. The Award bears testimony to United Securities’ solid track record and ability to deliver to clients healthy, risk-adjusted returns. “The award reinforces our reputation as asset managers of choice for investors who are looking to invest not just in the Sultanate, but in the region’s most promising markets and asset classes. We are both delighted and proud to win this award, and maintain our leadership position. To receive this recognition, among the most prominent asset managers, brokers, banks and financial institutions, underscores the hard-work and consistent track record of our highly professional and experienced team”, mentioned Mustafa Ahmed Salman, CEO of United Securities.

GAC Motor GS8 SUV now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own the GAC Motor GS8 SUV and avail manufacturer’s warranty — 5 years/150,000 kms, comprehensive insurance 1 year (Oman & UAE) and a chance to win raffle — one GA4 GB 1.3 T. The campaign is valid until June 9, 2022 (Conditions apply. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom).

The GS8 is designed to impress from the front grille to the headlamps, all the way to the alloy wheels and the tail lamps, the GS8 draws all eyes making it one of the most admired vehicles in its category. It is equipped with 19” alloy wheels, LED high mounted brake light, shark fin antenna and roof rails. Overall, the exterior design of the GS8 is one of its very strong points. The flagship GS8 SUV is equipped with a powerful 2-litre turbo engine that is capable of producing 198 HP and 320 Nm of torque. The engine is made more efficient by its pairing to a six-speed automatic transmission. Adding to the joyous experiences on every journey, the GS8 is filled with features that provide nothing less. It’s equipped with three-zone climate control air-conditioning, central control door lock system, and power sunroof with jam protection, among other features. For in-cabin entertainment, the GS8 is equipped with an advanced infotainment system, with a 10-



inch colour touch screen display system with Apple CarPlay, that is also available with Bluetooth and USB connectivity. Besides this, the GS8 is also equipped with a metre-cluster with 7-inch trip computer, 6

speakers, speed-based volume control, front and rear parking sensors, surround view parking camera, cruise control and more. The interior of the GS8 takes comfort and styling to great levels. A look around will reveal ample

space which offers good comfort for all occupants. The leather seats spell luxury all over. All of the seats provide utmost comfort and convenience. The driver’s seat is 6-way power adjustable, while front passenger seat is 4-way, and both of them are heated and ventilated. For more information, please visit www.gacmotoroman.com or www.youtube.com/GAC_Motor_Oman or www.facebook.com/GAC_Motor_Oman/ or www.instagram.com/GAC_Motor_Oman/. For further details, & to ascertain the availability of stocks, please visit the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah, Seeb, Suhar, Nizwa and Sur.



Italian National Day celebrated in Oman

Enduring friendship: Reception highlights 50 years of robust diplomatic relations between Italy and Sultanate of Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 1

The Ambassador of Italy in Muscat, Federica Favi, celebrated the Italian National Day at the Diplomatic Club 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 and 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.

The event was attended by over 400 guests among officials, personalities and members of the Italian and Omani communities.

On this occasion, Federica Favi, Italian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, said: "I am very grateful to the late Sultan Qaboos 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 Foreign Ministry, 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.

Oman Hydrogen Centre inks green energy pact



MUSCAT: Al Shawamikh Oil Services — a local community oil and gas contracting company — has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Oman Hydrogen Centre—an affiliate of German University of Technology (GUTech)—to recruit global experts specialised in the field of green energy and to optimise benefits from this sector.

As per the MoU, the two sides will exchange expertise and studies to contribute to the Sultanate of Oman's aspirations for alternative energy transformation, as part of Oman Vision 2040.

The MoU was signed by Dr Aflah Said al Hadhrami, CEO of Al Shawamikh, and Dra Sawsan Said al Riyami, Director of Oman Hydrogen Centre.

Oman Hydrogen Centre constitutes a step forward in Oman's approach for global economic transition into green energy. Oman is striving to expand green economy and renewable energy projects, and has thus engaged into a variety of related investments. — ONA

Khazaen Dry Port inks pact with DB Schenker

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Khazaen Dry Port (KDP), a member of Asyad Group, signed a service agreement with DB Schenker — the global logistics giant — in the Sultanate of Oman (formally known in Oman as Schenker Khimji's LLC) to use facilities and services provided by KDP to enhance its customers' experience further.

The service agreement offers DB Schenker a range of KDP services and top-notch infrastructure to better serve its major clients, mainly oil and gas corporations and other heavy hitters in specialised industries. Services in the scope of the agreement include the handling and temporary storage of sensitive cargo and other shipments that require special processing.

Juma al Maskari, Executive Director at KDP, highlighted the significance of partnering with such a household name in logistics and said "sourcing new services to a top logistics player, like DB Schenker, is proof of the trust that a major company with high operational standards has in the quality of our services and assets.

