



P11

MAXWELL
MAGIC SEES
AUSTRALIA SEAL
T20 SERIES



P15

JAPAN'S
ECONOMY
REBOUNDS ON
SOLID SPENDING



P20

TAKE A
BREAK
AND
HIKE!



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
LITHUANIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Gitanas Nauseda of the Republic of Lithuania on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Nauseda. He also wished the people of Lithuania further progress and growth. — ONA

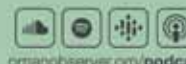
REGISTER TENANCY
AGREEMENT

Registration of tenancy agreement is compulsory, and failure of which amounts to fines three times of the registration fee, according to Muscat Municipality. The first party (landlord) is bound to register the agreement with Muscat Municipality and pay the fixed tax of 3 per cent. The second party (tenant) is supposed to pay as agreed upon in the contract, and failure of which would invite legal proceedings, an official at the civic authority confirmed. The second party is bound to hand over the leased property to the first party on the date of expiry of the agreement. **DETAILS ON P3**





OVERCOMING
FEAR



omanobserver.om/podcast

INSIDE



SOUTH KOREAN CANDIDATES
KICK OFF PRESIDENTIAL RACE

P6



THREE RESCUED AFTER
SPANISH TRAWLER SINKS

P7

TOUR OF OMAN 2022 CONCLUDES



Czech rider Jan Hirt of Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux survived the challenge of rivals to take the overall winners red jersey in the Tour of Oman 2022 which concluded on Tuesday. Stage 1 winner Fernando Gaviria of UAE Team Emirates stormed to another stage title in the 132.5 km sixth and final stage from Al Mouj to Muttrah Sea Road. **SEE P10**

Crude prices inch towards \$100

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oil prices inching towards \$100 a barrel can be welcome news for anyone in the Sultanate of Oman, but it raises concern about the inflation, especially of prices of food products, including vegetables and fruits, that are imported from different parts.

As per the official statistics, the average price of Oman crude recorded an increase of 39.7 per cent at the end of last December compared to the same period in 2020, as the price rose from \$46 per barrel to \$64.3 per barrel. On Tuesday, Oman crude prices

traded at \$93.39 per barrel.

On Monday, world oil prices rose above \$96 per barrel before scaling back on Tuesday as Russia slightly softened its position by scaling back troops.

“Prices are the highest level since 2014, which could make world’s inflation problem even worse”, according to experts.

Oil prices may have a limited impact on transportation costs in the Sultanate of Oman as the government has ordered a cap on fuel prices at October 2021 rates until the end of 2022. The government would bear the cost difference that may result from

any potential increase in oil prices.

But according to experts, energy prices have been affecting inflation rates due to high transportation costs in many countries, which is then transferred to goods that are imported from these markets.

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the biggest casualty of any inflation surge will be on prices of fish, fruits, vegetables, and oils (around 27.5 per cent), bakery and other food products (around 5.5 per cent).

TURN TO P2

Camel racing concludes on March 5

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the concluding ceremony of the 5th edition of Al Bashayer Annual Festival for Arabian Camel Racing on March 5. The 6-day event will be held on Al Bashayer racecourse in the Wilayat of Adam, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The race, to begin on February 28, includes 74 rounds. **DETAILS ON P12**

30,000 TO 40,000 ARE
GRADUATING EVERY YEAR

40,000 nationals
got jobs in 2021

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The public and private sectors in the Sultanate of Oman absorbed 40,000 Omani youth in 2021, said a senior official in the Ministry of Labour.

The official said that as of now around 100,000 are seeking employment, with nearly 30,000 to 40,000 graduates coming out of higher education institutions each year.

“Nearly 40,000 nationals secured jobs in 2021 in various sectors in both government and private organisations. We have an average of 100,000 youths seeking placements as about 30-40,000 youngsters seek jobs each year”, said Sayyid Salim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of Human Resources at the Ministry of Labour.

He further said that the contribution of public and private sectors is approximately 50:50, and there would be more

The contribution of public and private sectors is approximately 50:50, and there will be more jobs available for both skilled and unskilled workers

SAYYID SALIM AL
BUSAYDI

Under-Secretary

jobs, as the country has more projects that require both skilled and unskilled workers.

“Having said, foreign workforce is inevitable for any economy, and the case with the Sultanate of Oman is not any different. No economy can grow without making the right balance between the local and the foreign workforce.”

TURN TO P2

Diplomacy ‘not exhausted’
on Ukraine: Germany

MOSCOW: German and Russian leaders stressed their openness towards the diplomatic de-escalation of the Ukraine crisis on Tuesday, as Western officials welcomed Moscow’s claims of a partial troop withdrawal from near the Ukrainian border.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said during his first official visit to Moscow on Tuesday that

the diplomatic possibilities were “certainly not exhausted” when it came to resolving the crisis.

“We are ready, together with all partners and allies in the EU and Nato and with Russia to discuss very concrete steps to improve security for both sides”, he said at a press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

DETAILS ON P7

Medicinal chemicals are polluting rivers worldwide: Study

LONDON: Potentially toxic levels of pharmaceutical drugs have been found in a quarter of river locations examined across the world, a study found.

Researchers from around the world surveyed more than 1,000 sites on 258 rivers, from the Thames in London and other British waterways to the Brazilian Amazon and rivers in major cities such as Delhi, New York and Guangzhou.

The assessment measured the presence of 61 pharmaceuticals, including some compounds also linked to lifestyles such as caffeine,



and whether they were above levels where they could have an effect on the environment.

The study, published in the

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), warns that pollution of the world’s rivers by medicinal chemicals is a

global problem.

Pollution poses a risk to freshwater habitats and wildlife, potentially could contribute to the build-up of antimicrobial resistance and also threatens global goals on water quality and pollution, the research warns.

The analysis, carried out at the University of York, found pharmaceutical pollution in rivers on every continent, with nicotine and cotinine, caffeine and paracetamol turning up everywhere including Antarctica.

An array of chemicals such as beta blockers, antibiotics,

antidepressants, sleeping medication and antihistamines were found in rivers on all inhabited continents.

While most chemicals seen in rivers globally are lower than concentrations that could cause ecological effects, there were levels of contaminants that could pose a threat to environmental or human health in more than a quarter of the studied locations.

Contaminants found at harmful concentrations at some sites included beta blocker propranolol and antibiotic ciprofloxacin. — dpa



Shura Office reviews briefing requests

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura held its ninth meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022) of the ninth term, under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, on Tuesday.

The Office reviewed the results and recommendations of the discussion session with the minister of higher education, research and innovation before being submitted to the Council of Ministers. It also reviewed the technical office's report on the studies and recommendations of Majlis Ash'shura during the sixth to eighth terms (2007-2019) and reviewed a report on the activities of the standing committees for January 2022. The Office approved the agenda of the eighth meeting of Majlis Ash'shura due to be held at the end of this month to discuss the Ministry of Economy's statement.

