

HM greetings to Sisi conveyed

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The minister also conveyed His Majesty the Sultan's wishes of good health to the president, and further progress to the Egyptian people. On his turn, President Sisi asked the minister to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health to His Majesty the Sultan, as well as his wishes of further prosperity to the Omani people. **DETAILS ON P2**



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AHMED AL HARTHY RELISHING SPA RETURN



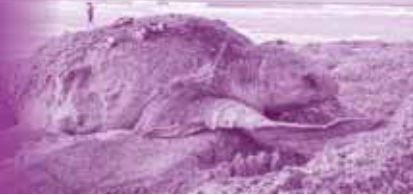
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SECOND PHASE OF AL MAZUNAH FREE ZONE UNDER CONSTRUCTION



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13 THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR ULTIMATE OMAN BUCKET LIST



MUSCAT

NEW GUIDE FOR BETTER BUSINESS

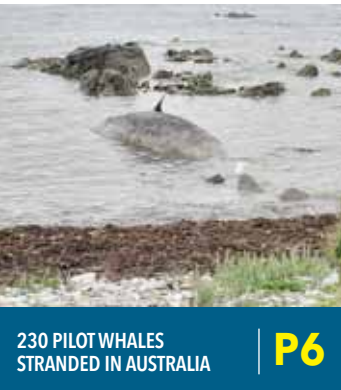
The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched a Service Guide aimed to apply the best practices in serving beneficiaries and furnishing a better business environment for investors. The guide covers all the 180 services provided by the ministry, through which it seeks to encourage companies to invest their capabilities and resources optimally and appropriately and establish a business environment portraying a high level of responsibility, control, commitment, clarity and transparency. **DETAILS ON P13**

NEW YORK

BIDEN AT UN BACKS PALESTINIAN STATE

President Joe Biden on Wednesday told the United Nations that the United States remained committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state. “We will continue to advocate for lasting, negotiated peace between the Jewish and democratic state of Israel and the Palestinian people,” Biden said in his address to the UN General Assembly. He said a two-state solution “remains in our view the best way to ensure Israel’s security and give the Palestinians a state to which they are entitled.” — AFP

INSIDE



230 PILOT WHALES STRANDED IN AUSTRALIA



AT UN, LEADERS WARN OF RISING DIVISIONS

HIS MAJESTY RETURNS HOME

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Wednesday evening from the United Kingdom (UK) after a visit lasting several days. During the visit, His Majesty offered condolences on the demise of Queen Elizabeth II, and congratulated King Charles III of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, on the occasion of his accession to the throne in the UK. — ONA



Inflation rate hits 2.4% in August

MUSCAT: The inflation rate of the Consumers Price Index (CPI) in Oman stood at 2.4 per cent in August, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in August 2022 compared to August 2021, such as education by 5.1 per cent, food and non-alcoholic beverages by 4.9 per cent, health by 3.5 per cent, transport by 3.1 per cent, restaurants and hotels by 2.1 per cent, miscellaneous goods and services by 1.5 per cent, recreation and culture by 1.4 per cent, furniture and routine household maintenance by 1.2 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.9 per cent and housing, water, electricity, and gas by 0.6 per cent. Meanwhile, the prices of some main groups remained unchanged, such as tobacco and communications. Prices of oils and fats also went up by 19.2 per cent, meats by 8.8 per cent, fruits by 7.5 per cent, non-alcoholic beverages by 4.4 per cent, bread and cereals by 4.1 per cent, milk, cheese and eggs by 3.2 per cent, sugar, jam, honey and sweets by 2.3 per cent, other foodstuff by 1.9 per cent. — ONA

JOINT ACTION WILL STRENGTHEN GCC LEGISLATIVE WORK

SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES GCC OFFICIALS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman hosted the 16th regular meeting of Heads of Shura, representatives, national assembly, and parliament councils in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), on Wednesday. The meeting discussed the report of the GCC-European Parliamentary Committee, joint GCC action and cooperation with Latin American parliaments. Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, presided over the meeting. Delivering a speech at the meeting Al Maawali underscored the support accorded by the leaders of the GCC states to the march of the GCC cooperation and joint action and the strengthening of the bonds tying the GCC peoples together on the path of goodness and solidarity. He noted that the meeting aims to complement the joint GCC action and strengthen the achievements of the GCC legislative work. The chairman of Majlis Ash’shura said that the outcomes of the meeting reflect the level of cooperation among the GCC legislative councils and the exchange of opinions regarding the challenges that the region has gone through. This, he said, further enhanced the GCC joint action and union arriving at



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received chiefs of GCC shura, representatives, national and Ummah councils who are taking part in the 16th meeting of the GCC Legislative Councils. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

Global death rates by NCDs on the rise

NEW YORK: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, headed the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation at the first meeting of the Global Group of Heads of State and Government for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Injuries (Global NCD Compact). The Global NCD Compact is held in New York, the United States of America. The meeting underscored the importance of prioritising prevention and control of NCDs



within the framework of national and international response to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This comes in the midst of increasing global death rates caused by NCDs, with the tally of

deaths reaching millions among people aged between 30s and 70s. The meeting explored means of supporting international action on NCDs and achieving the SDGs, as well as exchanging expertise and ideas in this regard. Emphasis was laid during the meeting on boosting and accelerating efforts to achieve the SDGs. The Global NCD Compact is the first meeting of its kind at the level of heads of state and government who are undertaking a leading strategic role in prevention and control of NDCs. — ONA **SEE ALSO P2**



Fahd receives GCC Legislative Councils chiefs



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received chiefs of GCC shura, representatives, national and Ummah councils who are taking part in the 16th meeting of the GCC Legislative Councils in Muscat on Wednesday.

The meeting is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman. HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed the Omani shura experience which is based on civilised heritage and responding to requirements of the time. He hailed the constructive role of the Council of Oman in cooperation with the state institutions in supporting the march of comprehensive development in the country. He

also underscored the importance of the role undertaken by the GCC legislative councils in promoting cooperation and enhancing ties among GCC peoples to realise the envisaged goals.

Conversation during the meeting touched on the march of the GCC legislative councils, and well as experience of each country

in building its institutions. The latest regional and international developments were also reviewed during the meeting. On their turn, the chiefs of GCC shura, representatives, national and Ummah councils expressed their thanks to the Sultanate of Oman for the good preparations of hosting this meeting that contributed in reaching many positive outcomes. They also commended Oman's constant support for the GCC march. They also lauded the Omani experience in building the state of institutions and the rule of law, as well as consolidating pillars of domestic nation-building that ensures decent life for all citizens.

The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura; Adel Abdulrahman al Asoomi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament; Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs; and Shaikh Al Fadhli bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. — ONA



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, in New York.

Pact to reduce global NCD deaths

NEW YORK: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation taking part in the first meeting of the Global Group of Heads of State and Government for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Injuries (Global NCD Compact).

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, launched a new report calling on global leaders to take urgent action on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), responsible for 17 million premature deaths every year.

To accelerate action, Dr Tedros renewed the two-year appointment of Michael R. Bloomberg as WHO Global Ambassador for Non-communicable Diseases and Injuries. This is Bloomberg's third reappointment as Ambassador, having first been appointed to the role in 2016.

To mark the occasion, WHO released a new report, "Invisible Numbers: The true scale of non-communicable diseases," and a data portal that for the first time brings together all WHO data related to NCDs for 194 countries. The report and portal highlight the extent of global NCD burden,

risk factors, and the progress each country is making in their efforts to combat these diseases and conditions.

Every two seconds, someone under 70 somewhere in the world dies of an NCD. Non-communicable diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and lung disease now outnumber infectious disease as the top killers globally.

NCDs cause nearly three-quarters of deaths worldwide. Every year, 17 million people under the age of 70 die of NCDs, 86 percent of whom live in low- and middle-income countries.

The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated the NCD burden by delaying and disrupting care, and in the early months of the pandemic, 75 percent of countries reported disruption to essential NCD services because of lockdown restrictions and channelling of resources. While every Member State of the United Nations has committed to reducing premature death from NCDs by one-third by 2030 – an effort that could save millions of lives – few countries are currently on track to achieve it. Urgent global efforts are needed to get back on track to reach Sustainable Development Goal targets and reduce premature deaths from NCDs.

Information minister conveys HM's greetings to Egyptian President

CAIRO: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The minister also conveyed His Majesty the Sultan's wishes of good health to the president, and further progress to the Egyptian people.

This took place during President el Sisi's meeting with information ministers taking part in the Arab Information Ministers' 52nd session held at Al Ittihadiya Palace at the Secretariat-General of the Arab League in Cairo.

On his turn, President el Sisi asked the minister to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health to His Majesty the Sultan, as well as his wishes of further prosperity to the Omani people.

During the meeting, President el Sisi affirmed Egypt's conviction in the strategic role of media in enhancing the efforts of Arab countries to achieve stability and development, notably by addressing national issues and deepening public awareness. President el Sisi underscored "the



shared challenges facing the Arab world".

Dr Abdullah commended Egypt's comprehensive development march led by President Abdel Fattah el Sisi.

During a speech he delivered at the event, the minister laid emphasis on the media's significant role in portraying modern development. He called for developing the Arab media content so that it could reflect the strength of national entities and aspects of their stability.

Dr Abdullah stressed the importance of media in spreading appropriate concepts of the Islamic religion in a manner that promotes peace and stability, builds nations and spurs knowledge.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, took part in the 97th session of the Permanent Committee for Arab Media, held at the Arab League's Secretariat-General headquarters in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting discussed a spectrum of topics, particularly

activating the Arab Media Strategy (2022-2026), the role of media and developing its tools to combat the phenomena of terrorism and extremism, the Arab media map for sustainable development and the Arab Media Excellence Award. The meeting also touched on methods of including media studies in school curricula (of member states) for all grades, among other initiatives and projects in a bid to reach an Arab consensus on important media issues. — ONA

Workshop to attract Chinese tourists

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism organised a second workshop to enlighten partners in the Omani tourism sector about how to deal with Chinese visitors and understand their needs. The workshop was held in the presence of Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Tourism Under-Secretary.

Chinese outbound flights grew from 57 million in 2010 to 155 million in 2019, with Oman seeing the largest increase in Chinese tourists from 44,580 in 2018 to



107,446 in 2019, an increase of 141 per cent. These figures reflect a much stronger growth compared to other long-distance exporting markets. During the workshop, a programme titled "China Ready" was presented by Marcus Lee, CEO of CBISN, which already

launched the programme in 49 countries across 6 continents. More than 80 agents of travel and tourism companies, hotel facilities and airlines in Oman participated in the programme. The workshop is a curtain raiser ahead of the re-opening China. Target groups, preferences and the behaviour of Chinese tourists have changed after the Corona pandemic. The orientation will help destinations, hotels, tourist attractions and other service providers to upgrade and update their product offers.



Al Numani receives Pakistan’s Navy Chief of Staff



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi, Chief of Staff of Pakistan's Navy, in Muscat on Wednesday. They reviewed means of enhancing cooperation to achieve joint interests. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). — **ONA**

Tenders worth over RO 86m approved

MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Wednesday held its fourth meeting for 2022 under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Chairman of the Tender Board. The Board approved RO 86,661,126 worth tenders and additional works for a number of development projects.

The Tender Board awarded tenders for projects include but not limited to: Construction of Mahout Hospital in Al Wusta Governorate (RO 13,920,686); road rehabilitation project in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate for a five-year period (RO 13,721,199); catering and food services, cleaning and pest control services at public hospitals (RO 10,413,494); road rehabilitation project for a five-year period in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate (RO 8,868,553); and supply of consumable surgical supplies for public hospitals (RO 8,656,147).

In addition, the Board awarded a tender for the



road rehabilitation projects for five years in Al Wusta Governorate to the tune of RO 6,246,361; expansion of the Tax Authority’s automated tax system (RO 5,806,279); road rehabilitation projects for a five-year period in Musandam Governorate (RO 5,427,599) among other projects. — **ONA**

Campaign to understand impact of inflation starts

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Ministry of Economy is conducting an awareness campaign to understand the impact of inflation on family budget.

Inflation is currently part of everyone’s conversation. In its explanation, the ministry stated, “It is the continuous rise in the general level of prices of goods and services of interest to citizens.”

In his comments on inflation, Ali Abdulaziz, who does household shopping for his family, said, “The impact of inflation is seen in his shopping items. If RO 10 would suffice for regular shopping in the past, it is not so anymore. You get fewer items now. It seems the value of money has reduced,” he pointed out.

“The impact of inflation can be seen in the whole lifestyle,” said another shopper, Yasser Said.

Similarly, Abdulaziz al Sakiti feels the impact but calls it a global phenomenon. “Around the world, it is the same. Inflation has affected me personally, from water to gas to clothes. Last year was better than this year.”

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information’s monthly consumer price survey data, the inflation rate of consumer prices in the



The inflation rate of consumer prices in the Sultanate of Oman in August reached 2.4 per cent.

Sultanate of Oman in August reached 2.4 per cent.

In their campaign, the Ministry of Economy explained that the recent increase in inflation has come as a surprise to many. As of mid 2022, global inflation reached 7.8 per cent, the highest since the 2008 crisis. In advanced economies, it rose to 6.9 per cent, which is the highest level since 1983, while in emerging economies, it reached 9.4 per cent, the highest since 1995. The International Monetary Fund predicted that inflation in 2022 would reach 6.6 per cent

in advanced economies, 9.5 per cent in emerging market and developing economies.

According to the Ministry of Economy, the course of inflation is unprecedented under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global economies. Measures to revitalise the economies and recover from the effects of the pandemic (increased demand) suffered due to the Ukraine conflict and its impact on food-exporting countries. The pandemic seems to have changed people’s consumption patterns and disrupted supply chains.

TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Based on Royal Decree 36/2022, Sinaw became a wilayat in appreciation of its historical and economic importance. This ancient place has many archaeological and historical sites bearing a symbol of the Omani heritage and identity.

Most of these houses and mosques served as schools for teaching literature and Islamic studies, as well economy, politics and sociology. Therefore, these sites still carry cultural connotations and store historical values that the people of this wilayat are proud of.

A large group of houses with their massive columns and decorated doors are now in dilapidated condition. Many districts (Harat), which were built some 300 years ago, comprise mosques, traditional souqs, Quran schools and old castles with high circled towers where the Wali used to stay with his family. This distinctive sight can be seen in Sinaw, which is 175 km from Muscat.

In Sinaw, there are around 30 small villages. Important among them are Al Magdar, Al Mahalla,

Al Qala’a, Al Souk and Al Handaly. The old traditional souq has four gates to help people enter easily from different directions. In the past, these gates opened for the public only after the evening prayers since they used to spend their morning gathering their agricultural products. Here they traded local livestock, agricultural products, silver and gold antiques.

These Harat are now seeking official attention. The area is now a waste dumping area. These old houses, castles and high towers are falling prey to elements. The extreme weather conditions have taken a toll on them. The roofs of most houses and mosques have already collapsed, while the decorated doors and windows are broken. The plastering on the walls and beautiful arches has peeled off, revealing the stones and clay used in the construction.

On the positive side, all Harat are surrounded by green oases. Like other old towns around the Sultanate of Oman, locals used the aflaj to irrigate their farms. Each local farmer has a specific time to share the falaj water, and a sundial clock controls it.



SINAW

THE CRADLE OF OMANI ARCHITECTURE





THE CHILD LAW OF 2014 and **2019** executive regulations prohibits violence against children in all settings, including schools. That same law also makes the reporting of all child abuse mandatory and facilitates the removal of children from situations of violence.

REPORT IT AND STOP ABUSE

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Violence against children is rare in the Sultanate of Oman. If some cases come to the notice of authorities, action is swiftly taken.