We are happy to conclude this agreement with DB Schenker and provide them with our customised, client-centric storage solutions and support that attract big clients looking for a new logistics base."

Speaking on behalf of DB Schenker in Oman (formally known as Schenker Khimji's LLC), Richard van Schie, Managing Director, said, "We believe this service agreement will help form synergies for our customers' trade and related activity in and out of Oman. We are delighted to have access to Khazaen Dry Port's successful setup of facilities and services while leveraging Oman's strategic

ASYAD GROUP CONTINUOUSLY SEEKS TO PROMOTE ITS INTEGRATED LOGISTICS SOLUTIONS TO ATTRACT MAJOR GLOBAL PLAYERS, ENHANCE ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES AND LEVERAGE OMAN'S UNIQUE POSITION AS THE IDEAL HUB TO ACCESS GLOBAL MARKETS.

location that provides a gateway to regional and global markets."

In line with its strategic objectives to bring in additional foreign investment, Asyad Group continuously seeks to promote its integrated logistics solutions to attract major global players, enhance economic and commercial activities and leverage Oman's unique position as the ideal hub to access global markets.

With more than 74,500 employees at over 2,100 locations in more than 130 countries, DB Schenker is one of the world's leading logistics providers. The company operates land, air and ocean transportation services, and it also offers comprehensive solutions for logistics and global supply chain management from a single source.

In 2022, DB Schenker celebrates its 150th company anniversary. Khazaen Dry Port continues to attract major corporations and global players to set up shop in the Sultanate of Oman, in line with the plans drawn by Asyad Group, the leading national logistics developer of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Group, acting through KDP and its multiple business units, is a key enabler of the Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy 2040 (SOLS 2040) and the logistics and supply chain themes of Oman Vision 2040.



Energy sector leads in social investment in the Sultanate of Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Leading oil and gas companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman undertook as many as 121 social investment projects in various parts of the country during 2021, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals sated in a post on Wednesday.

Notable players include OQ, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), CCED, bp, Oxy and Daleel Petroleum LLC. Social investment projects implemented by energy companies include training centres and workshops for the physically challenged.

Small-scale desalination plant, reception and

administration facilities, supports for SMEs, labs for higher learning institutions, healthcare support services, and a major public park in Muscat Oman's energy sector is one of the largest providers of corporate social funding support in the country. Local energy firms and their partners have played an important role in this regard.

Madayn launches Sur Oasis Incubator

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 1

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by Industrial Innovation Academy and in collaboration with Oman LNG, launched the Sur Oasis Incubator at Sur Industrial City under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, and in the presence of Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

The incubator comes in line with efforts made to enhance the business climate in Madayn's industrial cities through the establishment of incubators and accelerators in various governorates, which shall attract innovators, entrepreneurs and SMEs owners as well as connect these SMEs with the industrial sector.

Sur Oasis Incubator also reflects Oman LNG's relentless efforts to boost the in-country value by supporting the aspirations of youths and entrepreneurs alike through such initiatives, and consecutively contribute to enhancing the national economy.



Moreover, the incubator embodies Oman LNG's efforts in aligning with Oman Vision 2040 by focusing on innovation, entrepreneurship and keeping pace with Industry 4.0 goals.

Being the first incubator to be managed and operated by the Industrial Innovation Academy outside Muscat Governorate, Sur Oasis Incubator will act as an ideal entrepreneurship platform featuring a line-up of services and facilities for entrepreneurs and innovators.

These services include

providing co-working space, private offices, advisory services, training programmes, technical support services, among others.

To enhance and expand business opportunities, the incubator will link the incubated companies to the factories and companies in Sur Industrial City.

The inauguration ceremony also marked graduation of 30 participants from the Industrial Innovation Programme, financed and supported by Oman LNG, that took place last October in

Sur Industrial City and targeted entrepreneurs and innovators in South Al Sharqiyah in the food and beverage industry.

Commenting on the value-added by Sur Oasis Incubator, Eng Abdulqadir bin Salim al Balushi, Director General of Sur Industrial City, expressed appreciation to Oman LNG for its support of such significant programmes in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

"This incubator will serve as a leading centre for entrepreneurs, innovators and owners of SMEs in South Al Sharqiyah, and we will ensure to link the incubated projects with the companies and factories operating in Sur Industrial City to expand their business opportunities", Al Balushi pointed out.

On his part, Dr Amor bin Nasser al Matani, CEO of Oman LNG Development Foundation, commented: "The launch of this incubator reflects Oman LNG's constant efforts to support the Omani youth, develop the skills and capabilities of entrepreneurs, and provide training and advisory programmes to ensure the sustainability and long-term growth of the SMEs."



Shanghai euphoria tempered by deep wound to China’s economy

Orders have evaporated at Zhou’s textile company based just outside Shanghai, a city now stumbling free from a two-month lockdown that has left small businesses on life support.