The Office also reviewed a number of ministerial responses including a response provided by the minister of agricultural, fisheries and water resources to a question regarding the



announcement issued to applicants for use of agricultural lands. It also reviewed the response provided by the minister of health to a request for briefing on activating medical examinations for expatriate workers before issuing or renewing residence cards. This is in addition to the response of the minister of information regarding the collection of due amounts of fees on the re-broadcasting of materials from external channels.

During the meeting, the Office approved a number of briefing requests submitted by the council members which included a briefing request submitted to the chairman of Oman Investment Authority



(OIA) on the limits of privatisation of state-owned companies, the Authority's privatisation plan for the next years and the percentage of privatisation in public companies and the criteria that will be applied by the OIA in this regard.

The Office reviewed a question directed to the minister of social development regarding speeding up the amendments of the Social Development Law. The request included inquiries about the amendments and increasing

the social security pension. The Office reviewed a question to the minister of health regarding the unavailability of the most important medicines in government hospitals and the cause of the shortage in medicine supplies for patients in

the Sultanate of Oman. The Office also reviewed the letter submitted to the inspector-general of police and customs, regarding the reduction of renewal fees for taxis taking into account their financial condition.

SUN STROKE ON THE SANDS



A photograph by Mohammed al Ruzaiqi (inset) taken in the Sharqiyah desert. Al Ruzaiqi is passionate about photographing people, their customs and Sultanate of Oman's landscape. He says through travel, a photographer discovers different customs and traditions of peoples. The goal is to discover one self and refine skills at the same time. — ONA

10 projects shortlisted for Bilarab Bin Haitham Architectural Award

MUSCAT: Ten projects have qualified for the final stage of the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design. The 10 qualifying projects were submitted by 19 young men and women entrants from the Sultanate of Oman. They include 5 individual teams and 5 group teams.

The 10 projects have qualified for the initial review stage scheduled to be held on February 27-28 and the entrants will be invited to present details of their projects before the jury to be discussed elaborately from the technical and engineering perspectives.

The judging panel urged the



finalists to modify and improve the technical designs of their projects after clarifying the points that should be revised for each project. The panel stressed the importance of preparing a visual presentation for the final submission of the project provided that their

submissions are sent no later than 10 am on Thursday, February 24.

It is noteworthy that the site designated for development for this year's award is located in Al Mina district in the Wilayat of Muttrah with a total area of 7,500 square metres. — ONA

Crude prices inch towards \$100

FROM PAGE 1

On a positive note, a senior market-based analyst in the Sultanate of Oman told the *Observer*: "The surge is very good for the Omani economy as it will help the government to cut the deficit as the economy is still dependent on revenues from the oil and gas sector. It will also help accelerate government spending on various infrastructure and social projects that will help to generate job opportunities and subsequently boost consumer confidence."

But the word of caution is that prices such as \$100 per barrel can slow down the economic growth or recovery in oil-importing economies.

40,000 nationals got jobs in 2021

FROM PAGE 1

"This is the case with any developed economy with a perfect mix of the workforce," he added.

The relationship between the locals and foreigners will continue to contribute to the economy.

"We are aiming to ease the procedures for jobs, facilitate the right mix and help the economy. Next year, there will be a bundle of incentives to revitalise the economy."

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

As the facilitators of jobs for the citizens, the Ministry of Labour has been investing in training and skills development while protecting their rights and ensuring that the economy is growing so that everyone can look forward to their roles in society.

"We have to coordinate and organise, and balance the market between locals and expatriates and make sure the environment is investor-friendly for everybody."

Speaking about the Etimad Programme based on the Tanfeedh, Oman Vision 2040, he said the idea of Etimad is to tackle



Salim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary, MoL

the challenges of the job market facing the local employment and try to build a team and share the expertise of this manpower.

"There are some skills and attitudes of our manpower that need to be tuned to help them achieve the desired goals in their career. Etimad programme aims to solve this issue among the middle and higher management levels in the private sector, and the goal is to enhance the skills of locals in these categories and enlarge the know-how of the middle management candidates. This will help benefit each other and the company itself," Al Busaidy said.





■ **BLOOMS IN GREENHOUSE**



A research team of Sultan Qaboos University succeeded in growing high-quality Gladiolus flowers inside a greenhouse. – ONA

Ministry designates Najd as admin division

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Tuesday, assigned the Office of the Development of the Najd Agricultural Area as an administrative division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The idea is to organise and manage Al Najd region in the Dhofar Governorate using best practices to raise the economic return to bridge the gap of food security that coincides with the vision 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman.

The office will develop programmes to improve agricultural wealth, water resources and related activities; through strategic planning, employing appropriate policies, implementing the best integrated technical packages for new investment projects, opening up to global experiences and gradually updating the projects.

Dr Khalid bin Saleem al-Mashikhi, the Assistant Director-General for Assessment of Water Resources for Dam Affairs, highlighted the work of the Development Office of the Agricultural Zone.

The office has prepared a comprehensive investment map



for the Najd region to determine the promising areas for food self-sufficiency and to create a comprehensive database that includes agricultural, aquatic data

and other related activities and to engage agricultural associations in programmes and policies to diversify crop composition and maximise return.

Among the tasks of the office are the supervision of the laboratories in the Al Najd area to ensure the quality of agricultural products, maintain the safety and quality of food locally and globally, and oversee all business related to investment, production and marketing in direct coordination with various sectors.

Also in focus is distribution dedicated to strategic agricultural investment for the Omani private sector and foreign investment that would contribute to the improvement of the agricultural production system and activate the partnership between the public and private sectors to create

economical investment projects that strengthen the system of food security.

The office is working to encourage research and innovative projects to highlight the best successful agricultural experiences to facilitate the transfer of those experiences for farmers to improve the quality and production level and empower small and medium-sized enterprises and agricultural societies to exploit the investment opportunities available. And the creation of a comprehensive database that includes farming, aquatic data and other related activities.

Non-registration of rental agreement attracts fine

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Registration of tenancy agreement is a compulsory requirement, failure of which amounts to fines three times of the registration fees, according to Muscat Municipality.

The first party (landlord) is bound to register the agreement with Muscat Municipality and pay the fixed tax of 3 per cent. The second party (tenant) is supposed to pay as agreed upon in the contract, failure of which would invite legal proceedings, a spokesperson at the civic authority confirmed.

“The non-registration or renewal of the agreement and/or the failure of payment of the fixed tax within one month from the date on which it has been signed or expired and entered into shall result in this agreement being considered as legally null and void before any government authority in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to imposing a fine equal to three times the fixed tax,” the spokesperson said.