A few days ago, the Ministry of Social Development followed up on a video circulating on social media platforms about “a child being subjected to physical abuse.”

Accordingly, the ministry explained its intervention as soon as it received the report through the child protection representative. It coordinated with the relevant authorities, took the necessary legal measures, and detained the offenders. The ministry said the child’s health was safe and stable.

Oman Human Rights Commission stresses that the judiciary and the competent authorities in the Sultanate of Oman deal with cases of violence against children under the provisions of the Omani Penal Code.

Abuse includes physical and emotional abuse, neglect, bullying, child labour or other types of exploitation, which cause actual or potential harm to the child’s health and threaten his or her development or dignity at home, schools and other areas.

Any form of violence against a child is a crime punishable by imprisonment from five to no more than 15 years and a fine of up to RO 10,000.

For children with disabilities, the Sultanate of Oman has a range of specialised services. However, most of them are limited to major cities. The government is continuing its efforts to implement inclusive education in regular schools.

In addition, cases of child abuse can be reported through Child Protection Line 1100 and the Ministry’s Call Centre 1555.

Parents need to be cautious as cases of their abuse are reported even from homes and schools.

The UNICEF Gulf Office focuses on strengthening the capacity of governments to generate the data needed to improve analysis of the causes and prevalence of violence against children, strengthen national response systems, and monitor the effectiveness of responses at the national level.

The data can be used to help governments raise national awareness of children’s rights.

The Ministry of Social Development has taken many steps to build a safe family and a stable and cohesive society, protecting every child on the land and preserving his rights and its mission is to provide protection for beneficiary cases, working to rehabilitate them, as well as rehabilitating family members and specialists dealing with them according to scientific standards.

There is a directorate in the ministry specialised in family development, and in this directorate there is a family protection department. One of the specialties of this department is to identify the dimensions of social problems, work to find programmes that help solve them, receive communications and study them to verify their accuracy and validity, and then develop a treatment plan for the case. Also, preparing the statistical database on family protection, setting plans for family protection and strengthening the efforts of the concerned mechanisms in coordination with the relevant authorities in the field of protection.

Child protection committees are also present in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. They were formed by a ministerial decision. Child protection committees are responsible for receiving complaints and reports about any violations of children’s rights, and about cases of a child being subjected to violence, exploitation or abuse, all as indicated by the regulations, and the members of these committees. They are represented by the Royal Oman Police, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Public Prosecution and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

Awareness needs to be focused on protecting children from neglect, abuse and violence.

Every child has the right to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. In addition, facilities are in place to help children to access social services and solve the issues.



Nizwa Hospital hosts session on patient safety

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, SEPT 21

The Ministry of Health, in association with the World Health Organization, launched a session on patient safety at Nizwa Hospital recently.

Dr Khalifa bin Hamad al Shaqsi, Director of Nizwa Hospital, and specialists from the Ministry of Health represented by the General Directorate of Quality Assurance Centre attended the session.

Specialists from the General Directorate of Quality Assurance Centre presented the report and praised Nizwa Hospital for its ranking as the first government hospital in the Middle East to achieve the third level. They also discussed the efforts of the employees of Nizwa Hospital to achieve better ranking.

These efforts involve patients, community members, government



institutions, and health and private health institutions.

Dr Al Shaqsi said, “Ensuring the quality of specialised healthcare means avoiding medical errors that can be avoided. And that is through the use of quality factors. No one should get hurt when receiving specialised healthcare, and urgent measures are needed to reduce patients’ injuries while

taking treatment.”

Dr Said bin Abdullah al Broumi, Assistant Director of Medical and Paramedical Affairs and Chairman of the Leadership Committee for Patient Safety, spoke about the framework for patient safety and its importance in specialised health services. This is done by adopting and implementing international



standards concerning patient safety, including those of the World Health Organization.

He stressed that patient safety is the focus of the work of all Nizwa Hospital employees.

Sulaiman bin Abdullah al Hashimi, Head of Quality Management and Patient Safety Department, explained: “The mission of Nizwa Hospital lies

in improving the quality of healthcare that meets the needs and expectations of patients and their families. The hospital is keen on continuous development and modernisation of services and staff.”

The Quality Management and Patient Safety Department specialises in analysing patients’ feedback on treatment and to improve services. It also investigates complaints submitted by various medical departments and other institutions. The department works on questionnaires to study the satisfaction of service recipients (patients), work atmosphere of health workers, and the extent of their awareness and culture of patient safety.

The World Health Organization for the Eastern Mediterranean will conduct the second evaluation in Nizwa Hospital at the beginning of 2023.

Literati mourn death of writer Majid al Sulaimani



KABEER YOUSUF
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Condolences poured in for writer and columnist Majid al Sulaimani, who passed away after a brief illness on September 18. A retired HR personnel from PDO, Al Sulaimani was a columnist with Oman Observer.

With his career spanning over 40 years, Majid bin Said al Sulaimani served as an HR Senior Professional at PDO for 25 years and later as an HR Consultant at several firms in Oman and other GCC countries.

“He was not only an HR enthusiast, but also known with his policies and ideas introduced during four decades of service. He helped build Omani workforce by providing them educational opportunities as well as catering to their training needs with some of whom holding significant positions in public and private sector companies in Oman today,” remembers Syeda Tabinda Bukhari, his daughter-in-law and an official at the Muscat Stock Exchange.

He was also an avid reader and a well-known writer known for his unbiased writing style through the several books he wrote in service of his country and community. In his ‘The Arab Manager’, Al Sulaimani shared his experience in bridging the gap between expectations and reality of labour market.

“Majid’s writings explained the most burning, complex and contemporary issues in a few sentences with unqualified clarity of thought,” said Vinod Raghavan, a writer.

He was fondly called ‘Magic Majid’ due to the words of wisdom in his writing that were a source of comfort to his readers.

Dhofar Integrated Services begins safety drive

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Dhofar Integrated Services Company began its safety campaign in August. The campaign, named Baiti Amin, has been held annually since 2015 by Nama Group, with the primary objective being teaching the important role of electrical safety to households across the Sultanate of Oman.

“The goal of this campaign is to spread the important message of household electrical safety in the country, in order to prevent and reduce accidents,” says Said al Kathiri, the general manager of Customer Services of Dhofar Integrated Services Company.

Targeting the vast audience of all households across the country, the campaign hopes to achieve its goals of ‘identifying the causes of household electrical accidents,’ and ‘to share knowledge on methods of prevention and reduction of electrical accidents.’

In order to achieve these goals, the campaign consists of educational exhibitions, lectures and workshops, videos, competitions, and even a solar-powered van, which has travelled to various areas of Dhofar, spreading awareness about the campaign, and its message of electrical safety. “The van is our focal point this year. We are using it to get closer to the local society, and get them more engaged with the event.”

Antibiotics are non-renewable resources

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The Annual Symposium 2022 on ‘Antimicrobial Stewardship and Patient Safety’ is to be held online on Thursday. The event is being organised by Sultan Qaboos University, American Society for Microbiology, Hospital Infection Society-India, and DASH to protect antibiotics.

Antimicrobial stewardship means optimal patient management by prescribing the right drug, in the right dose, right route to the right patient, while minimising unintended consequences of drug resistance, adverse drug events, healthcare-associated infections and economic cost, according to Dr Meher Rizvi, Associate Professor, Department of Microbiology and Immunology, College of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The objective is to promote judicious and responsible antimicrobial prescribing by healthcare practitioners and to promote evidence-based medicine to allow optimal patient care.

Dr Meher feels that it is important to spread awareness amongst the citizens that antibiotics are a non-renewable resource which needs to be protected for future generations.

“If we do not act now, it will be

We should be very circumspect in using antibiotics. They should not be prescribed for diarrhoea and common cold — as most are caused by viruses and are self-limiting in nature. Preventing infection in the first place is the need of the hour

DR MEHER RIZVI
Associate Professor

too late. We may push our future generations into a post-antibiotic era where life as we know it stands threatened. Longevity, quality of healthcare, economic productivity, plant, animal and environment health and food security may be compromised. Poverty will increase. The time to act is now,” she pointed out, adding that patient safety also promotes antimicrobial stewardship, as well as reducing all possible complications which may accidentally befall a patient- thus optimise patient experience and care.

This is the reality of antibiotics today.

The Associate Professor said that the very foundation of modern healthcare is antibiotics, “Whether we talk about surgery, e.g simple caesarian section, or appendectomy, transplant surgeries, management of cancer patients, management of infectious diseases like simple skin

infections to infective endocarditis, tuberculosis, malaria, HIV all need antibiotics for a successful outcome. Longevity is directly linked to antibiotics.

Antibiotics ushered in the golden age for man-longevity, health and economic prosperity are directly linked to antibiotics.”

The challenge that is facing the health sector and could be a potential crisis is the situation medical experts are seeing — overuse of antibiotics has led to the bugs fighting back spectacularly.

“They are a formidable foe. They have developed large scale resistance to most of the available antibiotics. This has led to poor patient outcomes — from increased length of stay in hospitals to mortality and increased economic cost. A point has come where in some patients, none of the antibiotics may work.”

These are the measures to be taken. “We should be very

circumspect in using antibiotics. They should not be prescribed for diarrhoea and common cold — as most are caused by viruses and are self-limiting in nature. Preventing infection in the first place is the need of the hour,” said Dr Meher.

Hand hygiene is a very effective tool in preventing infection. Social distance should be maintained from people with cough and cold. Wearing personal protective equipment like gloves and masks are very useful when we are taking care of a sick person. Eating healthy food and exercising keeps the immune system strong and prevents infection.

The public also has a crucial role to play in this awareness and cause, according to the expert, the public should not pressurise a doctor to prescribe antibiotics for diarrhoea and colds. They should use clean water and follow principles of sanitation to prevent infection in the first place and should try symptomatic management for simple infections.

The Annual Symposium is aimed at healthcare administrators, microbiologists, ID physicians and surgeons, medical and nursing leadership, healthcare quality control personnel in Oman, India, Pakistan, Qatar, Iran, Maldives, Saudi Arabia, UK, USA, Ukraine, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Cameroon etc.

Global career guidance event begins at ISB on October 13

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Avenir 2022 #DISCOVERYYOU, a six-day global career guidance event, will be organised by Indian School Bousher under the aegis of the Board of Indian Schools in Oman, from October 13-18. The launching ceremony of the event was held at Indian School Bousher last week.

‘Avenir 2022 #DISCOVERYYOU’ was launched by the chief guest, Al Azhar bin Saud al Salmi.

A warm heartfelt welcome was cordially extended by Dr Anchan CK, Vice-President of the ISB School Management Committee. He appreciated the presence of Al Salmi, Assistant Director,

International Schools Office, Ministry of Education, dignitaries, invitees and fraternities of all schools across the globe and set the stage for the launch of Avenir 2022 #DISCOVERYYOU.

Dr Sivakumar Manickam enriched the gathering with his address on the various initiatives taken by the BOD for the benefit of students and the importance of Career Counselling. “Avenir is a great platform for the students to know the umpteen opportunities that the future has to offer. Once the discernment is made, work consistently with perseverance – nothing can stop your determination to achieve what you wish for your future,” the chairman exhorted the students.



Al Azhar Saud, Al Salmi Assistant Director, International Schools Office, Ministry of Education, at the launch ceremony of Avenir 2022 #DISCOVERYYOU.

Bhaves Bhalerao, Principal, Indian School Bousher, presented the salient features of Avenir 2022 like the availability of new Avenir app, helpline number and the psychometric test for students.

In her felicitation address, Ashwini Sawarikar, Finance

Director, Board of Directors of Indian School, and Director In Charge, Indian School Bousher, shared relevant career-oriented information like how career counselling has expanded its length and breadth and how Avenir 2022 can help students to

make decisions about their careers, leading to greater satisfaction and success. Sirajudeen Nhelat, Academic Chair, BOD, motivated the students to make best use of the Avenir platform and hone their competencies for a bright and successful future.

The fusion dance performance that came up next transformed the stage into a visually appealing setup. The impressive choreography and graceful movement of the performers drew thunderous applause from the spectators.

Dr Chandan K Jaisimha, Chairperson, Co-curricular and Cultural Sub Committee, School Management Committee, did the honours of proposing the vote of thanks.

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■ PEACE DAY CELEBRATED



United Nations peacekeepers (UNIFIL) attend a ceremony to mark the International Day of Peace in Naqoura, near the Lebanese-Israeli border, southern Lebanon. — Reuters

Tunisian police question Ghannouchi

TUNIS: Tunisian police questioned main opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi for more than 12 hours overnight, his lawyer said, over terrorism accusations that Ghannouchi, who was also speaker of the dissolved parliament, says are politically motivated.

The 81-year-old head of the Islamist Ennahda party was summoned to meet the terrorism police on Tuesday and questioned from 5 pm until 6 am on Wednesday, his lawyer Samir Dilou said.

Ghannouchi and another senior Ennahda figure, former prime minister Ali Laareyedh, were both initially summoned on Monday. Laareyedh was questioned through Monday evening and night and detained. Ghannouchi waited for 12 hours before being questioned.



Both men, and Ennahda, deny the accusations the police are investigating, that they helped Tunisian fighters travel to Syria during the IS crisis a decade ago. They will face a judge later on Wednesday, Dilou said.

Both accuse police of using the investigation to intimidate them because of the party's opposition to President Kais Saied's seizure of broad powers and shutdown in July 2021 of the elected parliament.

The police or other authorities have not commented on the case. Ghannouchi was also investigated earlier this summer regarding accusations of money laundering, which he denied.

President Saied's critics accuse him of a coup for seizing most powers last year and moving to one-man rule, and of dismantling the democracy won in the 2011 revolution that triggered the uprisings.

In July, he passed a new constitution ratifying his expanded powers through a referendum.

Last week, he issued a decree mandating prison terms of five years for people spreading what he called false information online, a move that rights groups and the main journalists' union have said will undermine free speech. — Reuters

Kyrgyzstan leader seeks dialogue with Tajikistan

UNITED NATIONS: Kyrgyzstan's leader said he is prepared to negotiate as long as it takes with Tajikistan to resolve a deadly border dispute, while also vowing his forces would not cede "a centimetre" of land.

Tajikistan accused Kyrgyzstan on Wednesday of failing to withdraw military hardware from their mutual border after last week's deadly conflict and hiding it instead, a charge Bishkek denies.

At least 100 people died and about 140,000 were evacuated when the two Central Asian nations, both of which are allied with Russia, clashed in a border dispute on September 14-16, using tanks, aviation and rocket artillery.

They have since agreed to cease hostilities and pull back troops, but, indicating tensions remain high, Tajikistan's foreign ministry said in a statement on Wednesday Kyrgyzstan was not honouring its part of the deal.

It said it has spotted camouflaged Kyrgyz armed personnel carriers and other military equipment and a group of special forces servicemen near the border, as well as Kyrgyz drones crossing into Tajik territory.

Kyrgyzstan's foreign ministry said the allegations were untrue. Both countries host Russian military bases and are members of a Russia-led security bloc.

Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Japarov, in an address to the United Nations General Assembly, said some 140,000 Kyrgyz civilians



A burned-out car is seen in the village of Kapchygay near the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, some 1000 kilometres from Bishkek. — AFP

At least 100 people died and about 140,000 were evacuated when the two Central Asian nations clashed in a border dispute using tanks, aviation and rocket artillery



Kyrgyz military look for unexploded shells in the village of Ak-Say near the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, some 1000 kilometres from Bishkek. — AFP

have been evacuated from border settlements and were being provided assistance.

"For the sake of my people, I am ready to spend... as much time as possible to solve this issue once and for all," he said of the tensions which have simmered and occasionally spilled into open conflict.