Sales are on “a very serious downward slope” and layoffs are imminent at his factory, owner Zhou said, asking for his company to remain unidentified.

The firm is based in Zhejiang province, the anteroom to Shanghai’s cavernous consumer and manufacturing market.

His is one of tens of thousands of small enterprises clinging to life as China’s strict zero-Covid policies drive a crippling economic slowdown.

Shanghai, a city of 25 million, is the centre for innumerable supply lines that radiate across the country’s eastern seaboard, including Tesla cars and iPhones.

For Zhou, survival will be his only thought over the next two months in an economy whose growth forecast has been clipped by rating agencies.

“I will have to fire people,” Zhou said, as he scours for customers to fill his order book.

Beijing is tied to a strategy of eliminating Covid outbreaks through harsh lockdowns and mass testing, even as most of the rest of the world has chosen to live with the virus.

That has meant closing factories, disrupting logistics, and squeezing travel to almost zero for weeks on end in major manufacturing hubs including Shenzhen and Shanghai, home to the world’s busiest container port.

Factory activity nationwide plummeted to a two-year low in April after Shanghai shut its 25 million residents at home while multiple Omicron-driven outbreaks bubbled up elsewhere, with activity continuing to shrink — albeit at a slower pace — into May. — AFP

For Zhou, survival will be his only thought over the next two months in an economy whose growth forecast has been clipped by rating agencies



NO MORE PAPER ROLLING

An employee of the Norske Skog newsprint mill works on huge paper rolls sit on the floor next to a paper cutting machine in Golbey, eastern France. The Golbey plant, the last site in France that manufactures newsprint, is preparing to abandon part of its production to move towards cardboard production by the end of 2023. The change comes as newsprint consumption has fallen sharply in recent years, with the printed press gradually losing ground to digital information. The Norwegian Norske Skog Group is counting on the booming paperboard market, due to the success of online shopping, to boost its profits. — AFP

Looming crises over water shortages



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCl.

Water – or lack of it – is the subject of renewed concern in the face of rising demand growth from populations, coupled with the desire of countries to secure their rightful quotas from shared resources.

This issue has continued to haunt some countries in Africa, including Egypt and Sudan, because of the plans drawn up by Ethiopia to build huge dams on its territory. Dam constructions in Ethiopia had led to a decline in the amount of water flowing downstream into Egypt and Sudan.

A similar crisis appears to be affecting both Iraq and Syria in the wake of Turkey’s decision to build projects to reduce flows downstream. Recent media reports have referred to declining levels in the Tigris and Euphrates.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, water disputes have led to the outbreak of wars, notably the Israeli assault on Lebanon in 2006 as a result of the Zionist state’s desire to tap into the resources of the Litani River.

Recent reports issued by international institutions indicate that a number of countries will be severely affected by water shortages by 2040.

Access to water will be one of the most pressing issues in this century due to climate change and drought in several regions of the world, which analysts believe will lead to conflict, and widespread thirst among the citizens of those countries.

According to the World Resources Institute, some countries will be exposed to significant damage from water stress in the coming decades.

The Gulf region will also be the least water safe in the world, as it currently depends to a large extent on groundwater withdrawal and sea water desalination to quench the thirst of its populations.

Such difficulties may also be faced by some other countries in Europe and South America.

A 2012 United Nations analysis indicated that by 2030, half of the world’s population will face water shortages in one form or another.

It is no secret to everyone that the high demand for water stems from population growth alongside economic growth, global climate change, and migration of people from villages and rural areas to cities and population centres due to climate change impacts.

All these factors increase pressure on the water infrastructure as people enhance their water consumption to improve their social status.

This situation prompts countries to use drip irrigation systems in agricultural practices that require a lot of water. In most countries between 70-90 per cent of water is used for irrigation purposes due to the migration of people from arid lands to population centres.

Droughts are an inevitable outcome, compounded by the uprooting of thousands of trees from farms, and conflict.

Several Gulf states are included in the list of countries that are vulnerable to water-regression issues in the coming years, necessitating increased awareness of the importance of water conservation.

The global economy in transition



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author, a Nobel laureate in economics, is an emeritus professor at Stanford University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

Recent conversations about the global economy and markets have been defined by a set of recurring questions.

While there are many moving parts that are difficult to capture in a single clear picture, it is worth attempting to bring some of the biggest issues into better focus.

The first question is straightforward: Is a recession looming? With authoritative growth forecasts like those from the International Monetary Fund having been revised significantly downward, and likely to be downgraded further, there is good reason to worry.

But a global recession — defined as two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth — remains unlikely, though a major shock, such as a dramatic expansion of conflict or a sudden and significant disruption in a key market like energy, could change this outlook.

Some economies, however, certainly will contract. Russia’s GDP will surely shrink, even with higher oil and gas prices, as a result of severe and most likely prolonged Western sanctions.