The second party is bound to hand over the leased property to the first party on the date of expiry of the agreement. He is bound to undertake necessary repairs and damages that may result from the misuse of

The landlord is bound to register the agreement with Muscat Municipality and pay the fixed tax of 3 per cent

the property. The first party is bound to undertake any maintenance/overhauling/restoration works required for maintaining the leased property in a condition consistent with the purpose it is rented for.

If one party fails to comply with his commitments, the other party shall have the right to rescind these provisions.

“This agreement can be renewed for a further period or more unless one of the parties advise the other of his wish to evacuate the property before the expiry of the valid period by at least three months or half of the period if it is less. The landlord may not ask evacuation of the property except in particular cases and according to the provisions and procedures of the Royal Decree No (6/89),” the spokesperson further said.

Other terms and conditions may be added to this agreement as mutually agreed by both parties provided not to contradict the Royal Decree.

ICT infrastructure capable of new technologies

MUSCAT: A study titled “Covid-19 Pandemic and Expectations of Future Technology” has confirmed that the current infrastructure of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the Sultanate of Oman is capable of accommodating new technologies in specific fields.

The study, conducted by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) showed that digital transformation can be turned into an opportunity to restructure the market in specific areas and to devise an effective regulatory and administrative framework in a bid to accelerate economic diversification programmes.

The study stressed the importance of adopting the techniques of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the programmes of increasing the total added value of the sectors that should boost the economic diversification plans.

The study dealt with the rapid technical solutions used by the Sultanate of Oman to address the challenges it faced during the pandemic. — ONA

Thieves, khat smugglers nabbed in Dhofar

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate Police Command arrested three people on charges of stealing from 8 commercial stores.

The police seized stolen items which included electrical devices, steel safes as well as stolen cash amounts.

Legal procedures against the defendants are yet to be completed.

HUAWEI P50 Pro | P50 Pocket



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Product color, shape, interface and functions are for reference only. The actual product may vary.
CNP21311HPV1



SURGERY IS THE LAST RESORT TO SHED FAT AND IT DEPENDS ON INDIVIDUAL'S BODY PARAMETERS

WHICH WAY TO GO FOR WEIGHT LOSS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

[@zainabalnassri](#)

Obesity or excess fat in the body increases risk factors for other diseases like heart attack, diabetes, high blood pressure and certain types of cancer.

In the Sultanate of Oman, about 66 per cent of the population suffers from obesity and overweight, according to 2017 statistics by the Ministry of Health. The obesity rate among women then was 40.9 per cent compared to 28.2 per cent in men.

The proportion of children under the age of five who suffer from obesity in the country exceeds 5 per cent.

Although the causes of obesity may be genetic, most cases are caused by unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyles.

People resort to several methods to get rid of excess fat, of which is surgical intervention as a last resort when other solutions fail. But for some patients it is risky.

Obesity operations are divided into several types such as gastric balloon, sleeve gastrectomy, gastric bypass and gastric banding.

Dr Mohammed al Abri, Laparoscopic and Obesity Surgeon at the Royal Hospital, said, "Weight loss surgeries involve restricting the amount of food and inducing early feeling of fullness through sleeve gastrectomy; and unilateral or bilateral duodenal diversion operations which lead to a physiological state that reduces food absorption."

He mentioned that sleeve gastrectomy, cutting or stapling reduce the size of the stomach to remain 15-20 per cent of the original size by removing a large part of it using surgical staplers to stay in the shape of a banana. "It's idea is based on reducing the amount of food and controlling hunger. Advantages of this include reducing ulcers and emptying syndrome. It has proven effective in losing weight and preventing obesity-related diseases", he explained.

As for the two-way duodenal diversion, it is done by creating a gastric bag that holds a capacity of 30ml and connecting it to the small intestine. Dr Al Abri said, "It is one of the oldest operations that has existed for more than five decades, with excellent long-term results. Its main function is to reduce the amount of food consumed, as well as to change the intestinal hormones related to hunger, food and sugar path. Results are better and longer lasting".

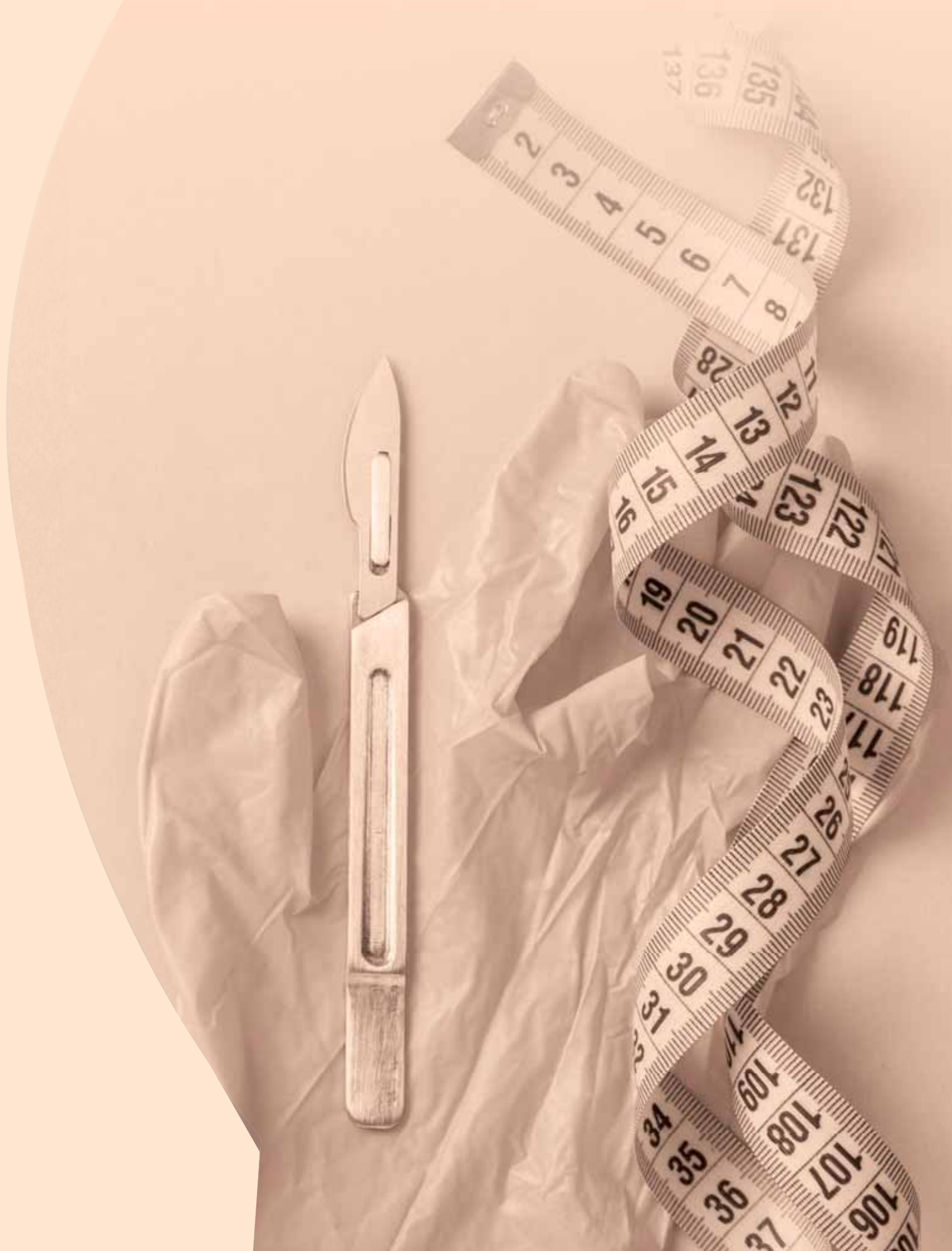
The doctor, who holds a Canadian and American fellowship in advanced laparoscopic surgery and obesity, indicated that "due to the change of course, the patient needs to be on supplements and to stay away from smoking and anti-inflammatory drugs to avoid complications".