"Of course, whatever the solution is, it should be mutually beneficial," he said. Clashes regularly erupt between the two Central Asian neighbours, as around half of their 970-kilometre border is still to be demarcated.

Japarov said there was a "will and readiness on our part" to continue negotiations under any legal format with Tajikistan, adding that he welcomed any mediation efforts by international bodies such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. — AFP

230 pilot whales stranded in Australia, 'about half' feared dead

SYDNEY: A pod of 230 pilot whales was found stranded on the rugged west coast of Tasmania on Wednesday, with Australian officials saying only half appeared to be alive.

Aerial images showed a devastating scene of dozens of black glossy mammals strewn across a long beach, stuck on the waterline where the frigid southern ocean meets the sand.

Locals covered survivors with blankets and doused them with buckets of water to keep them alive, as other whales nearby tried in vain to twitch free and yet more lay dead.

The whales were "stranded near Macquarie Harbour", said the state's Department of Natural



A beached sperm whale is seen at bay in King Island, Tasmania, Australia. — Reuters

Resources and Environment.

Officials said marine conservation experts and staff with whale rescue gear were en route to the scene.

They will try to refloat animals that are strong enough to survive and likely tow the carcasses out to sea, to avoid attracting sharks to the area.

It is almost two years to the day since Macquarie Harbour was the scene of the country's largest-ever mass stranding, involving almost 500 pilot whales.

More than 300 pilot whales died during that stranding, despite the efforts of dozens of volunteers who toiled for days in Tasmania's freezing waters to free them.

The cause of mass strandings of whales is still however not fully understood.

"Scientists have suggested they could be caused by pods going off track after feeding too close to shore.

Pilot whales — which can grow to more than six metres long — are highly sociable and can follow podmates who stray into danger.

That sometimes occurs when old, sick or injured animals swim ashore and other pod members follow, trying to respond to the trapped whale's distress signals.

Others believe gently sloping beaches like those found in Tasmania confuse the whales' sonar making them think they are in open waters. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TOKYO

Man sets himself on fire near Japan PM's office

A man set himself on fire near the Japanese prime minister's office on Wednesday after expressing opposition to a state funeral for assassinated ex-premier Shinzo Abe, local media reported.

Police declined to confirm the incident, but the government said an individual with burns had been found near government property.

"We are aware that a man with burns was found by a police officer at 7 am at an intersection below the cabinet office,"



top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno said. "But details are currently being examined by police," he added, declining to answer further questions on the incident. — AFP

ISLAMABAD

Kabul restaurant explosion kills 3, wounds 13

At least three civilians were killed in an explosion in the Afghan capital Kabul, security officials said on Wednesday.

Another 13 people were wounded in the blast that happened inside a restaurant in police district 3 of the city, police spokesman Khalid Zadran said.

Zadran added that the Taliban security forces were investigating the incident to discover the explosion's cause. Initially, local sources claimed that the blast happened during lunchtime as the



restaurant was occupied mostly by the employees of the country's power utility company which is located near the blast site. Pro-Taliban media reported it was due to a gas cylinder leakage. — dpa

MANILA

Filipino activists mark anniversary of martial law

Hundreds of Filipino activists took to the streets to mark the 50th anniversary of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos Sr's declaration of martial law.

Marcos Sr assumed emergency powers on September 21, 1972, commencing what many remember as one of the darkest periods in the Southeast Asian country's history. He was ousted 14 years later after a popular uprising.

Activists chanted "never forget" and held banners



condemning the crimes allegedly committed by the regime during martial law including extra-judicial killings, human rights abuses and forced disappearances. — AFP



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In brief

■ COPENHAGEN



DANISH MONARCH TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

Denmark's queen Margrethe II, who attended the funeral of queen Elizabeth II in London, has tested positive for Covid-19, the royal palace announced. The 82-year-old triple-vaccinated queen, who already had Covid in February, tested positive on Tuesday evening, the palace said in a statement, a day after the funeral. "The queen's activities this week have therefore been cancelled," it said, without giving details of her condition. Margrethe came to the throne at the age of 31 in January 1972 on the death of her father, Frederik IX, becoming the first woman to hold the position of reigning queen in Denmark. — AFP

■ ASTANA



KAZAKHSTAN TO HOLD PRESIDENTIAL VOTE ON NOV 20

Kazakhstan will hold snap presidential elections meant to "radically reset" the ex-Soviet country's political system on November 20, according to a decree published on Wednesday on the presidential website. The announcement comes after the Central Asian nation's recently-installed leader passed legislation limiting presidential mandates to a single, seven-year term and reverted the capital's name away from that of its previous strongman leader. President Tokayev told lawmakers earlier this month that the vote was part of reforms to institute "completely new standards" for political life, with "fair and open rules". — AFP

■ COPENHAGEN



THUNBERG IS SWEDISH CHILDREN'S CHARITY AMBASSADOR

Greta Thunberg is to become an ambassador for a Swedish charity foundation that grants wishes to children with serious illnesses. The 19-year-old Swedish climate activist has been involved with the foundation My Special Day for some time, but is now taking the next step and becoming an official ambassador, the organisation said. Thunberg said she was honoured to be given the role by the foundation. "It means a lot to me because I think it's important to shine a light on the struggle that many children and young people with illnesses silently fight every day," she said. — dpa



Police experts examine the location of a missile strike at a freight railway station in Kharkiv amid Russia's military attack on Ukraine. — AFP

President Putin orders Ukraine mobilisation

KYIV/NEW YORK: President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian mobilisation to fight in Ukraine on Wednesday and made a thinly veiled threat to use nuclear weapons, in what Nato called a "reckless" act of desperation in the face of Russia's looming defeat.

Flights out of Russia quickly sold out following the announcement of Russia's first military mobilisation since World War Two, a dramatic reversal after months in which Moscow had insisted its operation was "going to plan".

The mobilisation is, for now, being officially described as a partial one that will steadily draw in 300,000 reservists over a period of months, rather than a full one that would rely on what Russia's defence minister says is a vast reserve force of 25 million people.

In his televised address, Putin effectively announced plans to annex four Ukrainian regions, saying Moscow would facilitate referendums in Ukraine's Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions on joining Russia. A day earlier, Russian-installed officials in the four regions announced plans for such votes, which Western countries

Putin says West wants to destroy Russia as 4 Russia-occupied regions announce referendum plans

denounced as shams.

Putin said, with no evidence, that officials in Nato states had threatened to use nuclear weapons against Russia, and that Russia "also has various means of destruction".

"When the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people. It's not a bluff," he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he thought Putin would be unlikely to use nuclear weapons, but that the threat showed why it was important to stand up to him.

"I don't believe that he will use these weapons. I don't think the world will allow him to use these weapons," Zelensky said in remarks reported by Germany's Bild newspaper.

"Tomorrow Putin can say: 'Apart from Ukraine, we also

want a part of Poland, otherwise we will use nuclear weapons.' We cannot make these compromises," Zelensky said.

In an interview with Reuters, Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg denounced Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons as "dangerous and reckless rhetoric".

The mobilisation plan demonstrated "that the war is not going according to his plans" and it was clear that the Russian president had made "a big miscalculation", Stoltenberg said.

As for any potential Russian use of nuclear arms, "We will make sure that there is no misunderstanding in Moscow about exactly how we will react," Stoltenberg said.

Putin's announcement came after weeks in which Russia's invasion force was routed in northeastern Ukraine, with thousands of Russian troops fleeing frontline positions in the biggest shift in momentum since the war's early weeks.

Ukrainian forces have captured the main supply routes serving Russia's front line in the east and say they are now poised to push deeper into territory that Moscow had captured over months of heavy fighting. — Reuters

American, Russians blast off for ISS

BAIKONUR: A US astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts blasted off to the International Space Station (ISS) on Wednesday on a Russian-operated flight, in a rare instance of cooperation between Moscow and Washington.

The Russian space agency Roscosmos and Nasa both distributed live footage of the launch from Kazakhstan and commentators speaking over the feed said it was stable and that "the crew is feeling well".

Nasa's Frank Rubio and Russia's Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitry Petelin make up the crew that launched from the Russia-leased Baikonur cosmodrome at 1354 GMT.

Rubio is the first US astronaut to travel to the ISS on a Russian Soyuz rocket since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into pro-Western Ukraine on February 24.

In response, Western capitals including Washington have hit Moscow with unprecedented sanctions and bilateral ties have sunk to new lows.

Russia's only active female cosmonaut Anna Kikina is expected to travel to the orbital station in early October aboard a SpaceX Crew Dragon.

She will become only the fifth



Nasa astronaut Frank Rubio gestures as his spacesuit is tested during pre-launch preparations in Kazakhstan. — AFP

professional woman cosmonaut from Russia or the Soviet Union to fly to space, and the first Russian to fly aboard a spacecraft of SpaceX, the company of billionaire Elon Musk.

Russian cosmonauts and Western astronauts have sought to steer clear of the conflict that is raging back on Earth, especially when in orbit together.

A collaboration among the United States, Canada, Japan, the European Space Agency and Russia, the ISS is split into two sections: the US Orbital Segment and the Russian Orbital Segment.

At present, the ISS depends on a Russian propulsion system to maintain its orbit, about 250 miles above sea level, with the US segment responsible for electricity and life support systems. — AFP



The Soyuz MS-22 spacecraft carrying the crew of Russian cosmonauts Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitry Petelin and Nasa astronaut Frank Rubio blasts off from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. — AFP

Hurricane Fiona strengthens to powerful Category 4 storm

PUERTO RICO: Hurricane Fiona strengthened to a powerful Category 4 storm on Wednesday as it headed toward Bermuda after slamming Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and the Turks and Caicos Islands with heavy rains and flooding, a US government agency said.

With its eye now about 1,125 km southwest of Bermuda, Fiona was packing winds as high as 130 miles per hour and was expected to strengthen as it moved north, the National Hurricane Center said in an early on Wednesday report.

"On the forecast track, the centre of Fiona will continue to move away from the Turks and Caicos today, and approach Bermuda late on Thursday," the agency said.

The Bermuda Weather Service has issued a tropical storm warning for the archipelago, which lies 600 miles east of the US state of North Carolina, as Fiona tracks to the west of the British



View of a sailboat dragged to the shore by strong waves in the Bay of Samana, after the passage of Hurricane Fiona, in Samana, Dominican Republic. — AFP

Overseas Territory. Hurricane-force winds are a possibility depending on the storm's path, it said.

"Outer rain bands will sweep into the region bringing bouts of showers, thunderstorms, and heavy rain," the weather service said in its forecast for Thursday and Friday.

Fiona has so far claimed four lives in Puerto Rico, according

to the US Federal Emergency Management Agency. The storm made landfall on the island, a US territory, on Sunday, knocking out power to the island and dumping massive amounts of rain. A fifth person was killed in Guadeloupe earlier in the week.

An estimated 1.2 million homes and businesses remained without power in Puerto Rico on Wednesday morning. — Reuters

Thinking about strategy and life



Dr Anchan C K

The writer is an international adviser

A life without some life strategy is like a boat without a rudder. The boat will definitely get you somewhere due to the forces of wind and water currents, but where you end up may not be where you really want to go. For that reason, it is important to give life some direction to end up where you want to be in life in the future. Strategies are our most powerful tools for creating great life. They help us see the world in the right way to solve the important problems of our field. Most of us are not what we could be. We are less. We have great capacity. But most of it is dormant; most is undeveloped. As long as we take our thinking for granted, we don't do the work

required for improvement. Strategy is determining where you are now, where you want to go, and then how to get there. It's the art of developing and implementing specific actions and decisions that will enable the growth of life. Strategies are something like mental best practices. People doing great work, then, are not necessarily faster or smarter than others doing mediocre work. They do great things because they have changed themselves to see the world in a certain way. They notice the things which help them articulate and solve significant problems, and they ignore the rest. Building the right strategies into our lives is important because

STRATEGY DETERMINES WHERE YOU ARE NOW, WHERE YOU WANT TO GO, AND THEN HOW TO GET THERE. IT'S THE ART OF DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SPECIFIC ACTIONS AND DECISIONS THAT WILL ENABLE THE GROWTH OF LIFE

of our attention is one of the most difficult in our lives. If we were perfectly able to cut the noise out of our lives, focusing only on what was important, most of us would be living far differently than we do now. Unfortunately, we often don't know what noise is and what is signal, or how to remove the noise or act on the signal. A good set of strategies help us solve these problems. One great thing about having a good set of strategies is that when we apply the appropriate ones to the question at hand, the choice of tactics becomes much easier. Strategies work together to build a set of constraints which help us choose the right tool for the job.

Without them, it would basically be working randomly, via trial-and-error method. You will discover that when you have a life strategy that has a 15–20-year horizon, you will be continually refining your life strategy as you gain more knowledge and experience in your life. Additionally, you will also learn to fine-tune opportunities as they present themselves, which further enhances the fulfilment of your life strategy. What was the last good, positive thing that happened to you? Perhaps it made you smile or dance around the room or maybe even want to shout it from the rooftops... and think of the strategy behind.

Climate change, conflict decimate Syria's grain crop

MAHA EL DAHAN

Climate change, a faltering economy and residual security issues have decimated Syria's 2022 grain crop, leaving the majority of its farmers in a precarious position, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said. Syria's 2022 wheat harvest amounted to around 1 million tonnes, down some 75 per cent from pre-crisis volumes, while barley was almost non-existent, Mike Robson, FAO's Syria Representative said. Erratic rainfall patterns in the past two seasons have shrunk Syria's wheat crop from around 4 million tonnes annually pre-war, enough to feed itself and export to neighbouring countries in a good year. Now after more than a decade of conflict many farmers are struggling with harsh economic conditions and security issues in some areas while having to adapt to the new realities of changing weather conditions. The meagre harvest adds strain on Syria's sanctions-hit government as it struggles to source wheat from the international market. Food is not restricted by Western sanctions but banking restrictions and asset freezes have made it difficult for most trading houses to do business with Damascus. International import tenders conducted by the state's main grain buyer, Hoboob, have repeatedly failed in previous years with most wheat sourced from ally Russia. Global wheat prices have also surged since February, after Moscow's war of Ukraine halted grain exports from the Black Sea for months. "Climate change isn't easy anyway but it is doubly not easy in a place like Syria with high inflation, no power, no good quality inputs and some residual security issues that are still playing up in parts of the country," Robson said. The bulk of Syria's wheat crop, or around 70 per cent, relies on rainfall with irrigation underdeveloped due to war. Compared to planted areas, the harvest was around 15 per cent of what farmers expected of the rainfed wheat areas. "When the rain fell it was concentrated and it didn't follow traditional patters," Robson said. "A late start to the rainfall meant that farmers were delayed in planting and they couldn't prepare their land in time and then the rains finished early by March," he said. Farmers in Syria typically plant their wheat crop around November-December and harvest in May-June. Syria's economy is also faltering under the weight of its complex, multi-sided conflict, now in its twelfth year. — Reuters