Europe, too, is likely to experience a recession, owing to high energy prices, heavy dependence on fossil-fuel imports, and the (costly) imperative of rapidly weaning itself from Russian supplies.

And many lower-income countries – for which soaring food and energy prices are compounding the effects of the pandemic – are facing harder times.

While the United States appears increasingly likely to face a major economic slowdown, a recession is not the most likely scenario.

Similarly, China – normally a powerful engine of global growth – is set to experience low single-digit growth for at least a year, owing to the combined effects of Covid-19 lockdowns, low vaccination uptake among the elderly, some loss of investor confidence in high-growth tech sectors, and a real-estate sector beset by high debts and falling prices.

The second key question relates to the trajectory of inflation. The proximate cause of recent price increases is supply-chain blockages and imbalances between supply and demand.

The war in Ukraine has

intensified upward pressure on energy, commodities and food prices. Some of this will be transitory, though it will last longer than initially expected.

But inflation is also being fueled by secular trends that are not set to fade anytime soon. Populations representing about 75 per cent of the global economy are aging, labour-force participation is declining, and productivity growth is trending downward.

Moreover, unused productive capacity in developing economies – a key source of deflationary pressure in the past – is smaller than it used to be, and what there is remains unused.

Add to that a coming policy-driven diversification of supply and demand linkages – a response to myriad shocks, from the pandemic and climate change to geopolitical tensions and conflict – and an extended period of supply-constrained growth with embedded inflationary pressures seems likely.

The third recurring question is: What is next for the tech sector and the digital transformation it is propelling?

Lockdowns and other public-

health measures spurred an acceleration in adoption of digital technologies during the pandemic.

But, contrary to market expectations, this trend is likely to slow as pandemic restrictions are removed.

Amid overly optimistic growth projections, equity markets produced valuations that would have been unrealistic in the best of times. At a time of surging inflation, monetary tightening, and falling growth projections, markets have begun correcting.

Not surprisingly, growth stocks, whose value is derived from expected future cash flows, and which tend to be concentrated in the tech sector, have fallen particularly sharply.

These market gyrations do not mean that the digital, energy and biomedical transformations that are underway lack substance, or that they will not have long-lasting economic effects.

Markets naturally tend to be more volatile than the underlying economic reality they are supposed to mirror. Momentum incentives cause overshoots in both directions.

Higher market volatility

will have important short-run consequences, because venture-capital and private-equity funding, which plays a vital role in supporting innovative, potentially high-growth companies, is not insulated from it.

During upswings, valuations are rich, and some companies with dubious claims to durable growth dynamics are funded.

During downswings, private valuations lag behind market adjustments by about 6-9 months (experts estimate), partly because both investors and companies resist adjusting valuations downward until the need to raise additional capital forces the issue.

(Even now, growth companies are being urged to cut costs and conserve capital.) During this period, deal prices are out of line with realistic longer-term values, making funding difficult and impeding growth and innovation.

A final question that seems to be preoccupying minds lately is whether the war in Ukraine, Europe’s resolve to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas, and sky-high fossil-fuel prices will derail the low-carbon transition.