Unilateral duodenal diversion is done through reducing the size of the stomach through a bag of approximately 60ml and diverting the path to the intestine so that it goes beyond the first two metres of the intestine and thus reduces absorption.

Another type is a gastric sleeve with a duodenal switch. The stomach is stifled while food passes through the duodenum. It passes over the last 100 cm of the intestine only, thus reducing absorption. Dr Al Abri commented: "It is the best operation in terms of results and improving health problems. Yet, it is the most complex, as the patient needs continuous follow-up and examination of vitamins and minerals frequently."

The doctor said each type has advantages and complications, and the more complex the operation, the more useful it is for weight and health improvement. "Other procedures like endoscopic band ligation and diversion of the small intestine are safe when they are performed by a specialised surgeon on an appropriate patient, and their complications are in varying proportions", Dr Al Abri said.

IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, ABOUT 66 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION SUFFERS FROM OBESITY AND OVERWEIGHT. THE OBESITY RATE AMONG WOMEN IS 40.9 PER CENT COMPARED TO 28.2 PER CENT AMONG MEN





■ CARMEN ON FEB 17 AND FEB 18



Mi Carmen Flamenca is a one hundred per cent Andalusian show from the Antonio Andrade Company, performed and in costumes by José Galvañ from Malaga and by Andalusian artists and fashion designers Victorio and Luchinos. The myth of Carmen created first by Prospero Mérimée and Georges Bizet is re-interpreted in the spirit of new flamenco with Arab elements, jazz and salsa and pure flamenco. Dramatic, romantic and exciting to watch, Flamenco is a Spanish dance form the world adores for its vibrant energy and iconic costumes to be held at Royal Opera House Muscat on February 17 and 18.

— ONA

In brief

PRIZE FOR MUNICIPAL WORK IN SOUTH AL SHARQIYAH

SUR: The prize of Oman India Fertiliser Company OMIFCO for municipal work was launched in the Governor's Office of South Al Sharqiyah on Tuesday

The second version of the prize covers the fields of general health and environmental cleanliness. It targets several segments, including families, schools and people living in residential areas in the wilayats of the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah. The logo of the prize was unveiled and a presentation was given on the award's goals. The inauguration ceremony was held under the patronage of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah.



MOD ENGINEERING SERVICES MARKS ANNUAL DAY

MUSCAT: The Engineering Services at the Ministry of Defence marked its annual day which falls on February 15 each year, under the auspices of Nasser bin Hilal al Harthy, Head of the Engineering Services, on Tuesday.

A celebration on the occasion was held at Muaskar Al Murtafaa which included several events such as infantry skills competition, running race, football matches, traditional games competitions interspersed by equestrian shows staged by the Sultan of Oman Armours Cavalry.



BOOK ON OMAN-ZANZIBAR ORDERS, MEDALS

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) has issued a book in English titled "Orders, Decorations and Medals in the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar".

The book is part of NRAA publications in the 25th edition of research studies on national and international archives.

It highlights various civilisational and historical aspects of the legacy of the Sultanate of Oman and Omanis across the ages. The 336-page manual consists of a preface and four chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to orders, decorations and medals in the Sultanate of Oman.



Made in Oman buses for Qatar World Cup set for delivery

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Duqm-based Karwa Motors is racing against time to deliver the first batch of buses that are to be used in the Qatar World Cup this year.

According to officials, the first batch of 'Made in the Sultanate of Oman' buses are ready for delivery with standard specifications in accordance with the Gulf and international transportation.

The project will contribute to new economic activities in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. It will also establish and support small and medium projects in the Duqm area. Karwa Company is a closed joint-stock company between the Oman Investment Authority and Qatar Transport. It became a model for foreign investment in providing job opportunities for Omanis, and it provides the state budget with positive financial returns. The company has prepared a clear training plan to qualify employees to work in the bus industry. Work is under progress in cooperation with authorities concerned to attract the best Omani cadres for training at various stages of work in the manufacturing field and absorb them as employees.

According to a report on al



Jazeera TV, the project is classified as one of the most important strategic projects between Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman. The factory manufactures the structure of the buses, re-processes and paints them and then assembles other parts. The process ensures a quality check of the buses. This is done inside the company premises, which has been prepared to include various production workshops for cutting, welding and dyeing works, assembling production components and materials, as well as a workshop for assembling equipment and engines. In addition, it has a

central maintenance workshop, warehouses, sub-electricity stations, cold room equipment, a fuel station, the administration building and some other facilities.

The project is based on an estimated 600,000 square metres with investments amounting to \$71 million. The Omani Investment Authority shared about 30 per cent, while Qatar Transport Company shared about 70 per cent of the project.

In its first phase, the project aims to produce between 500 and 700 buses annually, with production increasing to 1,000 buses in the coming stages. Karwa Company

represents great importance in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm; in addition to that, it reflects an added value to the Omani industries. This is a successful model of an Omani partnership with a Qatari company.

The company benefits from the advantages and incentives offered by the region in addition to the availability of the necessary services. After production from the first phase, the company will manufacture and assemble school buses and transport vehicles within cities and highways. It also has many other plans, including electric buses.



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Omani researcher Dr Ibtisam bint Rashid al Harrasiyah of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, won Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation under the category distinguished Innovative Studies and Modern Technology category.

She shared the award with Dr Emmanuelle Jacquin-Joly of France. The winners of the 14th edition were announced in Dubai on Wednesday Khalifa International Award is a platform and forum for international partnerships, aiming towards the development of date palm cultivation sector. The Award's Secretary-General also added that the Award has accomplished great achievements since its forming, under the blessing of HH Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United

Arab Emirates. Dr Abdelouahhab Zaid, Award's Secretary-General, congratulated the winners, stressing on the fact that the winners of the Award's various categories are an added value, contributing to the development of the date palm sector and agricultural innovation across the world, and hoping that the Award will receive more participations in its next sessions to serve this sector and promote it at all levels.