Letter from Europe: We still don't know how the Ukraine war ends



Thomas L Friedman

The writer is a US political commentator and author

Last week was an interesting week to be in Europe talking to national security experts, officials and business executives about Ukraine. Ukraine and its allies had just forced Russian attackers into a chaotic retreat from a big chunk of territory, while the presidents of China and India had seemed to make clear to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the food and energy inflation his war has stoked was hurting their 2.7 billion people. On top of all that, one of Russia's iconic pop stars told her 3.4 million followers on Instagram that the war was "turning our country into a pariah and worsening the lives of our citizens." In short, it was Putin's worst week since he attacked Ukraine — without wisdom, justice, mercy or a Plan B. And yet... maybe I was just hanging around the wrong people, but I detected a certain undertow of anxiety in many of my conversations with Ukraine's European allies. I learned long ago as a foreign correspondent that sometimes the news is in the noise, in what is being said and shouted, and sometimes the news is in the silence, in what isn't being said at all. And my interpretation of what wasn't being said last week went like this: Yes, it is great that Ukraine is pushing the Russians back some, but can you answer me the question that has been hanging out there since the fighting started: How does this war end with a stable result? We still don't know. As I probed that question in my conversations, I discerned three possible outcomes, some totally new, some familiar, but all coming with complicated and unpredictable side effects: — Outcome 1 is a total Ukrainian victory, which risks Putin doing something crazy as defeat and humiliation stare him in the face. — Outcome 2 is a dirty deal with Putin that secures a cease-fire and stops the destruction, but it risks splintering the Western allies and enraging many Ukrainians. — Outcome 3 is a less dirty deal — we go back to the lines where everyone was before Putin attacked in February. Ukraine might be ready to live with that, and maybe even the Russian people

THE EU IS DIVIDED ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE WAR — NOT ON THE BIG QUESTION OF WHETHER PUTIN IS RIGHT OR THERE IS A THREAT, BUT ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE WHOLE SITUATION, ESPECIALLY WHERE THE POPULIST BACKLASHES EMERGE WHEN PEOPLE GET TOTALLY STRESSED THIS WINTER

would, too, but Putin would have to be ousted first, because he would never abide the undeniable implication that his war was completely for naught. The variance among these outcomes is profound, and few of us will not be affected by which way it goes. You may not be interested in the Ukraine war, but the Ukraine war will be interested in you, in your energy and food prices, and, most important, in your humanity, as even the "neutrals" — China and India — have discovered. So let's go under the hood of all three

possible endings. Outcome 1: No one expects the Ukrainian army to be able to immediately follow up its substantial military gains of the past two weeks by just sweeping the rest of the Russian army back across the border. But for the first time I could hear people asking: "What if the Russian army actually collapses?" Surely more than a few Russian soldiers, and the Russian-speaking Ukrainians who threw in their lot with them, thinking they would win and stay forever, are now asking themselves the John Kerry Vietnam War question: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" Everyone can now see just what a big lie this whole war was. Everyone hears the stories that some of the reinforcements Putin is sending to the front are convicts who bartered their way out of prison by agreeing to fight in Ukraine for six months. Many others are mercenaries from as far away as Syria. Wait a minute. If Ukraine really had become, as Putin claimed, a state led by "Nazis" and the spearhead of a Nato plan to push farther east towards the Russian motherland, how could Putin not ask the Russian people to mobilise for that fight? If the cause was so just and the war so necessary, why did Putin have to pay criminals and mercenaries to rise up and expect the middle classes of Moscow and Leningrad to just shut up? — *New York Times*



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine makes an unannounced visit to a flag raising ceremony in the main square of the recaptured city of Izium.

Taking tourism reporting seriously



SONIA AMBROSIO
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The year was 2010, journalism students were having lessons on tourism reporting. It was something new to the local journos. Today, 12 years later, many of them occupy prominent jobs within the media and other related fields. Classes developed from the technicalities of reporting to colloquial talks about the potential of the leisure industry. The country's unique landscape and its geographic location between Europe and Asia turned into themes about the world map and the different cultures.

While clearing stacks of teaching material and students' work from my cabinets, I came across a variety of interviews given to journos; note-taking practices during press conferences, and loads of photos and videos, which in my view, register some of the big changes in journalism reporting in the country.

A throwback, and a thought-provoking interview on tourism given to a journo in 2010, that I found among the papers, still echoes today. Extracts have focused on some fundamental actions such as better infrastructure, public transport, local workforce training in tourism and hospitality, and the ability to communicate in different languages.

In that 2010 interview, it said: "... Several areas, particularly in infrastructure, need to be taken care of to develop the tourism sector. For example, public transport has to be improved. There is a need to promote stronger measures for road safety. There is also a need for medical facilities with trained staff who can speak English or other languages."

INTERNAL TOURISM WAS PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT, EXCEPT FOR PEOPLE TRAVELLING TO THE CAPITAL MUSCAT OR VISITING SALALAH DURING THE KHAREEF SEASON. THE LATTER HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MUST DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS

The interview continued: "One critical point is the need for public toilets in service and resting facilities, and these toilets should be supervised and cleaned." The lack of budget accommodation has also been pointed out. "There is a good number of classy and pricey hotels, but there are not many affordable accommodations around the country." Another suggestion that has been offered was for road shows, exhibitions, and conferences to be organised - which are well established nowadays. It said: "Fairs, exhibitions, and conferences are a good approach to attracting visitors. Besides, the professionals attending these events could be encouraged to visit parts of the country." A call for transnational budget airlines to fly into the country has also been mentioned.

The influx of international companies to Suhar was an attractive fact because then, tourism, business, and economic development could be combined. Students would be interviewing foreigners, attending business events, and press conferences, and would be writing pieces for the local newspapers - and so, they did.

In the early 2000s, for foreigners living and working in the country, short trips and sightseeing travels were about camping, wadi bashing, picnics, and desert driving. It was about discovering the most amazing and picturesque places, meeting the friendly local people in the villages, coming across rich archaeological sites, and learning about the country's history.

Internal tourism was practically non-existent, except for people travelling to the capital Muscat or visiting Salalah during the khareef season. The latter has always been a must during the summer months. Then, again, equally, for domestic, and inbound tourism, infrastructure and facilities needed to be available and cared for.

The spectacular pristine beaches, mountains, and valleys were - and still are - just perfect. If one is into eco-tourism, Oman is the place. So, monetising the country's natural beauty has been a natural step ahead.

It is inspiring to see former journos involved in the business of hospitality, sports, and environmental activities. Tourism journalism is not as trivial as it may look at first. It has many ramifications. Glad this old interview continues relevant after so many years.

As the travel industry continues to grow and diversify, tourism journalism requires more attention. Its relationships with cultural services, consumerism, entertainment, and practical information, can be constructive to suit different visitor needs and desires.



BIRDS SINGING CONTEST

Birds sit in cages during a bird singing competition in Thailand's southern province of Narathiwat on Wednesday. Some 1,500 birds from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore were entered in the annual contest. - AFP

At UN, leaders warn of rising divisions amid Ukraine, climate woes

SHAUN TANDON

World leaders warned that the Ukraine war risked creating a new era of divisions at a time when worsening climate change and rising food prices risk unleashing new instability.

The UN General Assembly, the annual gathering of world leaders that clogs Midtown Manhattan, returned in person after two years of pandemic restrictions with only one leader allowed to appear virtually -- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the summit by projecting images of a ship carrying grain out of Ukraine — evidence of how diplomacy can succeed — as he warned of the dire state of the planet.

"Our world is in big trouble. Divides are growing deeper," Guterres said.

"A winter of global discontent is on the horizon," he added.

"Trust is crumbling, inequalities are exploding, our planet is burning. People are hurting — with the most vulnerable suffering the most."

With global temperatures rising and a chunk of Pakistan the size of the United Kingdom recently under water, Guterres lashed out at fossil fuel companies and the "suicidal war against nature."

He called on developed economies to tax profits from fossil fuels and dedicate the funds both to compensate for damage from climate change and to help people struggling with high prices.

"Let's tell it like it is — Our world is addicted to fossil fuels. It's time for an intervention. We need to hold fossil fuel companies and their enablers to account," Guterres said.

The summit still saw disruption due

WITH GLOBAL TEMPERATURES RISING AND A CHUNK OF PAKISTAN THE SIZE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM RECENTLY UNDER WATER, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ANTONIO GUTERRES LASHED OUT AT FOSSIL FUEL COMPANIES AND THE 'SUICIDAL WAR AGAINST NATURE'

to the death of Queen Elizabeth II, with President Joe Biden of the United States, by tradition the second speaker on the opening day, instead due to speak on Wednesday.

Just as leaders huddled at the UN about the war in Ukraine, Russian-backed forces announced they were going ahead with a move the West had long warned against — referendums on annexation by Moscow.

French President Emmanuel Macron described Russia's war as "a return to a new age of imperialism and colonies" and warned that inaction risked "tearing down the global order without which peace is not possible."

"It's not a matter of choosing one side between East and West, or North or South. It's a matter of responsibility" to the UN Charter, he said.

"Beyond the war, there is a risk of division in the world for reasons both direct and indirect from the conflict."

But a number of developing nations have resisted Western calls to punish Russia and have voiced unease about the billions of dollars being spent on weapons for Ukraine.

"Africa has suffered enough from the burden of history," said Senegalese President Macky Sall, the current chair of the African Union, as he pleaded for a "negotiated solution" in Ukraine.

"It does not want to be the breeding ground of a new cold war."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has fashioned himself as a mediator, called for an end to the war that recognises Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"Together, we need to find a reasonably practical diplomatic solution that will give both sides a dignified way out of the crisis," Erdogan told the General Assembly.

The new Philippine president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, also alluded to tensions between the United States and China.

"In Asia, our hard-won peace and stability is under threat by increasing strategic and ideological tensions," he said.

Biden supports the Iran accord, under which Tehran drastically scaled back nuclear work in return for sanctions relief.

But Macron said Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi repeated his demand for "guarantees" a future US leader will not ditch the deal, a promise the Biden administration considers impossible.

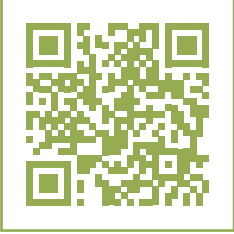
— AFP



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska pose for photos before a meeting at the UN headquarters. - Reuters

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Top seeds fall on day of Tokyo shocks

TOKYO: Top seed Paula Badosa joined US Open semifinalist Caroline Garcia and Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina in making shock early exits from the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Wednesday.

World number four Badosa lost 6-3, 6-2 to fast-rising Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen, failing to hit a single ace and losing seven straight games.

Badosa, who had a bye into the second round, compounded a miserable evening in the Japanese capital by swatting a return straight into the ground on match point.

The 19-year-old Zheng, who reached the last 32 at the US Open, said her win over Badosa was “a big jump” after beginning the year ranked number 126 in the world.

“There was a lot of emotion there on court — even though the score was like this, it wasn’t an easy win,” said Zheng, who will play American Claire Liu in the quarterfinals.

“I always know that I have the level to be here — it’s just that I have to show up on court in the tournament.”

Number two seed Garcia put up a fight but still crashed out in her first match, squandering a match point to be ousted 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5) by China’s Zhang Shuai.

France’s Garcia has been in red-hot form, winning the Cincinnati Masters last month before reaching her first Grand Slam semifinal at Flushing Meadows two weeks ago.

But she came up short against world number 28 Zhang in Tokyo despite hitting 27 aces — the best on the WTA tour this year — and holding a match point at 5-4 in the second set.

Zhang fought back to level the match via a tiebreak before munching on a sandwich during the changeover.

It seemed to energise Zhang as she outlasted Garcia in the final set, taking it on her second match point when the Frenchwoman hit long after two hours and 30 minutes.

“It was not the best tennis I can play but I really tried hard and kept



Zheng Qinwen of China hits a return against Paula Badosa of Spain on day three of the Pan Pacific Open tournament in Tokyo. — AFP



Garbine Muguruza of Spain hits a return against Despina Papamichail of Greece on day three of the Pan Pacific Open tournament in Tokyo. — AFP



Zhang Shuai of China hits a return against Caroline Garcia of France during their singles match on day three of the Pan Pacific Open tournament in Tokyo. — AFP

fighting,” said Garcia.

“She just got better at the end and it was a few points here and there.”

Zhang will now face either sixth seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic or Croatia’s Petra Martic in the quarterfinals.

HECTIC SCHEDULE

Kazakhstan’s Rybakina lost 6-2, 6-4 to Russia’s Liudmila Samsonova just one day after arriving in Tokyo as a late wild card.

Rybakina, who was drafted in when countrywoman Yulia Putintseva tested positive for Covid, said her hectic schedule had been “very tough”.

“I felt that if I stayed here for maybe a few more days it would be much better, especially as I was closer in the second set so I started to play better and better,” she said.

“But I just came from another tournament and I played a lot, so it was a question of it being not easy physically.”

Number three seed Garbine Muguruza advanced with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Greek qualifier Despina Papamichail.

The two-time Grand Slam champion said she wanted to end a “roller-coaster” season with “a different feeling”, and will face Samsonova or Xinyu Wang in the quarterfinals.

“I think also trying and trying and trying, at some point I will get rewarded,” said former world number one Muguruza.

Japan’s Naomi Osaka will return to action on Thursday when she faces Brazil’s Beatriz Haddad Maia in the second round.

Osaka advanced when her first-round opponent, Australia’s Daria Saville, retired after tearing an anterior cruciate ligament in her knee just seven minutes into their match on Tuesday. — AFP

WTA PAN PACIFIC OPEN RESULTS

Second round
Zheng Qinwen (CHN) bt Paula Badosa (ESP) x1)
6-3, 6-2; Garbine Muguruza (ESP x3) bt Despina Papamichail (GRE) 6-4, 6-2; Zhang Shuai (CHN) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA x2) 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5); Claire Liu (USA) bt Elise Mertens (BEL) 6-4, 6-1
First round: Liudmila Samsonova bt Elena Rybakina (KAZ x8) 6-2, 6-4

AL RAWAS HONOURS AL MUHANNAD FOR THE FIRST MEDAL IN TAEKWONDO



Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary for Sports and Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, received the national taekwondo team player Al Muhannad bin Tawfiq al Balushi, for achieving the first bronze medal for Oman in taekwondo in the Asian Junior and Youth Championships in the 41 kg category in Vietnam, among 350 players representing 35 countries.

OMAN CHESS TEAM BEGINS PREPARATION FOR ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP



The Oman national chess team started the internal camp at Al Amal Club, led by Iranian coach Mersad Khoda, with the participation of 10 players, in preparation for the Asian Amateur Chess Championship, to be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher from September 29 to October 6. The men’s team includes Salem al Omari, Salem Shammass, Amer al Ma’ashani, Hamoud al Busaidi and Mani al Kathiri. The women’s team includes Anaat al Eisa, Rawan al Balushi, Maria al Balushi, Al Anoud al Ghafri and Afra al Balushi.



Green, Wade guide Australia to four-wicket win

MOHALI, India: Matthew Wade steered Australia to a four wicket victory over India after a blistering knock by Cameron Green in the opening game of the three match Twenty20 series in Mohali on Tuesday.

Wade's unbeaten 45 off 21 helped the visitors chase down India's mammoth 209 runs with four balls remaining after Australia had stuttered briefly in the middle overs following quick losses.

But it was the all-rounder Green, who replaced star batsman David Warner for the India tour, who laid the foundation for the high score run chase, smashing 61 off 30 balls.

Green, the man of the match, smashed eight fours and four sixes after the Aussies lost skipper Aaron Finch for 22 in the third over. The right-hand all-rounder stitched a 70-run partnership with Steve Smith before he was caught by Virat Kohli off Axar Patel. Smith with 35 off 25 departed in the next over followed by Glenn Maxwell's wicket in the same over for one.

However, Wade displayed a powerful batting performance, hitting six fours and two sixes helping the visitors to chase down the target in the 19th over.

Tim David, who made his Twenty20 debut, scored 18 off 14 balls while Josh Inglis made 17 off 10 balls.

Pat Cummins hit the winning shot off Yuzvendra Chahal to reach 211-6. Patel picked three for 17 while Umesh Yadav took 2 wickets for 27.

It was Australia's second highest successful chase in the white-ball format and highest against India.

"At this ground it didn't worry us too much. Anywhere between 12-14 an over at the back end on a wicket like this and an outfield like this we back ourselves to get them," Wade said.