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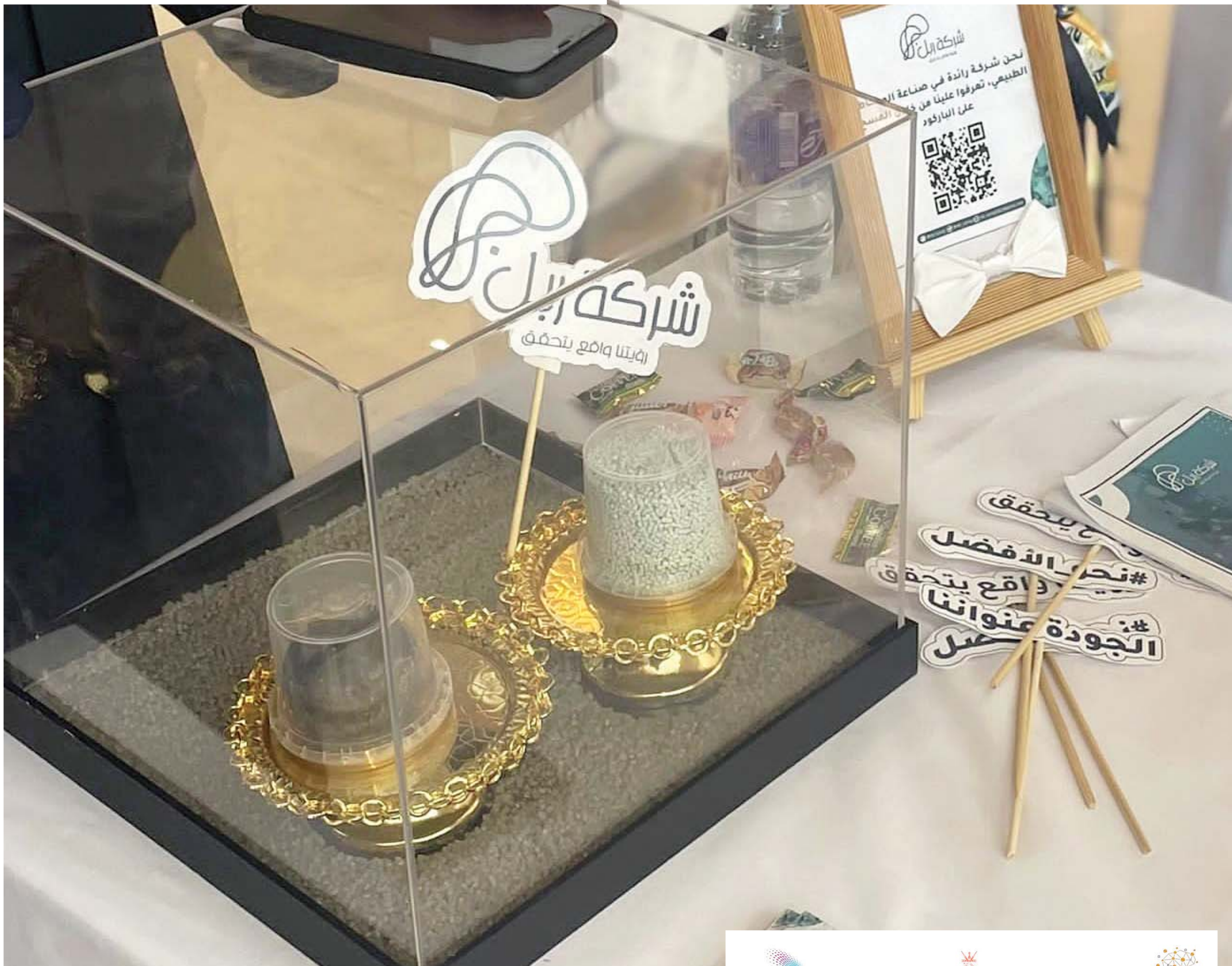
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Omani start-up introduces product that can serve as alternative to rubber

By Mai al Abri

With the threat of climate change, a lot of innovations are currently happening across different industries where companies are turning to high-quality alternative products that are efficient and eco-friendly.

In Oman, SMEs and big companies had already started this process emphasising many Oman-based businesses' commitment to good change.

This change is also starting to sweep the rubber industry. While there is still a growing demand for rubber worldwide, finding a good alternative that is healthy for the environment becomes a priority.

A start-up company from Shinas

University of Technology and Applied Sciences created an environmentally friendly product that exploits organic waste, collecting it and converting it into natural organic rubber.

The project aims to provide rubber to factories that use it as a main ingredient in their industries to reduce the dependence on endangered natural rubber as well as synthetic rubber, which contains a large proportion of harmful petroleum materials to the environment.

The product instead is rubber paste that can be used in various industries such as car tires, stadium floors, medical instruments and other products.

Khalifa al Muqbali, a member of the Department of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas, said, "The department aims to

educate the target audience on the importance of entrepreneurship by presenting the successful experiences of student companies and identifying the size of support given by the concerned authorities. It also works to direct the attention and interest of students to the right path. We carry out some workshops and seminars, camps and consultations that are suitable for each project."

"The appropriate logistical support that the company (Rabal) may get will surely help it participate in a variety of local and external competitions. It will also help build ideas, and invest in the method that turns the pioneering idea into a pioneering business, allowing students to use their knowledge and skills to integrate into the labour market with broad community support," al Muqbali explained.

He indicated that they worked with a group of qualified experts in the field of entrepreneurship to discover a generation capable of managing successful future projects that contribute to strengthening the national economy.

Rawan al Balushi, a member, said: This project contributes to opening new horizons for local and international markets in the manufacture of environmentally friendly rubber in large quantities and at prices suitable for markets.

"There were many challenges that the team faced, including difficulty in obtaining raw materials, in addition to the lack of laboratories to provide a workspace for the product's experiments, and the lack of financial resources and technical capabilities such as devices and tools that we need," she added.

Ali al Saeedi explained that the team developed a long-term plan to ensure the company's continuity and productivity.

"We aspire to be the first leading Omani company in the field of manufacturing and exporting natural rubber with high efficiency at the local and international levels. We wish to hit the field of manufacturing rubber-infused products," he hopes.

It is noteworthy that the innovative team consisted of nine students who, with this experience, gained the ability to develop ideas, work and design in a better and more feasible way. They also learned how to bear responsibility and to invest in positive thinking. The opportunity helped them to enhance their self-confidence by engaging in discussions with experts in this field and benefiting from innovative minds.