Knowledge Oman all set to resume offline ops after 2 years

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Knowledge Oman is all set to resume its public events following the Supreme Committee decisions issued on February 9 that allow conferences, exhibitions and mass gatherings with 70 per cent capacity. "After 2 years of only doing online webinars, we are now excited to get in action to deliver public sessions to the academia" announced Knowledge Oman Founder, Tariq bin Hilal al

Barwani. Engaging the academia on employment skills needed, entrepreneurship opportunities available and sharing insights on industry future developments is Knowledge Oman's 2022 goals. Speaking about the new plans, Al Barwani said "We have been working behind the scene to learn about what skills employers need, what business opportunities are there in the market, and how would industries behave especially post Covid-19. We are now working closely with academia institutions



Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani

to deliver sessions specifically aimed at empowering students and the faculty members."

A series of sessions delivered by local and international experts in the form of physical interviews and online via webinars will be arranged for the institutions. Furthermore, practical presentations by specialist on industry developments in addition to 2 public events aimed at motivating students will be hosted by Knowledge Oman for the college and universities within the year.

"Empowering the youth with the necessary knowledge to prosper in life is our chief goal, and this will be undertaken along with our knowledge partners via the academic institution and online through webinars" said Al Barwani Knowledge Oman has managed to deliver 74 initiatives in the form of projects, workshops, and seminars that has impacted thousands of students from colleges and universities since 2008. Projects were supported by over 35 partners locally and

internationally that attracted over 80,000 registrations and 700 volunteers across the past 14 years.

Knowledge Oman received 4 awards that includes the Outstanding contribution to the cause of education from the World Human Resource Development (HRD) congress.

Members of the platform consist of multinational group of both local and expatriates living in the country with passion of creating, sharing and exchanging practical knowledge.



Japan offers Ukraine \$100m in loans

TOKYO: Japan is ready to extend at least \$100 million in emergency loans to Ukraine, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Tuesday, the Japanese government said in a summary of their phone call.

The offer comes as Russia has amassed more than 100,000 troops near the Ukraine border, raising fears of war and casting a shadow over the Ukrainian economy. Moscow denies planning to invade Ukraine, accusing the West of hysteria.

The call came as the Kremlin said it had pulled some forces back from Ukraine's borders, and President Vladimir Putin began talks in Moscow with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Zelenskiy expressed his gratitude for the offer, according to the written summary of the two leaders' exchange.

Afterwards Kishida told reporters he had agreed with Zelenskiy to pursue diplomatic efforts tenaciously to ease tensions over the Russian military buildup. He also said Japan planned to take appropriate steps, including possible sanctions, if Russia

Kishida agreed with Zelenskiy to pursue diplomatic efforts and to ease tensions over the Russian military buildup

invades Ukraine, echoing what his foreign minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said earlier on Tuesday.

Kishida "reiterated my consistent support for the integrity of sovereignty and territory (of Ukraine)" in the conversation with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Japan is also ready to provide assistance to Ukraine in the form of loans of at least \$100 million, Kishida told the Ukrainian leader.

The Japanese prime minister expressed "grave concern" about the situation and urged a diplomatic solution, while warning that if Russia invaded "we would respond appropriately, including sanctions, in cooperation with the G7 and the international community".

He declined to be drawn on



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy

what Zelenskiy had said during the call, which came as Ukraine's foreign minister said he believed a further Russian escalation had been prevented.

Kishida spoke earlier with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, pledging to "continue close coordination for

de-escalation".

On Monday, a statement by finance ministers from the G7 group of most developed nations warned they were ready to impose sanctions that would "have massive and immediate consequences on the Russian economy" in the event of an invasion.

Hayashi also declined to specify what form of sanctions might take but said the measures would be implemented multilaterally.

Japan's defence minister also warned on Tuesday of an increased Russian naval presence in the Sea of Japan and the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk, which he

suggested was intended "to show off the capability to operate in the East and West, along with the Russian military's recent movement around Ukraine".

Japan and Russia have complex relations and did not sign a peace treaty after World War II because of a lingering dispute over four islands claimed by Moscow in the closing days of the conflict.

The islands, off the northern coast of Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido, are known as the southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan.

Tokyo has shown support for its allies in Europe by offering liquefied natural gas imports to help allay fears of a supply crunch if tensions around Ukraine disrupt energy supplies.

Last week, Japan announced it had diverted multiple gas shipments to Europe, with delivery expected this month and more on the way in March. No details on the amount of gas were given, but in their call on Tuesday, von der Leyen expressed "appreciation" for the move and Kishida pledged to continue cooperation to ensure energy security. — **Reuters**

Campaigning for presidential poll begins in South Korea

SEOUL: South Korea's presidential candidates formally began campaigning on Tuesday in what is set to be the tightest race in 20 years between its two main parties, dominated by scandals that have allowed a third challenger to potentially play the role of kingmaker.

Polls say voters are looking for a president who can clean up polarised politics and corruption, and tackle the runaway housing prices and deepening inequality that have dogged Asia's fourth-largest economy.

Curbing North Korea's weapons tests and resuming talks would be a plus, but even a record month of missile testing by Pyongyang in January hasn't made foreign policy a key issue for the March 9 vote in South Korea.

But the major issues named in the polls have been overshadowed by scandals and petty controversies, ranging from allegations of abuse of power to spats over one candidate's relationship with a shaman and an anal acupuncturist.

Fourteen candidates have signed up since official registration



Supporters of South Korean presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung of the ruling Democratic Party during an election campaign in Seoul. — **AFP**

opened on Sunday, with the flag-bearer of the ruling Democratic Party, facing off against Yoon Suk-yeol, from the conservative main opposition People Power Party.

Dubbed the "unlikely election" due to high disapproval ratings and smear campaigns waged by both sides, Lee and Yoon are neck and neck in polls, although Yoon has maintained a slight lead in recent weeks.

A survey released on Sunday by Realmeter showed 41.6 per cent of

respondents favoured Yoon and 39.1 per cent picked Lee, while Southern Post put Yoon just 0.5 per cent ahead with 35.5 per cent.

That would contrast with the last three presidential elections, which were largely predictable. The upcoming contest could be the closest since 2002 when an opposition challenger lost to former president Roh Moo-hyun by a 2.33-per cent margin, or 570,980 votes.

"This is the foggiest election

we've seen in a while, it's very rare that a likely winner had yet to emerge just three weeks before the vote," said Bae Jong-chan, a political analyst who runs the Insight K think tank.