In the first half, the visitors won the toss and opted to field, with all-rounder Hardik Pandya smashing a rapid 71 to help the hosts post a challenging total of 208-6. Opener KL Rahul also made a half-century while Suryakumar Yadav hit 46.

The teams will meet on Friday for the second Twenty20 match in Nagpur. — AFP

Brief scores

India 208-6, 20 overs (KL Rahul 55, S Yadav 46, H Pandya 71 not out; Ellis 3-30, Hazlewood 2-39)

Australia 211-6, 19.2 overs (C Green 61, S Smith 35, A Finch 22, Wade 45 not out; A Patel 3-17, U Yadav 2-27)

England win T20 on first Pakistan tour in 17 years

KARACHI: A new-look England side took the opening Twenty20 international by six wickets in Karachi on Tuesday, capping their return to Pakistan after 17 years with a memorable victory.

Opener Alex Hales celebrated his return to the England team with a 40-ball 53 to anchor England's chase of a modest 159-run target in 19.2 overs.

Hales was banned in April 2019 after a failed recreational drug test.

The win gives England a 1-0 lead in the seven-match series.

Pakistan opener Mohammad Rizwan scored 46-ball 68 to help the hosts to 158-7 in their 20 overs after England sent them in to bat at a capacity National stadium.

Pakistan's players wore a special kit on which their names and numbers are shown submerged in water, to show solidarity with victims of the floods in the country.

England's players wore black armbands as a tribute to Queen Elizabeth II who died earlier this month.

Hales, recalled from exile after injury ruled out Jonny Bairstow, smashed seven boundaries and added 55 for the fourth wicket with Harry Brook who finished on 42 not out.

Brook, one of seven England players to appear in this year's Pakistan Super League, cracked seven boundaries in a robust 25-ball knock.

Ben Duckett (21), Dawid Malan (20) and Phil Salt (ten) were other England contributors.

Moeen Ali, standing in for injured tour skipper Jos Buttler, praised his bowlers for pulling back Pakistan from 87-1 after 10 overs.

"It's a brilliant performance," said Ali. "We pulled the game back really well. A lot of praise to the



England's Alex Hales plays a shot during the first Twenty20 international match between Pakistan and England at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi. — AFP

bowlers who set it up nicely for our batters. Those crucial wickets around the 10th over made a difference.

"It wasn't an easy wicket for the new batters. Luke Wood and Adil Rashid were excellent."

Azam said his side lost momentum in the second half of the innings.

"The way we played the first power-play was great," said Azam. "After 10 overs, there was a swing of momentum, which you have to credit England for, especially Rashid."

Pakistan's innings was once again held by Rizwan.

Rizwan, top run-getter in the Asia Cup earlier this month with 281, knocked six boundaries and two sixes and put on 85 for the first wicket with skipper Babar Azam (31) after England won the toss and fielded.

Iftikhar Ahmed hit three sixes in his 17-ball 28 but Pakistan managed just 71 runs in the last 10 overs, losing six wickets.

Debutant Shan Masood failed with just seven runs while Haider Ali scored 11.

England debutant paceman Luke Wood finished with 3-24, while spinner Adil Rashid took 2-27.

The remaining matches are in Karachi (September 22, 23, 25) and in Lahore (September 28, 30 and October 2). — AFP

Brief scores

Pakistan 158-7 in 20 overs (Mohammad Rizwan 68, Babar Azam 31, Iftikhar Ahmed 28; L Wood 3-24, Adil Rashid 2-27)

England 160-4 in 19.2 overs (A Hales 53, H Brook 42 not out; Usman Qadir 2-36)

England won by six wickets.

E-Sports, the future sport course

MUSCAT: E-sports, the future sport course, organised by Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) for a period of 3 days, will conclude on Thursday, with the participation of 27 participants from Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), sports federations, and a number of club members, interested parties and E-Sports practitioners, in cooperation with OOC for games and e-sports.

The session was attended by Asma al Yahya, member of Oman for E-Sports — member of Women Sports Committee of Arab Federation for E-Sports. The importance of the course lies in spreading cultural awareness about e-sports due to the growing interest in it during the past few years and as one of the official sports recognised in many countries of the world. It is an important marketing channel for consumer brands. It positively affects physical activity, and e-sports help players to make decisions and implement responses more quickly, and enhance social and emotional learning skills.

On Thursday, the most important risks to the e-sports player will be discussed, and the



recommendations put forward in scientific research to manage these risks in a way that improves performance and enhances health. E-sports committee, the date of its publication and objectives, will also be discussed, in addition to addressing the relationship between physical sports and e-sports.

On Wednesday, the experiences of two players of the national team for games and e-sports, Imran al Dhahili and Sarah al Amri, were reviewed. They talked about the beginning of their sports career, their most important international participations and achievements, as well as the challenges facing the

e-sports player, and finally their future ambitions in the game.

Al Yahya also touched on the most important psychological factors facing players, their causes and sources, in addition to finding and developing strategies to deal with them. And there was talk about the e-sports industry, which means the participation of a group of sectors in order to activate and serve e-sports activity and push the wheel of the economy in this type of sports, as well as the parties involved in the industry.

At the end of the course, participants will acquire many skills and scientific information about electronic sports, familiarity with the methods of their

manufacture, the most common risks for players and ways to prevent them. The course also provides the opportunity for them to meet and activate joint cooperation between them in the field of games and e-sports.

The OOC, in its last meeting, approved four training courses within the agenda of OOA for the fourth quarter of 2022, namely the e-sports course, the future sport, and the course of physical activity and community health, which will be held in October. In addition, two courses will be organised in November, namely: Sports Governance, and the School Sports Tournament as one of the tributaries of Oman sports.

Sohar Port to support youth in upcoming half marathon

SUHAR: Leading the generations of tomorrow, SOHAR Port and Freezone will sponsor 300 students and 20 employees at the upcoming Sohar Half Marathon, taking place on September 23. Organised by Excellence Performance, the Sohar Half Marathon aims to enrich the youth of the Al Batinah North Governorate and promote a healthy and active lifestyle. SOHAR will sponsor 50 students from Grade 7 and 8 to participate in the 3-km race, 150 students from Grade 9 and above to take part in the 10-km race, and 100 students from colleges and universities in the governorate to enter the Sohar Half Marathon event.

Mohsin al Jabri, Executive Manager — Corporate Affairs, said, "We are very proud to support the community and enriching the lives of youth in Oman. Being able to offer 300 students the chance to take part in the Sohar Half Marathon forms a key component in our ongoing student development,



health and sports programmes for schools, and we hope that the event inspires runners of all ages to focus on their health and be more active."

Throughout the year, SOHAR gives back to the community through various activities and initiatives that are in line with the company's corporate social responsibility programme.

ARAB CORPORATE FOOTBALL TO BE HELD IN 2023

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The first Arab corporate football cup will be held in 2023 and an agreement was signed between the International Socca Federation and two of its members, Sport Makers from the Sultanate of Oman, and 2 Brothers Group from the Kingdom of Morocco.

The signing of the agreement held in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, coincided with the organisation of the third edition of the Socca World Cup 2022 in the Hungarian capital.

The agreement was signed from International Socca Federation by the founder and President David Leone while the other side was signed by Imad Mahassine, CEO of 2 Brothers Group and Waleed al Obaidani, founder and CEO of Sports Makers, with attendance of Tom Nash, Tournament Director for the ISF.

The agreement aims to organise the first Arab Football Corporate Cup for employees in Morocco, in early 2023. The International Socca Federation assigned the task of supervising and organising the competition to 2 Brothers Group



from Morocco and Sport Makers from Oman, for their prominent role in the development of sports

competitions for the employees of companies in both countries and their contribution to the success

of the World Cups organised by the International Socca Federation since 2018.

2 Brothers Group is the leading company in creating and organising corporate events in Morocco. Over the course of more than 10 years since its establishment, the group has succeeded in making a leap in the quality and volume of major corporate sporting events in Morocco, by involving more than 18,000 participants, representing more than 430 companies – national and multinational – in various sports competitions. It

is now recognised as the leading company in the management and execution of corporate sporting events in Morocco and Africa, and one of the most prominent players in this field in the Arab world.

On the Arab Gulf level, Sport Makers is one of the leading companies in activating corporate and amateur sports in Oman and the Arab Gulf states and has a proven track record in managing and organising local tournaments and international participations representing Oman in corporate and amateur world championships.

Al Harthy relishing Spa return

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS:

Ahmad al Harthy returns to the scene of the biggest race victory of his glittering motor racing career this coming weekend, September 24 and 25, when the European Le Mans Series arrives at Belgium's Spa-Francorchamps for the penultimate round of the 2022 season.

The Omani sportsman, who is part way through his maiden campaign in the prestigious ELMS, is determined to climb back up the LMGTE championship standings after a frustrating outing at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya last time out with Oman Racing.

Having qualified the No 69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE on pole position for the fourth round of the season, contact in hour two of the four-hour encounter led to damage and an unscheduled pit-stop which wrecked the squad's podium challenge. Instead, they had to settle for 10th position.

Al Harthy, who is partnered by British driver Sam De Haan and Danish ace Marco Sorensen, is hungrier than ever to return to



winning ways as the ELMS season heads into its latter stages. The trio, of course, secured a faultless first LMGTE class victory at Italian track Imola in May.

Spa-Francorchamps has long been a favourite track for Al Harthy, equally it is a track which holds incredible memories for the multiple champion racer – the biggest being his and Oman Racing's win in the Pro-Am class at the Total 24 Hours of Spa back in 2019.

The remarkable victory, which came following an enforced pitlane start, was the springboard from which Al Harthy claimed his second Pro-Am title in the then Blancpain Endurance Cup, now

known as the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe Powered by AWS Endurance Cup.

Two years prior, Al Harthy and Oman Racing sealed their first Pro-Am crown in Blancpain with a second place finish during the Spa round. More recently, in 2020, Al Harthy won at Spa on his debut in the International GT Open.

"We have many good memories from racing at Spa, the highlight being the win in the 24-hour race back in 2019", said the Omani, who is supported by the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Sohar International Bank, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS, "It's an incredible track

and one where we have always gone well, so I'm hopefully we can continue that this weekend in European Le Mans.

"Barcelona was disappointing in the end, we definitely had the capability of finishing on the podium, so now we're all more determined than ever to hit back. The contact we had in the previous round was damaging to our championship, so the focus now is on trying to win the LMGTE class this Sunday and then see where we are going into the final round in Portugal in October."

Free practice at Spa-Francorchamps will take place on September 23, ahead of a standalone session for Bronze graded drivers such as Al Harthy, before a second practice run on September 24, which will precede qualifying – the latter starting at 14.25 local time.

On September 25, round five of the European Le Mans Series will begin at 11.30 local time with live streaming and live timing available at <https://live.europeanlemansseries.com/en/>



Bank Muscat opens green sports fields in Suwaiq, Samayil

MUSCAT: In line with the bank's commitment to community development and promoting Oman as a sporting nation, Bank Muscat continues to hand over green sports fields across the Sultanate of Oman. Recently, the bank inaugurated the Al Ghalila Sports and Cultural Team's green sports field in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq at an event held under the auspices of Shaikh Sultan bin Mansour al Ghufaili, Wali of Al Suwaiq, and in the presence of Abdul Rahman bin Abdullah al Shezawi, Regional Manager – South Al Batinah, Bank Muscat.

The bank also inaugurated a second new green sports field for the Al Samadi Sports Team at a function held under the auspices of Salim bin Ali al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, and in the presence of Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager, Bank Muscat.

Taya Eid Bait Sabeea said the bank's landmark CSR programme, Green Sports, was continuing to achieve great success in creating sustainable green spaces across Oman. He congratulated the Al Samadi Sports Team and their members for their achievement. He added that new sports fields are also being used by local communities for a number of activities apart from sports and pointed out how these new facilities are helping improve community bonding and the harnessing of the talents of Omani youth across the country.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Al Ghalila Sports and Cultural Team's Green Sports field in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, Abdul Rahman bin Abdullah al Shezawi, Regional Manager – South Al Batinah, Bank Muscat, expressed his warm wishes to the team and the community for completing their project. He hoped that it would prove to be an incubator to develop the skills of the team members and other affiliates, and called on everyone in the community to make the best use of the facilities.

Bank Muscat recently announced the opening of 4 Green Sports fields in the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah. The projects included greening of football pitches and lighting as part of the well-known CSR programme, which was launched in 2012.

The bank also recently announced the 20 winners of the programme for 2022, having increased the number of beneficiary teams annually from the previous year on the occasion of the programme's 10th anniversary.

Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programmes in Oman, which provides support to local sports teams as part of the bank's efforts to develop sports infrastructure in Omani sports and provide green spaces throughout the Sultanate of Oman.



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New guidebook adds to ease of doing business in Oman



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched on Wednesday, September 2022, a new guidebook that offers local and international investors high levels of ease and convenience when doing business in the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch was held in the presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and a number of high-level dignitaries and officials of the ministry.

It serves as a one-stop reference manual designed to help investors as well as the business community to access as many as 180 services, distributed across 17 section-heads, provided by the ministry via its Invest Easy portal. The guidebook explains the pathway for accessing the ministry's services digitally. It spells out eight basic steps when accessing any service: the prescribed standards, required documentation, service workflow diagram, average time to generate a successful response, service fees and payment mechanism, other channels that provide the same service, working hours, contact points, and electronic contract documentation services.

During the meeting, he reviewed the electronic contract documentation service that was

launched earlier in the year, which allows the completion of the investor's transaction electronically via video communication, and the signing of contracts electronically from anywhere through the "Invest Easy" portal, without the need for investors to attend the ministry.

This service is an important and advanced step in facilitating business and investment. It aims to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's international indicators with regard to the ease of starting a business. It also contributes to facilitating commercial institutions and companies wishing to sell their shares, transfer the ownership of the commercial registry to another investor, or enter a partner in the commercial registry.

During the meeting, officials reviewed the electronic contract documentation service, which was launched earlier in the year.

It enables the completion of the investor's transaction electronically via video call, and the signing of contracts electronically from anywhere through the "Invest Easily" portal, without the need for investors to come personally to the ministry.

This feature is an important step in facilitating business and investment, as it aims to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's international indicators regarding the ease of starting a business, and also contributes to facilitating the establishment of

commercial institutions and companies wishing to sell their shares, transfer ownership of the Commercial Register to another investor, or enter a partner in the Commercial Register.

The meeting dealt with the Charter of Governance of Closed Commercial Companies, through which the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion seeks in cooperation with the Oman Centre for Governance and Sustainability to urge companies to invest optimally and appropriately for their capabilities and resources; by creating a working environment based on responsibility, control and commitment, and based on clarity and transparency, whether in determining their objectives and strategic plans, or in the statement of the rights and obligations of each of its entities, or in the management of its relationship with investors.

Also during the meeting, the Call Centre at the ministry provided an overview of its services in response to queries from businesses and investors. The Call Centre is also equipped to help callers complete some services related to their applications submitted electronically. The centres handled a total of 13,500 calls

during the first six months of this year. Importantly, the guidebook and other services are part of the requirements of the National Programme for the Digital Economy and the executive plan of the government digital

transformation programme 2021-2025 approved by the Council of Ministers.

It comes within the framework of the comprehensive development of the services provided by the ministry,

transforming all its services into electronic services, saving time and effort for business owners and investors and creating a stimulating investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.