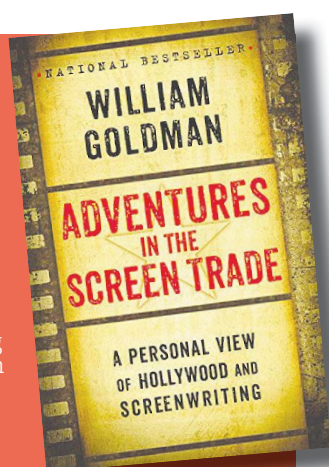


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ADVENTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE

BY WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Adventures in the Screen Trade is an intimate view of movie-making, of acting greats such as Redford, Olivier, Newman and Hoffman, and of the trials and rewards of working inside the most exciting business in the world.



ARTIST CARNE GRIFFITHS TO RELEASE 70 PRINTS OF 'THE PLATINUM QUEEN'

IN A LONDON STUDIO, British artist Carne Griffiths adds the final fluorescent pink touches to "The Platinum Queen", a portrait depicting the young Queen Elizabeth shortly before her coronation almost seven decades ago.

Griffiths, known for using tea, ink and alcohol in his work, is releasing 70 limited edition prints — as well as artist proofs — to mark the monarch's Platinum Jubilee, one for each year of her historic reign. Based on an original painting sold last year, each piece is made with layers that include diamond dust and platinum leaf.

"I thought this was a poignant moment to capture Her Majesty just at the point where she was about to ascend to the throne," he said.

"And whilst I painted the piece, I tried to imagine... what

kind of things she would be contemplating at the start of her reign."

Elizabeth, Britain's longest-reigning and currently the world's oldest monarch, became queen on February 6, 1952, on the death of her father King George VI. Her coronation took place on June 2, 1953.

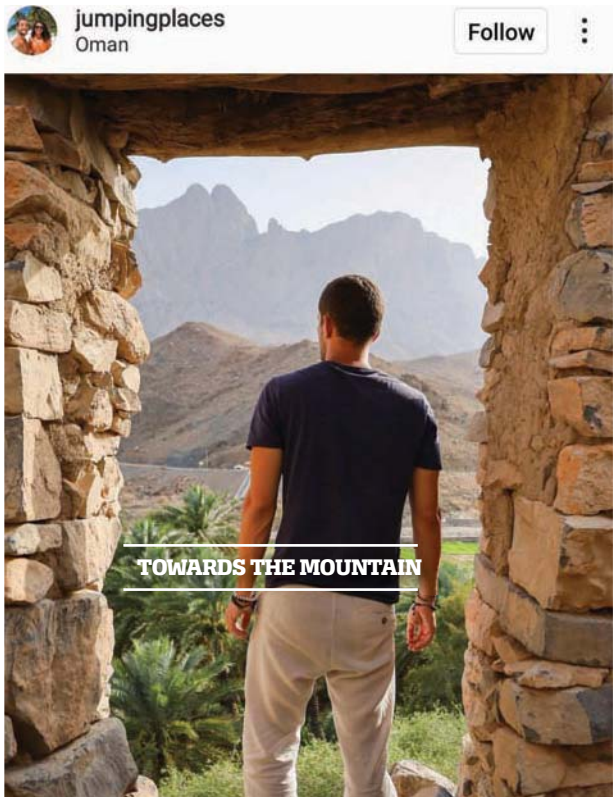
Priced at £1,550 (\$1,960), Griffiths' prints go on sale on June 4 on the West Contemporary Editions online platform, with £150 from each sale going to the Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) Children's Charity. — Reuters





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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Fashion industry risks falling short of green goals, Business of Fashion report says



DESPITE INCREMENTAL improvement from some sector leaders, the fashion industry's 30 largest listed companies risk falling short of social and environmental targets of the Paris climate agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals, a report from the Business of Fashion showed on Tuesday.

"You've got some front runners making small steps of progress but fundamentally the big picture is that the industry is wildly underperforming," Sarah Kent, chief sustainability correspondent of The Business of Fashion, said.

Fashion brands face increasing pressure from consumers and governments to show they are doing better on the environmental front, with heightened scrutiny from younger generations, in particular.

It's second annual report, the Business of Fashion Sustainable Index 2022, the online publication analysed publicly-disclosed information of companies in three categories — luxury, sportswear and high street fashion.

Puma led the report with the highest score, scoring 49 points out of 100, followed by last year's leader, Kering, which continued to lead rankings of luxury players. Levi Strauss, H&M Group and Burberry — a new addition to the study this year — were next in the rankings.

Lowest scoring companies were all newcomers to the list, with sportswear and high street fashion companies at the bottom.

"There are signs of progress but it's largely incremental — we're not seeing the big transformational leaps that we really do need to see over the next 8 years in order to get from where we are today to an industry that is operating at a level that is not going to blow through the ambitions of the Paris climate agreement," or other key industry targets, Kent said.