A former governor of Gyeonggi province, Lee shot to prominence through his aggressive handling of the coronavirus pandemic and his advocacy of universal basic income.

Yoon is a political novice, but has gained popularity thanks to his image as a staunch prosecutor-general who steered high-profile investigations into corruption scandals engulfing aides to former president Park Geun-hye and current President Moon Jae-in.

But growing frustration over mainstream politics and controversy involving both candidates' families have been a fillip for Ahn Cheol-soo, a renowned software mogul and doctor who is a minor opposition contender.

Ahn formally offered on Sunday to merge campaigns with Yoon, saying it would expedite a "overwhelming victory" and national unity. — **Reuters**

Sudanese detainees start hunger strike

KHARTOUM: More than 100 Sudanese detainees, including high-profile politicians, began a hunger strike on Tuesday, allied lawyers and doctors said. The detainees are part of the protest movement against an October 25 army coup that ended a civilian-military power-sharing arrangement that followed the overthrow of long-ruling autocrat President Omar al Bashir in 2019. The coup prompted mass protests during which 81 people have been killed, most recently two on Monday, and more than 2,000 injured, according to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors.

"More than 100 unlawful

detainees in Soba prison entered in an open hunger strike due to their unjustified and illegal detention," the Defence Committee for the Unlawfully Detained and Martyrs of Arbitrary Killings said in a statement.

The group said separately that one suspect in the killing of a police brigadier-general had been tortured while another was in solitary confinement. Reuters was trying to reach officials for comment on the allegation.

Civilian politicians Khalid Omer Yousif and Wagdi Salih were taking part in the hunger strike, said Abdelqayom Awad, a member of Yousif's Sudanese Congress Party. — **Reuters**



Sudanese protesters march during a demonstration calling for civilian rule and denouncing the military administration in Khartoum's twin city of Umdurman. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

UAE businesses urged to invest in Turkey

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on business leaders in UAE to invest in his country, which is in the grips of an economic crisis. Erdogan arrived in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi for a two-day visit to revive relations marking his first trip to the Gulf country in nearly a decade. "As the leading representatives of the private sector in the UAE, I am sure you fully comprehend the benefits of establishing commercial and investment partnerships with Turkey," he told



investors at a business conference in Abu Dhabi.

"It is you, the esteemed members of our business world, who will realise the two countries' potential, especially in trade and investments." — **AFP**

LONDON

UK to hold Afghan fundraising summit

Britain said it will co-host a virtual UN summit aimed at raising \$4.4 billion to alleviate a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan since the Taliban seized power. With the fundamentalist regime now denied access to Western funds, the United Nations says more than 24 million Afghans need urgent help to survive, and half the population is facing acute hunger.

The UN said last month that \$4.4 billion was needed, as it launched its largest appeal yet



for a single country. Donor countries, UN agencies and Afghan civil society are set to take part in the online event next month, the UK government and UN said in a joint statement, without giving a date. — **AFP**

TUNIS

US officials meet Tunisian civil society

US officials have met with Tunisian civil society representatives amid Washington's concern over the dissolution of the Supreme Judicial Council, the US Embassy in Tunisia said, escalating international pressure on President Kais Saied. Saied last week dissolved the council, one of the remaining institutions in Tunisia that was able to work independently of him, in the latest of a series of moves his opponents have described as being part of a coup.



US Deputy Assistant Secretaries Karen Sasahara and Christopher Le Mon met with Tunisian civil society representatives to discuss recent political and judicial developments, the US Embassy said. — **Reuters**



In brief

■ MANAMA



ISRAEL PM MEETS BAHRAIN KING ON LANDMARK VISIT

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett met Bahrain's king on a landmark visit on Tuesday to the Gulf country. "In these tumultuous times it's important that from this region we send a message of goodwill, of cooperation, of standing together against common challenges," Bennett said. On Tuesday he met King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, who is also prime minister. Bennett, the first Israeli head of government to visit Bahrain, discussed "deepening cooperation" in meetings with the defence and other ministers, his office said. "We want to fill this relationship with substance in energy, economy, tourism and architecture," Bennett said.

■ MOSCOW



NAVALNY SLAMS FRESH PRISON CAMP TRIAL

Imprisoned Russian dissident Alexei Navalny has accused the Russian judiciary of arbitrary criminal proceedings as a new trial against him gets under way. "My trials are quite strange in terms of the process and the sentences, but here they have crossed every line", the outspoken Kremlin critic said in an improvised courtroom set up at the prison camp where he is currently serving a prison sentence.

There he also met his wife Yulia Navalnaya again, the couple embraced and were able to be alone together during breaks. — dpa

■ TEGUCIGALPA



HONDURAN FORMER PRESIDENT SAYS WILLING TO SURRENDER

Former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez said he is ready to collaborate with national police, hours after authorities surrounded his house amid US government requests that he be arrested and extradited to Washington. Speculation had been swirling for months that the US was planning to request Hernandez's extradition when he left office amid accusations that he colluded with drug traffickers. Leftist leader Xiomara Castro replaced him as president last month. Honduras' Supreme Court will decide on the extradition request to name a judge to oversee the case, a judiciary spokesman said. The process could last between three and four months. — Reuters



A Belarusian multiple launch rocket system Polonez is seen during military exercises held by the armed forces of Russia and Belarus in the Gomel region, Belarus. — Reuters

Russia pulls some forces back from Ukraine border

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday some of its troops were returning to base after exercises near Ukraine and it mocked repeated Western warnings about a looming invasion, but Nato said it had yet to see any evidence of de-escalation.

Russia did not say how many units were being withdrawn, and how far, after a build-up of some 130,000 Russian troops to the north, east and south of Ukraine that has triggered one of the worst crises in relations with the West since the Cold War.

The development drew a guarded response from Ukraine and its Western allies, but prompted a rally on financial and oil markets. Western military analysts said it was too soon to be sure of the extent of any de-escalation.

The Kremlin sought to portray the moves as proof that Western talk of war had been both false and hysterical.

"February 15, 2022 will go down in history as the day Western war propaganda failed. Humiliated and destroyed without a single shot fired", Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

Nato's chief welcomed signals from Russia in the past two days that it may be looking for a diplomatic solution but urged



Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at a press conference following their meeting over Ukraine security in Moscow. — AFP

West responds with caution and scepticism as Putin hosts Germany's Scholz in Kremlin

Moscow to demonstrate its will to act.

"There are signs from Moscow that diplomacy should continue. This gives grounds for cautious optimism. But so far we have not seen any sign of de-escalation on the ground from the Russian side", Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters.

He said Russia often left military equipment behind after exercises, creating the potential for forces to regroup.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there were signs of a diplomatic opening but "the

intelligence that we're seeing today is still not encouraging".