شركة الفجر العالمية س.م.ع.ع. AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG				
PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN				
Consolidated Audited Financial Results for the year ended 30 June 2022				
Chairman's Report		Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income		
I have great pleasure in presenting to you on behalf of the Board of Directors the activities and performance of the Al Fajar Al Alamia Company SAOG ("the Parent Company") and its subsidiaries ("the Group") for the year ended 30 June 2022.				
Operating Results This year's results were way less than the expectation, and the Company saw a very tough year on all levels. The Covid 19 pandemic situation and the Russian and Ukraine war, plus other factors, have significantly impacted our business for the current year.				
The lack of availability of primary raw materials and a significant increase in prices has led to competition pressure and squeezed margins in our industry, both the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE. The cash flow situation was also not good and severely impacted the operation.				
Your Group closed the year at a record net loss of RO 5.9 million against net profit RO 0.205 million in the previous year. Around 44% of the year's loss was in the form of provisioning for expected credit loss. Another 30% of the recorded loss was from the high-interest cost that the Company bears due to the high leverage situation. The Board has already started the initiatives to correct both matters, adjust the account receivables, and leverage to a more normal level.				
The total consolidated revenue for the year was RO 16.48 million (previous year – RO 19.544 million), and the Parent Company achieved revenue of RO 6.204 million (previous year – RO 6.619 million). Gross profit at the consolidated level was RO 1.238 million (previous year 3.588 million), and Parent Company was RO 1.422 million (previous year 1.554 million).				
Consolidated net loss after tax was RO 5.908 million (previous year profit of RO 0.205 million), and the Parent Company's net loss was RO 0.168 million (previous year profit of RO 0.452 million). The current year's loss is mainly due to the reasons explained above.				
As highlighted above, the main reasons for this significant loss are				
a) Reduction in Revenues by 16% mainly due to non-availability of raw material in last quarter and stoppage of blasting for nonpayment clients.				
b) Provisions for ECL of RO 2.6 million to fully comply with the accounting standards as the Company has decided to go legal with all the clients who defaulted in payments. This action resulted in a need to build up an adequate Expected Credit Loss per the IFRS standards.				
c) Finance cost of RO 1.79 million. And that attributed to the high financial leverage the Company has, an overrun of costs, and the noncompletion of some of the significant projects, which resulted in a need to restructure some of the borrowings for longer terms and upset the plans to reduce the Bank borrowings.				
d) Gross profit decreased by 65% due to significant increase in raw material prices.				
e) The variable cost is increased by 6% overall, mainly due to the D&B business on account of high raw material prices. Fixed cost decreased by 3%, mainly due to cost-cutting measures. However, overall GP reduced due to lower turnover and the selling price not increasing due to competition in the market.				
Details of the consolidated performance of the Group for the year and comparison with the previous year's figures are shown in the Management Discussion and Analysis Report forming part of this Annual Report.				
Operations Summary The slowdown and constraints highly impacted your company's business during the Covid 19 Pandemic; it was unfortunate that the pandemic occurred when the company started significant investments and mobilized big financial resources for these investments. The impact of the pandemic led to a substantial delay in the completion and realization of these projects.				
Further, three other main external factors have also shed a significant impact on the company's performance over the past two years, and these are:				
a) The Beirut Port explosion pushed the regulators and operators in the industry to strengthen the safety requirements that come with a justified cost.				
b) The war between Russia and Ukraine, the two countries are significant exporters of the raw material for our business. The price of the primary raw material we use has increased by 300%; it was difficult to pass this price forward to the end user in some cases as some of the contracts are on an annual basis.				
c) The shipping and insurance costs have increased significantly due to the pandemic impact and the unstable political situation in several parts of the world.				
Your Board has sensed the risks and the challenging situation that the company is experiencing at an early stage and takes the liberty to get involved more than usual to protect the shareholders' interest and ensure that the company maintains its leading position in the market and financials.				
The Board launched a full assessment and review of the actions and decisions taken in the past five years to ensure full compliance with all requirements and reassess the investments and expansions committed to deciding how to move forward with each of them in light of the current developments.				
The Board is applying a whole Zoom-in approach and working closely with the executive management to analyze and study all the major cases and decisions that have impacted the current situation in the company.				
The Future The management and the Board are cooperating to re-organize the company and review all its exposures and investments to re-align them to the company's and its shareholders' best interest.				
Both Management and Board are confident that the businesses in which the company operates have a promising and bright future. The three sectors of operation (production of Explosives, Drilling and Blasting, and Mining) offer excellent growth and a positive outlook. But noncompletion of some of the company's expansions and projects has caused the company to experience a challenging situation.				
The Board of Directors has complete confidence in the ability to put the company back on track of profitability. Accordingly, it has formed Steering Committee to control the restructuring plan approved by the Board. The Steering Committee works closely with the management to address all operational matters and provide support in overseeing the operational and financials from a strategic perspective.				
There is high requirement of aggregate but rates are under pressure because of the large volumes available in the market. Currently we are selling aggregate to Qatar and Bangladesh. We are developing two more markets and, hopefully, once the pandemic is under control, we shall increase sales at higher rates.				
The gypsum business is also currently at a subdued level because most of the large users of this product are under lock down or restrictions due to the pandemic. The extremely high increase in shipping rates have also depressed the market. The Management, however, expects excellent future for this business once the pandemic is under control and the markets fully open up.				
Mineral Trading Division: During the Financial Year under reference, we started a division to trade in minerals, especially rock products. The idea was to take materials from those quarries who were not paying us on time against our drilling & blasting services. The Division has performed well and have managed to sell more than 1 million tonnes of aggregate to Bangladesh. The profitability is minimal because we are trading in the open market but this initiative has assisted in reducing a few long overdue receivables.				
Organisation I am happy to report that Omani nationals are currently working at various levels of operation of the Group and your Board and management take all efforts to induct more Omanis in all aspects of the Group's operations.				
Other Information The Corporate Governance Report for the year forms part of this Annual Report. Your Board is fully committed to ensuring compliance with all the applicable laws, rules and regulations of the Sultanate of Oman.				
Your Group is operating in a safe and efficient manner in accordance with the Internal Operations and Safety Manuals. There were no major health, safety and environmental issues during the year.				
Acknowledgements On behalf of the Board of Directors, I sincerely thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimur and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for their successful and continued efforts to improve development and prosperity within the country. I also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police for their valuable cooperation and support.				
To conduct our business, we are dependent on our customers, bankers, trading partners and shareholders. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of them for all the support that they have extended to us.				
On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank each and every one of the Al Fajar Group employees and management of the Group for their commitment and dedication during this Pandemic period and challenging market conditions.				
Haythem Mahmood Abd A-Nabi Macki Chairman				
Note The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.				

Construction work begins on tuna, sardines canning complex in Duqm

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

With the aim to localise supply chains and to achieve the company's strategy to develop In-Country Value (ICV), the International Seafood Company, a subsidiary of Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), has commenced the construction of

a tuna and sardines canning and other seafood products complex valued at RO 14 million in Duqm. The complex is being built within the Fisheries Industries Zone (FIZ), next to the upcoming Duqm Fisheries Harbour, in Duqm as part of a land usufruct signed with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

The complex, designed in accordance with the highest international quality and food safety standards and specifications, will have a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes annually, subject to future expansion and scheduled for commercial operations in the first quarter of 2024.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Tulip Inn Majan Hotel Salalah holds first team gathering



SALALAH: The Tulip Inn Majan Hotel Salalah had celebrated their first team gathering organised by the Associates Welfare Committee to recognise and award the team who exerted tremendous efforts and delivered a phenomenal job during the pre-opening stage and khareef season. Each associate was facilitated with certificate of recognition and a welcome goodie pack.

There was a full presentation about the owning company

and the Louvre Hotels Group followed by celebrating the birthdays, awards distribution for employee of the month, achievement award, the best associate room award and last but not the least the most promising new comer award.

The event ended with scrumptious snacks prepared by the culinary team. All team members were very happy about being acknowledged their efforts under the wise leadership of the General Manager Mark Abboud.

Lulu Hypermarket conducts HSE training programme for staff

MUSCAT: Lulu Hypermarket recently organised a HSE training for health & safety officers from their hypermarkets across Oman. The objective of the session was to impart a sound health & safety programme to protect customers and workers at the outlets.

The training was aimed at providing an awareness of the common workplace hazards, risks and safety controls and as a result minimise workplace injuries which cause significant challenges to both organisation and for the workers.

The three-day event, themed as 'IOSH - Managing Safely', educated the participants on the importance of health and safety at workplace and associated workplace benefits.

The programme also taught the learners about their core responsibilities and guided them on how to assess and react to hazardous situations. The 3-day training programme was held at the Oman National Training Institute premises in Al Khuwair.

The training programme is one of the many initiatives and that have been devised as a part of the continuous development programmes Lulu Hypermarket



imparts to their work force.

"The 'IOSH - Managing Safely' programme has been a result of extensive planning and is making steady progress, providing the building blocks to address some pertinent issues in our operations.

The safety programme has made an impressive start and is moving in line with international best practices. I commend the HSE Department on their work and hope that they build on the foundations that have been laid to making their services future ready", said Shabeer K A, Regional Director, Lulu Oman.

Twenty-four safety officers from Lulu hypermarkets across Oman participated in the workshop. Upon completion of the course the participants obtained certificates approved and validated by Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).

The training encompassed several key areas which included ensuring that the staff know how to work safely and without risks to health, develop a positive health and safety culture, where safe and healthy working, meeting your legal duty to protect the health and safety of your employees and

customers, thereby equipping them with competence to manage health and safety concerns.

Speaking at the event Nasr bin Salim al Maawali, General Manager- HR at Lulu Group, said that "the organisation has made a commendable effort by implementing the programme — 'IOSH- Managing safely' and this will improve emergency readiness at the stores. I'm delighted to be a part of this efficient team who knows the value and convenience they will bring to the system. I look forward to more exciting developments".

ahli islamic announces easy and convenient financing offers

MUSCAT: Mindful of the changing needs and requirements of the local market, ahli islamic has announced a bouquet of easy and convenient financing offers to partner in fulfilling its customers' personal responsibilities.

From mortgage-free auto finance to home and personal finance, ahli islamic presents its broad range of Sharia-compliant financing products with attractive profit rates.

While the key objective behind the new scheme is to facilitate financial opportunities for retail customers, ahli islamic is also utilising this platform to demonstrate its commitment to uphold its service standards of 'partnering' with the customer, instead of merely financing.

This will translate into simple financing procedures and convenient options for its growing customer base.

As per the new offer, customers looking for mortgage-free auto financing can choose repayment periods of up to 10 years, with the advantage of a competitive profit

rate starting from only 3.49 per cent. Post-date cheques financing is also available with periods of up to 7 years with profit rates starting from only 4.99 per cent. As for home and personal finance, the profit rate starts from only 4.75 per cent. Commenting on the new finance package and the ahli islamic's intent to partner with customers in fulfilling their commitments, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic, said, "As a responsive and responsible corporate entity, it is our duty to engage with our customers on a professionalised basis. Our core objective is to partner with our target group and create financial avenues for them to feel secure and bold when budgeting and taking purchase decisions.

Our increased reliance on customer feedback and market trends has demonstrated the need for fiscal help in the wake of a gradual economic recovery after the protracted pandemic slowdown. While there have been significant changes in consumer behaviour brought on by the pandemic, the months following have exemplified people's desire to get back to life as they knew it, with the comfort of easy finances to realise their aspirations."

Further, underscoring ahli islamic's motto of 'truth and transparency in banking', Al Rawahi pointed out that the Bank has adopted measures and standards to enhance customers' confidence in their fiscal abilities and instil a sense of security in their everyday dealings.



Lexus ES offers luxury experience

MUSCAT: The Lexus ES is a luxurious sedan that offers luxury enthusiasts numerous opportunities to make the most of every journey. The Lexus ES is designed to make instant impressions. Its range of advanced technology, safety features and inspiring luxury make the ES one of the most desired luxury vehicles on the road.

The Lexus ES is available with two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque. While the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The class-leading ES hybrid electric model is available with batteries that come with 8 years /160,000 Kms warranty and is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord. Furthermore, it hosts number of



advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The ES300h offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage.

The powerful and aggressive looking Lexus ES350 F SPORT model, further enhances the driving excitement so that drivers can enjoy a sense of oneness with the car, born of its ability to respond immediately to driving enthusiasts' intentions in various situations. In addition to a thrilling exterior that highlights its bold and aggressive personality, the Lexus ES350 FSPORT features numerous such as a retuned suspension,

19-inch wheels and tyres, and unique aluminium interior trim that gives the machine a more dynamic look and feel.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA. For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Lexus Showroom.

Marriott to launch Four Points by Sheraton brand in Oman

MUSCAT: Leading international hospitality chain Marriott International has signed an agreement with an Omani group to launch its Four Points by Sheraton brand, a midscale select-service marque, in the Sultanate of Oman. The new Four Points by Sheraton Muscat is due to contribute 201 keys to Marriott's Middle Eastern capacity when it arrives in Q1 2024.

The hotel group is developing the Omani capital site in partnership with Mustafa

Sultan Enterprises, with Valor Hospitality Partners appointed as the property's manager. Four Points by Sheraton Muscat will offer a centralised location for both business and leisure travellers in the city's upscale Qurum suburb. The hotel will offer visitors ballroom and conference facilities, leisure and fitness amenities, and multiple food and beverage venues.

Marriott is accelerating its development in Oman with at least three other high end projects



in the works: Aloft Muscat, St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort and Courtyard by Marriott Nizwa Resort.

Marriott International's vice president, development – UAE and

Oman, Saahil Lalit, commented: "We are excited to debut the Four Points by Sheraton brand in Oman and further strengthen our relationship with Valor Hospitality and Mustafa Sultan Enterprises. Four Points is one of the fastest growing hospitality brands in the world and we are continuing to see great opportunities to expand the brand's portfolio across the Middle East."

Julien Bergue, co-founder and managing partner, Valor Hospitality Middle East and CIS,

said: "It gives me great pleasure to announce our first franchise collaboration with Marriott International in the Middle East as we expand our third-party hotel management services in the region. We are honoured to have Mustafa Sultan Enterprises, a trusted and established owner, for our first property in Oman. We are working closely with the ownership and Marriott International on the full renovation plan."

Shabeer Mustafa Sultan,

chairman of Mustafa Sultan Enterprises, added: "We are thrilled to work with Valor Hospitality and Marriott International to bring the Four Points by Sheraton brand to Oman. This collaboration points to a full renovation and rebranding investment that supports our mission to create long-term value for the tourism, real estate and leisure sectors across Oman. It also supports the vision of Oman's leaders, particularly in the upscale hotel segment."



New Securities Law paves way for SME exchange, ETFs

VINOD NAIR

MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Capital Market Authority on Wednesday discussed the New Securities Law issued by Royal Decree 46/2022 earlier this year. The Law seeks to support Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by a creating stock exchange to establish or provide a real market or electronic system bringing together the buyers and sellers of the shares or securities of SMEs.

The Consumer Consumers Protection Fund will help compensate the consumers dealing with such entities in the event of losses to their assets kept with them. Members of the fund are the entities operating in the field of securities.

Abdullah Salim al Salmi, the Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), said the



law seeks to protect the consumers in the Omani capital market and ensure a financing environment with multiple options and a high ability to attract local and foreign capital through enhancing the public's confidence.

Speaking to the media persons, Salmi said that the plan for the SME is in the first stage of market analysis

and the project will start in 2023. The press conference revealed that the regulations are ready for the Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) are ready and will be available for public consultation in the first quarter of 2023.

He said that the law focuses on the companies operating in the field of securities, clearing,

custodianship as well as derivatives and other products.

On the key features of the law, Salmi said the law copes with the development of the technological revolution and provides legal coverage related to the requirements of Fintech, which would contribute, to providing financial support for

the economic sectors employing innovative financial solutions.

The law confers on the CMA the power to regulate innovative funding and the approval of implementation of technology and virtual and digital investments and allow for expanding funding options through new products and services such as warehouse receipts, derivatives, etc.