The risk is that companies could lose their cultural relevance and destroy long-term value, as regulators and consumers become increasingly critical of inflated claims, the report said.

Out of six topics, which included workers rights and materials, the companies overall scored highest for progress in reducing emissions while the least amount of progress was made in reducing waste.

The industry needs to develop alternative business models, the report suggested.

"This is a really gnarly challenge for big executives at any fashion company — how do you figure out a way to satisfy your shareholders and demonstrate that you can continue to drive financial growth without driving growth in production, without continuing to make more and therefore extract more and therefore create more waste?" said Kent.

Dragging down the overall scores was the enlarged scope of this year's report, which doubled the number of companies from last year's 15.

"More companies meant worse outcomes, almost across the board," said Kent. — Reuters

CHANGING WORLD

High-tech race to map Ukraine's damaged historic buildings



MANY OF Ukraine's historic monuments have been destroyed in the three months since Russia attacked, but cultural experts are working to conserve their memory using cutting-edge technology and 3D scans.

One of them is volunteer French engineer Emmanuel Durand, a specialist in 3D data acquisition, who is assisting a bevy of architects, engineers, historic building experts and a museum director to record buildings in Kyiv, Lviv, Chernigiv and Kharkiv.

Durand steps over a jumbled pile of beams and crunches over the rubble that was once Kharkiv's 19th-century fire station.

He plants his laser scanner, a sort of tripod with a pivoting head, in a strategic corner of the severely damaged building.

The redbrick fire station and its watchtower, built in 1887, are a monument to Kharkiv's industrial revolution.

Durand's gadget records the building from all angles.

"The scanner records 500,000 points per second. We'll get 10 million points from this location. Then we'll change location and go round the whole building, outside and inside. A billion points in all," he explains.

At the end of the day, Durand assembles all the data on a computer "like the pieces of a jigsaw" to digitally reconstruct the building.

The result is a perfect reproduction, accurate to within five millimetres (a fraction of an inch) that can be rotated in any direction or sliced into sections. You can even see the holes where

blast waves from explosions have damaged the structure.

"This enables us to map out the building for the future. That could help us work out if anything has moved, which is important for safety purposes, and see what can be restored and what can't. It's also useful from a historical point of view," he says.

"We've got the actual missile-damaged building and an exact replica of how it used to look."

CULTURAL GENOCIDE

In Kharkiv alone, around 500 buildings are listed as being of historic architectural significance. Most are in the dense historic city centre, on which Russian air strikes are concentrated, according to architect Kateryna Kuplytska, a member of the body documenting damaged heritage sites.

She estimates that over a hundred of them have been hit already.

And while Russian troops have loosened their noose around Ukraine's second city, shells still rain down with regular monotony.

New explosions and blast waves, inclement weather, construction work and site visits will all contribute to hastening the destruction of these already weakened buildings, Kuplytska says.

"That's why it's essential to record them in accurate detail so we can plan urgent interventions that will stabilise the structures" and preserve their memory, she explains.

"Recording the destruction will also assist in criminal proceedings. We see serious damage to heritage across

the whole country. It's genocide towards Ukrainian people and genocide towards Ukrainian culture," she says.

After two days at the fire station, Durand moves on to the economics faculty at the Karazin National University in Kharkiv. It is located right next to the imposing headquarters of the Ukrainian secret services, which is being targeted by the Russians and has been hit on numerous occasions.

The current iteration of the economics faculty was built in Soviet times. It was designed by Serhiy Tymoshenko, the father of the "modern Ukrainian" style of architecture of the early 20th-century, and is one of the country's first reinforced concrete structures.

Some critics suggest it is futile to document historic buildings in such meticulous detail while the war is still raging and people are dying every day.

But Tetyana Pylyptshuk, the director of the Kharkiv literary museum, begs to disagree.

"Culture is the basis of everything. If culture had developed well, people probably wouldn't be dying and there wouldn't be a war," she said.

Pylyptshuk, who also sits on the commission on damaged historical sites, has sent most of her museum collections to western Ukraine to protect them from damage — and from looting, should Russian troops overrun Kharkiv.

"Today, everyone realises this. Maybe they were not so attentive to our cultural heritage before... but when you lose it, it hurts." — AFP



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Middle Age: An opportunity to find beauty!

THE PHENOMENON of the mid-life crisis has taken on semi-psychological dimensions during the past years and it may have begun a century ago, when men and women tended to slip into a crisis related to ageing, thinking that time ran out to achieve their goals. So the timing of middle age I think is subjective, even though I am inclined to say that average life is when one is not young but not very old, so that might help and leave a little room for understanding!