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kyiv would only believe that Russia was moving to de-escalate the situation if it saw for itself that Russian troops were being pulled back.

"If we see a withdrawal, we will believe in a de-escalation", Interfax Ukraine quoted him as saying.

Russia has always denied planning to invade, saying it can exercise troops on its own territory as it sees fit. It has been pressing for a set of security guarantees from the West, saying it fears Nato is

encroaching on its Western flank.

In a separate development, Russia's Lower House of Parliament voted to ask President Vladimir Putin to recognise two Russian-backed breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine as independent, the house speaker said.

Recognition of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics could kill off the Minsk peace process in east Ukraine, where a conflict between government forces and Moscow-backed separatists has killed 15,000 people. It was not clear how Putin would respond.

Nato's Stoltenberg said such a move would be "a blatant violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty". Latvia said the European Union should impose sanctions on Russia if it recognised the separatists.

Russia's show of force near Ukraine's borders has prompted months of frantic Western diplomacy and drawn threats of severe sanctions if it invades, culminating in a crescendo of US and British warnings in recent days that this could happen at any time. "In terms of the timing of an attack, it could be imminent", British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said on Tuesday. She said Russian troops could reach Ukraine's capital Kyiv "very, very quickly". — Reuters

Trump tells French far-right hopeful to 'hang in there'



French far-right party! presidential candidate Eric Zemmour during a symposium focused on rural issues in Paris. — AFP

PARIS: Former US president Donald Trump has told French far-right presidential challenger Eric Zemmour, whose nationalist programme is shaping a divisive campaign race, to stay strong and true to his convictions, Zemmour said.

Zemmour's campaign team said the two had a 40-minute phone call late on Monday. Like Trump, Zemmour has positioned himself as a political outsider, banking instead on his celebrity status and no-nonsense language.

"He told me to remain who I am, that the media would call me brutal but that what mattered was to stay true to myself", Zemmour told reports on Tuesday.

Zemmour, 63, has said France needs saving from a downward spiral he blames largely on what he describes as unfettered immigration and the increasing influence of Islam on French society. He holds several convictions for inciting racial hate.

Zemmour said he told Trump that both their countries faced a "battle of civilisation".

"We share the same ideas, namely that the United States should remain the US and France should remain France", he added.

The two discussed immigration, security and their countries' respective economies, Zemmour's campaign team said in a statement. — Reuters

Four dead as Spanish trawler sinks off Canada

MADRID: A Spanish fishing trawler sank in rough waters off eastern Canada on Tuesday, killing at least four of the vessel's 22-strong crew, the Spanish transport ministry said.

Rescuers saved three crew members and were searching for 15 others who were missing off the island of Newfoundland on Canada's Atlantic coast where the ship foundered, a ministry spokesman said.

Twelve of the crew are Spanish nationals, eight are from Peru and the rest from Ghana, Spanish media reports said.

Rescuers had spotted four of the trawler's lifeboats, said Maica Larriba, a representative of Spain's central government in the

northwestern Galicia region where the trawler is based.

"Two were completely empty and in one of them were just three survivors who were in a state of hypothermic shock because the temperature of the water is horrible, very low", she told public radio. Rescuers had not yet managed to reach the fourth lifeboat, she added. When the trawler sent out a distress signal, two other fishing vessels in the area came to its aid, Rosa Quintana, the Galician official in charge of maritime affairs, told reporters.

A Canadian coastguard helicopter airlifted the three survivors to safety, she added.

The fishing vessel, a freezer trawler registered in 2004, was



At least four dead, 15 missing after Spanish fishing boat sinks off Newfoundland, in eastern Canada.

based in the port of Marin in Galicia and belongs to shipowner Manuel Nores.

The company, founded in 1950, has eight freezer trawlers and

some 300 employees, according to its web site.

It has fishing vessels operating in the South Atlantic, off the Canadian coast and between

Mauritania and Guinea-Bissau.

"We are following with concern the search and rescue operation for the crew of the Galician ship that sunk in the waters of Newfoundland", Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez tweeted.

"All my love to their families. The government remains in constant contact with rescue services", he added.

Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, who is from Galicia, said she was "shocked" by the news of the accident.

"Bad news is reaching us from the other side of the Atlantic", she tweeted. "All my love and support to the families of the crew in their pain at this time of uncertainty."

— AFP

The citizen experience in the public sector



Miriam Kugel
mkugel@newmetrics.net

As governments have worked hard to digitise services in the wake of the pandemic, expectations from citizens and residents to receive a frictionless, multichannel experience have increased.

Government services agencies are increasingly adapting to operate under customer-centric and digital-first mindsets, with the ambition even to surpass service-centric industries such as banking and telecoms in their service levels and customer satisfaction feedback.

Government authorities can transform how citizens interact and transact with them by rethinking what experiences citizens expect from government services, revamping high-friction processes, and eliminating frustrating service loops powered by reimaged digital platforms and interconnected ecosystems.

But just like in any other industry, legacy systems and processes, siloed organisational structures, and a lack of a customer-centric culture and KPIs can make transformation efforts more complex while customer expectations increase steadily.

Rami Haffar, Principal Customer

and Employee Experience at New Metrics, who is spearheading CX technology transformations across leading government entities across the GCC region, says: “One of the challenges customers and citizens are facing is that departments and agencies often seem to run independently, requiring citizens to repeat the same information as an initial step to access different services.”

A recent survey found that globally almost one-third of citizens (32 per cent) rank more use of digital technologies in the provision of public services as one of the top three priorities for governments to improve the quality of services.

As a result, the idea of a one-stop-shop and e-service portals is becoming a growing standard with customers and citizens, where connected services require only a login or ID check to access everything the citizen requires.

“But until that does indeed become the norm, the citizen experience will still need optimisation, and to do that, we need to start by understanding it”

Haffar further says: “To begin

DIGITALLY ENABLED
CITIZEN EXPERIENCES
ARE EXPECTED TO
BECOME THE NORM
BY 2023

redesigning the public sector experience, we typically look at the full journey by assessing the front-end stages and back-end processes, systems, and stakeholders cross-cutting across all government entities. We must start by identifying the data, system, process, and stakeholders’ internal and external silos that currently contribute to friction and frustrations in the citizen journey. In our work across the region, we have observed that the public sector has started embedding customer experience as a key strategic pillar as early as 2019, with CX investments doubling since then, largely brought on by the necessity of a pandemic restricting in-person access but dramatically increasing demand.”

“Many governments across the region have as a result established dedicated customer experience departments, invested in customer experience analytics technology,

adopted innovation and design thinking methodologies usually deployed at high-tech firms such as Google, and invested in digital and self-service channels.”

Data backs up these trends, with research showing that the GCC nations account for three of the top four leading nations in the adoption of online government services today, with Saudi Arabia featuring the second-highest digital adoption with an average of 15.5 digital government services used in the past year.