He said that the laws created the required legislative infrastructure to ensure the independence of the MSX from the CMA and to proceed as a self-regulated institution. The law enabled the stock exchange to regulate brokerage activities, market making, and margin financing.

The law allows licensing stock exchange for SMEs and focuses on achieving the principle of fairness and consumer protection in the capital market in the Sultanate

of Oman by setting out the determinants and international practices including those issued by the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO). The law provided the legislative framework for addressing the inadequacies in the rating report prepared by Thomas Murray on Muscat Clearing and Depository Company that would enhance the rating of the company to higher levels strengthening its status among its peers.

The law addressed an importance matter, which would contribute to the development of the capital market in that it encouraged the creation of independent entities carrying out investment banking activities to render consultancy services related to funding options, takeovers, acquisitions and other services.

Strong potential for growth in Oman and Brazil trade relations



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

Trade relations expand annually with the Republic of Brazil in various fields, especially on the economic front. Both friendly countries play a large and important role in strengthening bilateral ties. The goal is to make up for missed opportunities and build on initiatives identified by the two governments in promising areas of the relationship.

This was confirmed by Ligia Maria Shearer, the Brazilian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, in her speech recently on the occasion of her country's 200th Independence Anniversary.

In her speech, the Ambassador expressed her happiness as the head of the Brazilian mission in Oman, stressing that the two countries support peace and security in the world as the underlying principle of their commitment to international law, and to defend the precious principle of solidarity between nations and peoples.

The close relations between the two countries and cooperation in a number of important areas in investment, trade and agriculture issues give a greater opportunity to explore the full potential of the relationship in the future.

Economic data indicates that the trade exchange between the two countries amounted to about \$2.240 billion in 2021, with both countries pointing to the potential for enhanced trade in a number of areas.

Brazilian investment in Oman is concentrated in Vale Oman set up in Sohar with an investment of more than \$1 billion.

In recent years, a number of officials have paid high-level visits to each other's capitals, with plans for more visits in the near future. Significantly, the Brazilian Embassy in Muscat is the only embassy of a Latin American country in the Sultanate of Oman. Likewise, the Omani embassy in Brazil is the Sultanate of Oman's only embassy in Latin America.

Brazil enjoys a large economy and is one of the five countries forming the 'BRICS' group, which has human capabilities, financial, industrial, agricultural and technical capabilities especially in the digital field.

Brazil is a land of innovation, production and talent, while it has green energy projects accounting for 45 per cent of the country's total energy output. Brazil plans to be a strong hub for green hydrogen that can be produced sustainably.

It also enjoys green and high-tech spaces, especially in the agricultural field where food is produced sustainably for 215 million Brazilians, in addition to benefiting more than one billion other people around the world from.

It also has the Amazon rainforest, which is home to a rich biodiversity. There are many areas that Oman can benefit from through cooperation with Brazilian. These areas include urban planning and development, preserving heritage sites, sustainable agriculture, energy, industry and tourism.

The country has long highways, transportation, communications, import and export capabilities. The next steps will determine the directions with which we must find cooperation, especially since the Sultanate of Oman is working hard and efficiently in establishing projects that accelerate the policy of economic diversification that we aim to achieve.

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND MEETS OBA



MUSCAT: The Oman Banks Association (OBA) in cooperation with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) organised a meeting between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) team visiting the Sultanate of Oman and some of the chief executive officers of banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting was held yesterday, September 21, 2022 in Muscat.

A number of important topics were discussed at the meeting, such as, economic growth, Banking sector performance, Environment Social Governance (ESG), Climate change risk, and many other topics including policies, regulations, and new developments. OBA Continues to engage stakeholders to encourage constructive dialogue among financial institutions, regulators, local and international financial agencies to promote the Omani banking sector.

Oman Banks Association is a non-profit professional association created to represent the banking sector, promote Omani banking activities, coordinate with regulators on matters of policy and strategy, and support banking excellence in Oman.

Second phase of Al Mazunah Free Zone under construction

HAMMAM AL BADI
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Al Mazunah Free Zone, set up on Oman's border with Yemen, has attracted a total of 251 projects to date, underscoring its growing importance as a hub for trade and investment. Of this total, 152 are commercial investments, 29 automotive related, 44 service-centred, 24 industrial, and two real estate projects. During the first half of this year, Al Mazunah Free Zone received 23 investment applications in the industrial, commercial, and service sectors. They include ten commercial contracts.

Several infrastructure projects are currently being implemented in the zone, including a security project, which is 75 per cent complete. The project consists of a security fence equipped with surveillance cameras and high-quality lighting. A water desalination plant will be built to



supply clean water to the zone.

To support investment inflows into the zone, Shumookh Investment and Services Company – an affiliate of Madayn (Public Establishment for Industrial Estates), is constructing a multi-use facility and service building project at a cost of RO 3 million. The building, covering an area of over 11,000 square metres, is nearing completion. It will house a variety of facilities, commercial and service offices in

one building.

Furthermore, the free zone's second phase of construction is presently ongoing, and it comprises a new road network, water network and water tanks, an optical fibre communications network, electrical supplies, and drainage system.

Meanwhile, the Free Zone handled the flow of around 3,050 vehicles worth RO 11.866 million during the first six months of this year.

Construction work begins on tuna, sardines canning complex in Duqm

FROM PAGE 13

In line with Oman Vision 2040, the project is one of the outputs of the Tanfeedh Programme, which aims to achieve the country's vision of economic diversification by maximising the return from the fisheries landing that the Sultanate of Oman abounds and localising the value-added chain of fish products before exporting to global markets.

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

The complex will house three manufacturing units — the tuna and sardines/mackerel canning unit, a fish feed unit and a recycled fish oil-recycling units to achieve the zero-waste policy of the company.

Among its many accomplishments, Al Mazunah Free Zone has attracted a strategic investor and is currently overseeing the development of a 3 million square metre site that is divided into investment-ready plots.

Besides offering import and export services, the free zone also features commercial premises, retail shops, warehouses business, automotive showrooms, customs clearing offices, haulage, hotels, grocery outlets, and manufacturing facilities specialising in the production of plastics, culinary utensils, decorations, and cosmetics, among other items.

Al Mazyona Free Zone, maintained and operated by Madayn, is an important gateway for transit commerce to Yemen and, from there, to East African countries. It also makes a significant contribution to the Omani economy.

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URGENT REQUIREMENT

1. INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEER - 1 No.

- Candidate should have experience in Road, Sewage, Pipeline, Telecom Networking, Electrical works in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Should have worked with MOTC, Municipalities, Madayan and other related Govt. Bodies.
- Should be able to liaise with the Govt. Authorities.
- Should be willing to lead team of qualified engineers.
- Should be a qualified Civil Engineer with qualifications in Mechanical Engineering will be an added advantage.
- Should have 25 years of work experience.

2. PROJECT ENGINEER - 1 No.

- Candidate should have experience in Construction of Roads and other civil works in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Should be able to liaise with the Govt. Authorities.
- Should be a qualified Civil Engineer with 15 years of work experience.

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13 Things to Include in Your Ultimate Oman Bucket List

Oman has become a playground for thrill and adventure seekers who like to experience authentic Arabian experiences with touches of history and culture. With so many things to do in Oman, you may have difficulty deciding where to begin. We've compiled 13 incredible activities that should be included in your ultimate Oman Bucket List. ... **P18 & 19**

Paris presents grand Munch show: A look at 60 years of work



WITH AN EXHIBITION of more than 100 works spanning 60 years, the Orsay Museum in Paris shows that

Edvard Munch, who lived 1863 to 1944, cannot be reduced to his famous painting "The Scream."

Because the complexity of Munch's work is largely unknown, the exhibition seeks to showcase his entire artistic evolution, said curator Claire Berardi.

The exhibition *Un poème de vie, d'amour et de mort*, which translates as "a poem about life, love and death," was created in collaboration with the Munch Museum in Oslo and will remain on display until January 22.

The collection is not organised chronologically but focuses instead on Munch's recurring motifs of loneliness, love, disappearance and death, themes which go hand-in-hand with the various existential crises endured by the painter and graphic artist.

Munch's fears can be seen in the sinuous lines of his compositions, paintings, etchings, lithographs and wood carvings, as well as the powerful and dynamic colours he used.

Among the major works on display in Paris are "Vampire," "Melancholy," "Metabolism (Life and Death)," and "Evening on Karl Johan Street." Munch's iconic "The Scream" original is not in Paris, but its first version in print, a lithograph from 1895, is on display.

— dpa

READ

AMARI AND THE GREAT GAME

BY B B ALSTON

Amari agrees to participate in the Great Game after a magician with dangerous plans for the League steps forward.



FASHION TREND

Models present creations by Fashion designer Susan Fang, for their Spring/Summer 2023 catwalk show on the fifth day of London Fashion Week June Edition, at a swimming pool in London. — AFP



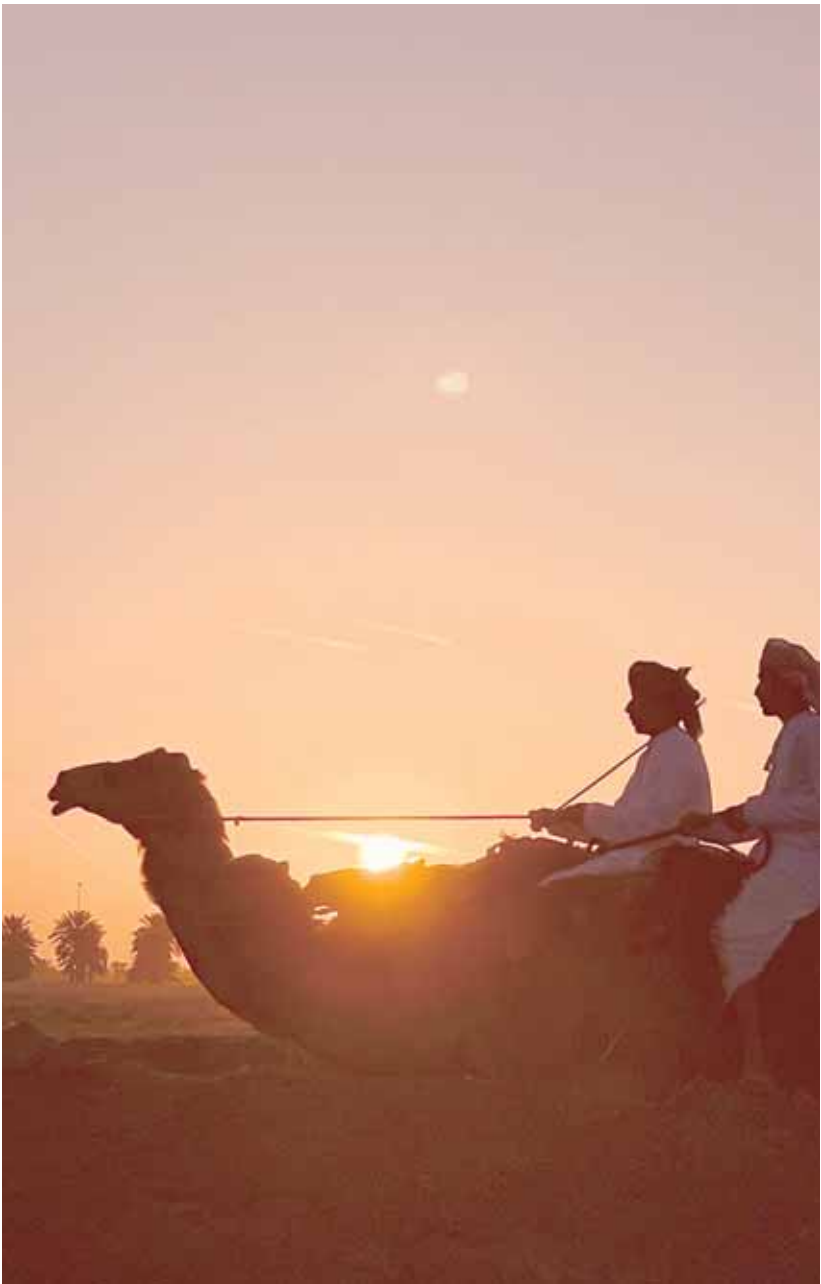
WHAT'S COOKING

A Thai participant carves patterns into a papaya during a fruit and vegetable carving competition at the 26th Thailand International Culinary Cup in Bangkok. — AFP





13 Things to Include in Your Ultimate Oman Bucket List





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By Rumpa Mitra
Instagram: @rumpa_mitra

Oman is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. Gifted with unique attractions, it is easy to understand why its endless coastlines, dusty deserts, naked mountains, unique waterfalls and acres of wilderness call out to travellers from around the world. Oman has therefore become a playground for thrill and adventure seekers who like to experience authentic Arabian experiences with touches of history and culture.

With so many things to do in Oman, you may have difficulty deciding where to begin. We've compiled 13 incredible activities that should be included in your ultimate Oman Bucket List.

VISITING MOSQUES

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat is Oman's biggest mosque with an area of 416,000 m2 and has a capacity of over 20,000 worshippers; 8,000 people can fit inside and the courtyard can easily hold up to 12,000 people. This mosque is one of the few mosques in Arabia which allows entry for non-Muslim visitors. The mosque is a wonder of modern architecture and is a fusion of Omani, Islamic, and Middle-Eastern architectural styles. The mosque opened in 2001. It is also a must to visit the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Suhar inaugurated in 2016. Its Persian, as well as Arabic and other influences, make this mosque a beautiful stop.

EXPLORING FORTS IN OMAN

Ad Dakhiliyah Governorate in northern Oman is surrounded by mountains and has played a very important role in the country's history. Rulers of Oman have built forts in several parts of the country that very strategically protect these semi-states from outsiders. Bahla Fort is one of the biggest forts in Oman and is also enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. On the way to Bahla, one can also stop at Nizwa Fort where every Friday, cultural activities take place. If you can afford some more time then Jabreen Castle, which comes after Bahla, is not to be missed.

EXPLORING THE ABANDONED VILLAGES/RUINS

While Oman has been marching towards modernisation, it is fortunate to see that it has not abandoned many of its traditions. The best way to explore these traditions and cultures is by visiting Oman's old villages that hold the key to what life was like in the past. Some popular abandoned villages are Al Hamra, Birkat al Mouz, Sab Bani Khamis, Wadi Tanuf Ruins, Al Aqar, Misfat Al Abreyeen and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. Recently Misfat Al Abreyeen was enlisted as a UNESCO heritage village because of its unique offerings to visitors which include staying in traditional Omani houses.

HIKING IN OMAN'S GRAND CANYON

Jabal Shams is home to the highest point in Oman. If you want a memorable trek, then exploring the Balcony walk (W6) is one of the best among many routes providing an amazing opportunity to see up close Oman's Grand Canyon. There are many routes from easy to hard all over the mountain so make sure to plan out your destination beforehand. Jabal Shams is located in northeastern Oman and north of Al Hamra. It's almost 3 hour-drive from Muscat and popular for its many sightseeing options. The best time to enjoy the hike is from October to March when the temperature is cooler.

SNORKEL WITH THE WHALE SHARKS ON THE DIMANIYAT ISLAND

Dimaniyat Island is a chain of nine

unoccupied islands with a peaceful environment, shallow coves and pristine beaches. This island is famous for its stunning array of wildlife which includes various types of sea turtles, sharks and specifically whale sharks and migratory birds. It also has some of the best coral formations filled with different colours. September to November is the best time to spot and swim with whale sharks. A short boatride away from Muscat to Dimaniyat Island and one can experience pristine beaches and the underwater world.