These challenges may indeed be exacerbated by a strange and highly personal transformation that begins around your forties, when the skills you honed in early adulthood begin to fade, especially if you don't focus on the abilities that grow as you age, you may see ageing as a loss and for some individuals, it is a source of suffering.

So, always I do remind everyone to focus on the age that gives you, not the one that robs you. Stagnating to your age can create a crisis and this, unfortunately, happens when you are trying to fight time, whether you are desperately trying not to look older or struggling against changes in your skills and strengths. Thus — if it is true to say — you must realise and accept your age, even recognise your abilities and a new one that develops naturally after the age of forty and become stronger during the fifties and sixties of age.

On the other hand, we are well aware that early in life, success usually comes from the addition: of more responsibility and more relationships, so that means that life in early adulthood is like filling in a blank piece of cloth. As such here when the time comes and I talk

about middle age, I talk more deeply about the point at which you must change your method of choice! Especially since it is difficult to do this when you have accepted a lot of responsibilities at work and home, for example. This fact leads us to wonder; Is success worth more? Personally, I think these accounts may be bad. It is more useful here for that individual to change his goal by moving away from the many duties which beyond your capabilities and dedicating more time to thinking, specify exactly those duties and the work that you need to do to re-engineer yourself!

In a way, I see here that life for most people improves from middle age. Over the years, people tend to become happier, more creative, less nervous, more accepting and more mindful. On average, people become mentally stable after the age of thirty. However, in old age and most likely, there will be no complete crisis even if you let nature take its course.

In the end, the search for joy in middle age may seem like carving on solid rock, but are you not with me that middle age is not that particular rock, but rather that beauty that dazzles the eye after it is carved? You will inevitably face difficulties and challenges, just as at any other time in your life. But if you make the right choices, middle-age may be the best opportunity and the biggest adventure you've had in decades... and even a chance to find beauty in yourself and those around you!

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

Sidrah: A leadership programme that will help open doors for young women

Outward Bound Oman (OBO) and Lahunna Oman have joined hands to launch Sidrah, a first of its kind leadership programme for young women between the ages of 18 to 25 years old. Drawing inspiration from its resilient namesake, the local Sidr tree, Sidrah is set to lay a solid foundation for participants to take a proactive role in identifying viable solutions to some of today's pressing youth concerns in line with the directives outlined in Oman Vision 2040. The pilot programme will run from June to December of this year.

Adopting a non-conventional learning model, Sidrah will allow participants to hone their employability skills, challenge their self-reliance and perseverance and unleash their talents. Phase I will see them spend four days in the rugged outdoors of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Taking their learnings from the mountains, Phase II will further cement the growth of its young women through dedicated coaching with an international tri-sector coach from Singapore's prestigious National Youth Achievement Award — who will expand their horizons in the areas of strategy, innovation and entrepreneurship. While undergoing this unique project-based learning exercise, Lahunna will curate their networks to expose a select group of participants to leaders from the government, private and civil society sectors in Oman, some of whom will be invited to men-

tor the young women as they work on concept papers addressing some of today's pressing national concerns, and leading the way in overcoming them.

Mark Evans, OBO's Executive Director said, "Youth are confronted

doors for them to expand their professional horizons. We hope to cultivate their leadership, resilience and connections through inspiring and challenging discoveries. For over a decade, Outward Bound Oman has been able to make an

inspire, to challenge the status quo and nudge change simply by showcasing what is possible," said Shatha bint Salim al Maskiriyah, Lahunna Founder. "Sidrah is a natural extension of Lahunna's objectives; participants will understand they do not require championing nor empowering — they have all the ingredients to excel within themselves. We hope to instill a heightened self-awareness by the end of Phase I that will propel them as they navigate Phase II."

Likeminded entities, Lahunna and OBO both embody the ethos of 'think global, act local'. Bringing this program to life, they partnered with NYAA, a body that prides itself on creating impact and delivering change. Dr Charles Chao Rong PHUA, CEO and Strategist-General at Solaris Strategies Singapore said "Trisector strategy-innovation-entrepreneurship is a skill that needs to be taught and nurtured over time. Through this Sidrah programme, NYAA and I are committed to coach learners towards skills mastery with impact on Oman and beyond."

Sidrah is supported by SOHAR Port & Freezone as the programme's impact partner and Al Wisal, Merge 104.8 and Virgin Radio Oman as radio partners.

Young women from across Oman are invited to register today and become a part of advancing Oman's Vision 2040. For more details please visit <https://forms.gle/is1obQm-1VuloNNgTA>.



with what is an increasingly competitive, challenging world. Partnering with Lahunna Oman and co-designing a programme such as Sidrah will not only help build the capabilities of young women and girls but will also open

impact on youth in Oman and today we co-write yet another chapter in our journey."

"Lahunna was founded on a simple yet powerful premise: to spotlight the infinite possibilities of women in society. It is a platform to