SHOPPING AND HOPPING IN THE SOUQS

Different wilayats in Oman have their own version of traditional markets (souqs) and are still very popular amongst the locals as well as tourists. These souqs are time-capsule sometimes selling antique items even old coins as well as accessories and gifting ideas. It is a perfect place to buy souvenirs, Omani dresses and hats, spices, frankincense, traditional jewellery, etc. Very interestingly, it is also the best place to see how Omanis greet each other and what are the unwritten social rules. For the nationals it is not only the place from where they shop, but also a place where they catch up with their friends, and relatives sometimes. Muttrah Souq is easily accessible as it is within Muscat. Other than this, Bahla Souq, Nizwa Souq and Sur Souq are also very popular. If you are lucky, you may be able to see some cultural performances inside the souq during the festival seasons.

NIZWA FRIDAY MARKET

Apart from the souqs, Friday markets in a few places in Oman have gained high popularity for their importance. These markets open in the early morning at 6 am and sellers come from everywhere to sell everyday items.

Nizwa Friday market is one of the most famous markets for its livestock auction activities. Locals come with their goats/ cows to auction here. The best quality Halwa are available in this market.

TRADITIONAL POTTER OF BAHLA

Omanis are still very fond of using earthenwares for their day-to-day household chores. As per research, some earthenwares found in Oman trace their origin back to the 4th millennium BC. From their archaic beginnings, their continuous usage has allowed potters of Bahla to become even more creative with their designs but maintain the vessels' functionality. Bahla is the place where mostly these potter hubs are still active, where one can buy beautifully designed pots and have an opportunity to see how they are made. On request, potters are generous enough to experience the process of making the pots from mud.

TRADITIONAL CAMEL RACE

Surviving time and modernity, traditional camel races are some of the most unique experiences one can have in Oman. It's the most famous traditional sport in the Arab world. Every year, the

Sultanate of Oman conducts these races in different regions and in total, over a thousand races are conducted not just within the 46 high-level race tracks, but also even in smaller ones in some wilayats. The season for the camel races is usually between September to April. Before the race, the owners dress up the camels with colourful tassels and then walk them around the track. You may also hear them humming folk songs.

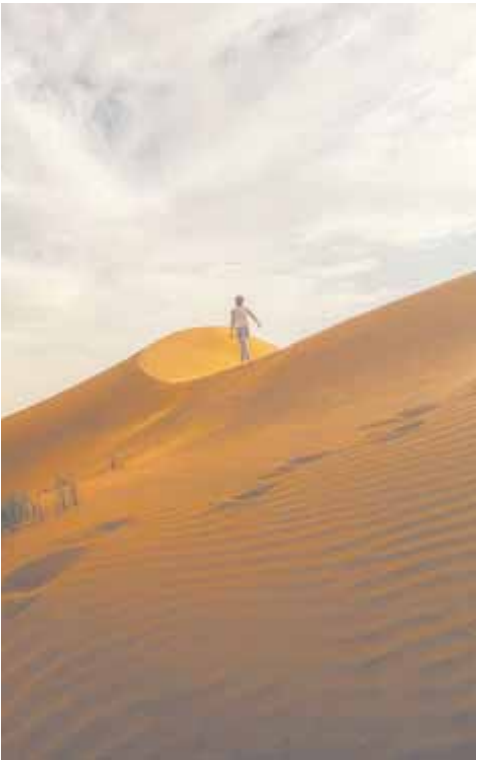
EXPLORE DIFFERENT HARVEST SEASONS IN AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is part of the Al Hajar Mountains, 2,000 metres above sea level, and famous for its wadi, irrigation system (aflaj), small villages, and different harvest seasons. Villagers harvest different crops in various terraced orchards throughout the year. Rose harvest season is between March to April. Pomegranate season comes between September to October simultaneously with figs while Olive season falls between especially the month of September and lasts till December. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is much cooler than the other parts of Oman and also offers many luxurious and traditional stays.

EXPERIENCE TURTLE HATCHING AT RAS AL JINZ

Oman is blessed with natural resources and a very long coastline around the country. Every year sea turtles come to the shore to hatch eggs here.

One of the things that can be most proud of is its comprehensive protection laws for these gentle sea creatures. Ras Al Jinz is the most famous place to visit as they offer organised and guided trips for their guests. Five of the world's seven sea turtle species can be found in Oman, making it an excellent choice for nature enthusiasts who want to catch a glimpse of these rare creatures. The best time to see turtles is from April to August.



DESERT EXPERIENCE WITH BEDOUINS

Sand dunes are the perfect place for off-roading. Rimal al Sharqiya, which covers almost 4,000 miles, is the best place to experience a desert safari. Lots of luxury resorts in Al Sharqiya provide Bedouin-style living experiences. But one can also opt to stay with the Bedouins in their camps. Apart from off-roading, camel ride, sand boarding, sand bashing, and watching the sunset sitting on top of the dunes are the best activities. Winter is the best time to explore the dunes, at other times of the year you may find the temperature around 50 degrees in the daytime.

OMAN'S UNIQUE FOOD

Oman is a place of wonder for food. Omani food alone has merged lots of influences but different nationalities contributed to the country's unique food scene. If you want to experience authentic Omani favourites, you can't miss "Shuwa" which is considered a delicacy. It is a fragrant combination of rice and meat slow cooked in a fire pit, most nationals prepare this on holidays or for some special occasions like Eid. Omani coffee is called "Khawa" with date served everywhere you go and visit, this comes as customary greetings. Some other favourites include the thin layer bread usually served with Oman chips, honey and even cheese spread. You can't also go wrong with salona, harees as well as the Dhofari favourite, mishkak.

CHANGING WORLD

Colombia wants sacred indigenous masks back from Berlin museum

COLOMBIA HAS requested the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation return two masks to the indigenous Kogi people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains in the north of the country.

The foundation said it was in negotiations with the Colombian Embassy on repatriating the masks as they have sacred significance for the Kogi indigenous group, who refer to themselves as Kágaba.

The two masks in question were acquired in 1915 by Konrad Theodor Preuss, an ethnologist and curator of the royal museum of ethnology, the predecessor institution of the Berlin Ethnological Museum, which is now part of the foundation.

Preuss collected over 700 objects, of which about 440 are still in the museum, though the artefacts are traditionally inalienable and passed down generationally.

Colombia has asked for the return of the masks, according to Foundation President Hermann Parzinger. He said he hopes to find "a solution that is appropriate for Colombia and the Kogi," which he plans to present to the foundation's governing bodies.

Ambassador Yadir Salazar-Mejia said the return of the masks to Colombia's place of origin in the Kogi community is of the utmost importance to its people, and she is confident that the negotiations will be successful. — dpa

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Our children and glasses!

AT THE BEGINNING of the new school year for our students and while you are experiencing fleeting moments from the past and you may be standing in one of those schools in which you studied in your childhood, looking at the innocence around you, you notice something unusual in children and school students, which is that most of them need glasses and at younger ages. Quickly upon inquiry, many of these children had parents who had perfect vision and I was frankly baffled by the low vision of their children!

Myopia is indeed a genetic condition that affected people to see distant objects in a blurry manner. However, its occurrence doubles with the presence of one of the parents with myopia and thus the possibility of the child needing glasses. While the presence of two parents suffering from myopia increases five times the chances of their child being near-sighted!

On the other hand, when you look at the scattered medical studies over the past few years worldwide, you notice that the proportion of adolescents and young people with myopia has jumped from almost a quarter to more than eighty per cent in just over half a century. And here's my real question-although I don't have a real study in this context - have the recent pandemic closures made children's eyesight worse especially since it is impossible to deny the scale of the problem and the speed of change that we have experienced over the past two years.

Perhaps I should highlight this topic because the consequences of this trend are much more serious than the increase in the number of children wearing glasses. Short-sighted eyes become prone to serious problems such as glaucoma and retinal detachment in middle age, conditions that can in turn cause permanent blindness. Here we must be aware that in

such cases, the risks may start small for them, but they increase significantly with higher medical effects.

Interestingly, here it seems to me that the reason for such a noticeable deterioration in our vision or the vision of these children is obvious: you just need to look around to see countless children immersed in phones, tablets and laptops. And you won't be the first to conclude that staring at something inches from your face is detrimental to remote vision. Strangely enough, now our modern life is up close and inside! So we get food by looking closely and staring long at that application to order a meal!

This frankly leads me to wonder: there is something in modern life that destroys our ability to see far away. Although those studies and theories associated with the causes of myopia and which of them were true, what interests me and the conclusion about what is best for children to see and recall is less time bending over screens, and more time in outdoor activities.

True, glasses and prescription lenses, as well as laser surgery, help people with myopia to see better. But none of these reforms may not completely correct the basic anatomical problem of myopia.

In the end, we may not know exactly how screens affect us all day and spend a lot of time indoors, or which causes more harm. Hence, I believe we must promote better vision habits, such as limiting screen time and playing outside. I also urge the Ministry of Education, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, to conduct a survey and research on this topic at the level of the Sultanate's schools. The sooner you start slowing the progression of myopia in children, the better the result.

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

Twilight of the Tigris: Iraq's mighty river drying up

IT WAS THE river that is said to have watered the biblical Garden of Eden and helped give birth to civilisation itself.

But today the Tigris is dying. Human activity and climate change have choked its once mighty flow through Iraq, where — with its twin river the Euphrates — it made Mesopotamia a cradle of civilisation thousands of years ago.

Iraq may be oil-rich but the country is plagued by poverty after decades of war and by droughts and desertification.

Battered by one natural disaster after another, it is one of the five countries most exposed to climate change, according to the UN.

From April on, temperatures exceed 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) and intense sandstorms often turn the sky orange, covering the country in a film of dust.

Hellish summers see the mercury top a blistering 50 degrees Celsius — near the limit of human endurance — with frequent power cuts shutting down air-conditioning for millions.

The Tigris, the lifeline connecting the storied cities of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, has been choked by dams, most of them upstream in Turkey, and falling rainfall.

An AFP video journalist travelled along the river's 1,500-kilometre (900-mile) course through Iraq, from the rugged Kurdish north to the Gulf in the south, to document the ecological disaster that is forcing people to change their ancient way of life.

KURDISH NORTH: LESS WATER EVERY DAY

The Tigris' journey through Iraq begins in the mountains of autonomous Kurdistan, near the borders of Turkey and Syria, where local people raise sheep and grow potatoes.

"Our life depends on the Tigris," said farmer Pibo Hassan Dolmassa, 41, wearing a dusty coat, in the town of Faysh Khabur. "All our work, our agriculture, depends on it.

"Before, the water was pouring in torrents," he said, but over the last two or three years "there is less water everyday".

Iraq's government and Kurdish farmers accuse Turkey, where the Tigris has its source, of withholding water in its dams, dramatically reducing the flow into Iraq.

According to Iraqi official statistics, the level of the Tigris entering Iraq has dropped to just 35 per cent of its average over the past century.

Baghdad regularly asks Ankara to release more water.

But Turkey's ambassador to Iraq, Ali Riza Guney, urged Iraq to "use the available water more efficiently", tweeting in July that "water is largely wasted in Iraq".

He may have a point, say experts. Iraqi farmers tend to flood their fields, as they have done since ancient Sumerian times, rather than irrigate them, resulting in huge water losses.

CENTRAL PLAINS: WE SOLD EVERYTHING

All that is left of the River Diyala, a tributary that meets the Tigris near the capital Baghdad in the central plains,

are puddles of stagnant water dotting its parched bed.

Drought has dried up the watercourse that is crucial to the region's agriculture.

This year authorities have been forced to reduce Iraq's cultivated areas by half, meaning no crops will be grown in the badly-hit Diyala Governorate.

"We will be forced to give up farming and sell our animals," said Abu Mehdi, 42, who wears a white djellaba robe.

"We were displaced by the war" against Iran in the 1980s, he said, "and now we are going to be displaced because of water. Without water, we can't live in these areas at all."

The farmer went into debt to dig a 30-metre (100-foot) well to try to get water. "We sold everything," Abu Mehdi said, but "it was a failure".

The World Bank warned last year that much of Iraq is likely to face a similar fate.

"By 2050 a temperature increase of one degree Celsius and a precipitation decrease of 10 per cent would cause a 20 per cent reduction of available freshwater," it said.

"Under these circumstances, nearly one third of the irrigated land in Iraq will have no water."

Water scarcity hitting farming and food security are already among the "main drivers of rural-to-urban migration" in Iraq, the UN and several non-government groups said in June.

And the International Organization for Migration said last month that "climate factors" had displaced more than 3,300 families in Iraq's central and southern areas in the first three months of this year.

"Climate migration is already a reality in Iraq," the IOM said.

BAGHDAD: SANDBANKS AND POLLUTION

This summer in Baghdad, the level of the Tigris dropped so low that people played volleyball in the middle of the river, splashing barely waist-deep through its waters.

Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources blame silt because of the river's reduced flow, with sand and soil once washed downstream now settling to form sandbanks.

Until recently the Baghdad authorities used heavy machinery to dredge the silt, but with cash tight, work has slowed.

Years of war have destroyed much of Iraq's water infrastructure, with many cities, factories, farms and even hospitals left to dump their waste straight into the river.

As sewage and rubbish from Greater Baghdad pour into the shrinking Tigris, the pollution creates a concentrated toxic soup that threatens marine life and human health.

Environmental policies have not been a high priority for Iraqi governments struggling with political, security and economic crises.

Ecological awareness also remains low among the general public, said activist Hajer Hadi of the Green Climate group, even if "every Iraqi feels climate change through rising temperatures, lower rainfall, falling water levels and dust storms," she said.

SOUTH: SALT WATER, DEAD PALMS

"You see these palm trees? They are thirsty," said Molla al-Rached, a 65-year-old farmer, pointing to the brown skeletons of what was once a verdant palm grove.

"They need water! Should I try to irrigate them with a glass of water?" he asked bitterly. "Or with a bottle?"

"There is no fresh water, there is no more life," said the farmer, a beige keffiyeh scarf wrapped around his head.

He lives at Ras al-Bisha where the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates river, the Shatt al-Arab, empties into the Gulf, near the borders with Iran and Kuwait.

In nearby Basra — once dubbed the Venice of the Middle East — many of the depleted waterways are choked with rubbish.

To the north, much of the once famed Mesopotamian Marshes — the vast wetland home to the "Marsh Arabs" and their unique culture — have been reduced to desert since Saddam Hussein drained them in the 1980s to punish its population.

But another threat is impacting the Shatt al-Arab: salt water from the Gulf is pushing ever further upstream as the river flow declines.

The UN and local farmers say rising salination is already hitting farm yields, in a trend set to worsen as global warming raises sea levels.

Al-Rached said he has to buy water from tankers for his livestock, and wildlife is now encroaching into settled areas in search of water.

"My government doesn't provide me with water," he said. "I want water, I want to live. I want to plant, like my ancestors."

RIVER DELTA: A FISHERMAN'S PLIGHT

Standing barefoot in his boat like a Venetian gondolier, fisherman Naim Haddad steers it home as the sun sets on the waters of the Shatt Al Arab.

"From father to son, we have dedicated our lives to fishing," said the 40-year-old holding up the day's catch.

In a country where grilled carp is the national dish, the father-of-eight is proud that he receives "no government salary, no allowances".

But salination is taking its toll as it pushes out the most prized freshwater species which are replaced by ocean fish.

"In the summer, we have salt water," said Haddad. "The sea water rises and comes here."

Last month local authorities reported that salt levels in the river north of Basra reached 6,800 parts per million — nearly seven times that of fresh water.

Haddad can't switch to fishing at sea because his small boat is unsuitable for the choppy Gulf waters, where he would also risk run-ins with the Iranian and Kuwaiti coastguards.

And so the fisherman is left at the mercy of Iraq's shrinking rivers, his fate tied to theirs.

"If the water goes," he said, "the fishing goes. And so does our livelihood." — **AFP**