This has been only surpassed by India, featuring an average of 17.0 digital government services used in the past year.

Citizens themselves have a strong appetite for greater engagement with their public services through technology.

With an elevation in customer expectations, the public sector is increasingly investing in bridging the experience gap by investing in the customer and employee experience.

Haffar sees these trends developing further in the region. He says that “The statistics are significant because the population

of the GCC is generally quite young. In 2020, General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) showed that 66 per cent of the Saudi population was under 35 — and this is mirrored across the region.”

“High adoption of digital services can be assumed to be greater in this demographic, but tailoring services to this age range is a very different proposition to catering to older generations. Differing needs, expectations — both now and in the future — and a completely different lifestyle are all factors.

“Appealing to opposite demographics is a difficult task and a challenge faced by the public sector as well as private companies all around the world.”

Digitally enabled citizen experiences are expected to become the norm by 2023. Private companies and government agencies alike will face a period of constant digital and process transformation in the following years.

The best preparation for any organisation and its employees to carry out this transformation will be to be ready for constant change.

Taliban sniper becomes Afghan mayor

ELISE BLANCHARD

Strolling through the town of Maymana, the new mayor appears to inspire goodwill from war-weary constituents in the Afghan provincial capital. But Damullah Mohibullah Mowaffaq has a reputation as one of the top snipers in the ranks of the Taliban, until last summer waging war to take control of the country.

Mowaffaq was made mayor of Maymana, capital of Faryab province in the far reaches of northwest Afghanistan, in November, three months after the Taliban ousted the Western-backed government and seized power. He rose to prominence as a fighter, but now his schedule is packed with the daily tasks of local government — unblocking sewers, planning roads and smoothing over neighbourhood quarrels. His switch reflects the broader transformation that the Taliban are undergoing, as the insurgents grapple with administering territory. “When I was fighting my objectives were very specific: to end the foreign occupation, discrimination and injustice,” the 25-year-old said.

“Now my goals are also clear: to fight corruption and make the country prosper.” On a walk through the streets of Maymana, the new mayor talks with municipal workers clearing roadside gutters. Residents of the city of 100,000 approach with complaints and suggestions, which are dutifully added to an ever-growing to-do list.

“The new mayor is young, well-educated and, very importantly, from the city,” says his non-Taliban deputy, Sayed Ahmad Shah Gheyasi. “He knows how to deal with people.” Unlike the poor, educated rural men who make up the Taliban rank and file, Mowaffaq comes from a family of wealthy traders and grew up in Maymana, where he excelled at school and in sport. Memorabilia from his youth decorates his office including a certificate from a martial arts competition as well as his high school diploma. After joining the insurgency at 19, he was promoted to command a small unit deployed in Faryab province.

Others describe him as one of the Taliban’s most talented snipers, although he appears reluctant to be drawn into telling war stories. — AFP



Catherine Porter

The writer is the Canada bureau chief for TNYT based in Toronto

Baffled by the chaos in Canada? So are Canadians

It seemed a classically Canadian moment in a scene otherwise torn from the book of Trump America. Between the intersection transformed into a mosh pit and the graceful Parliament buildings cluttered with “fake news,” “the Great Resist” and “Covid red pill” signs, a middle-aged man named Johnny Rowe perched on a median last weekend with an amplifier and a simple greeting.

“Welcome to Ottawa,” he called out to the hordes streaming down the middle of the street, many hollering “freedom.” “Thank you for coming.”

If the outside world is baffled by the scenes unfolding in the streets of Canada, they are hardly alone. Many Canadians, too, are dumbfounded, perhaps none more so than the government officials who have stood by largely slack-jawed as giant trucks stake out ground in the normally placid capital, shaking and honking at night as people cheer and dance, neighbours be damned. The pervasive slogan, scrawled across trucks, hats, shirt and flags, is an epithet startlingly vulgar by Canadian standards that urges Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to go away. Some say he should be not just deposed but imprisoned over the vaccine regulations governments in Canada have passed. It all seemed a rebuff to the cherished mythology imposed on its citizens from abroad and held by many Canadians themselves as moderate, rule-following, levelheaded — and just plain nice.

“It feels like a national nervous breakdown,” said Susan Delacourt, a veteran Canadian political columnist from Ottawa who like many of her fellow citizens is wondering what exactly is happening to her country right now.

On Monday, there were some signs

of easing tensions.

Traffic resumed over the Ambassador Bridge, a major international route blockaded for a week, and officials announced that they were lifting some contentious vaccine pass requirements. But the government also invoked the Emergencies Act to end the protests, and in Alberta the police arrested 11 people and seized a large cache of weapons. Maybe it is because Canada, unlike the neighbour that overshadows it, was born not from revolution but from negotiation that its approach to rebellion now seems more than a little unconventional, even quirky. But one thing is clear: The members of the so-called freedom convoy are not bellowing “compromise” or “care for one another.” The streets of downtown Ottawa echo with chants and slogans steeped in the language of the American Revolution, right down to the Don’t Tread on Me pennants.

“Freedom,” yells a man in a red mask waving a Canadian flag. “Freedom,” comes the ardent reply. Though the flag, it should be noted, was held aloft in a quintessentially Canadian fashion,

attached to a hockey stick.

The repeated invocation of liberty is just one reason — along with the American, Confederate and Trump flags spotted in the mix — many believe the unrest is essentially a US import. For two years, Canadians have been largely stuck at home, and many have spent more time in front of the screen than ever.

As they did, they absorbed the American culture war being played out from Fox News to Breitbart, and Trumpian ideas took root in Canada, said Gerald Butts, a longtime friend of Trudeau’s and his former top political aide.

Right-wing activists in the United States and elsewhere have lent more than moral support to their new kindred spirits in Canada. They are opening their wallets. At least some of the money that has allowed the protesters to keep their trucks fueled and cover other expenses has flowed in from untraceable sources.

“The suffering has gotten to a level where they have nothing to lose,” he said.

—The New York Times



Protests against vaccine mandates in downtown Ottawa.

Beginning of an end to the pandemic?



The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

Along with many others, I too took a decision last week not to engage in any discussion about the Covid-19, which wrought havoc during the last two years. Nevertheless, with the changes taking place in our daily lives thanks to the breather from the ease in restrictions and respite in the nature of the virus, I feel it is appropriate to share some thoughts with the readers.

True, after nearly two years and wave after wave of the deadliest outbreak in human history, the hopefuls have now started embracing the belief that the latest variant of the virus, albeit it is found to be less deadly than its delta predecessor, will herald the beginning of the end of the pandemic.

As researchers predict, after the Omicron wave, we will get back on track although Covid-19 is expected to become endemic. But we need a shift in both language and approach!

Let me start with what Dr Anthony Fauci, the top White House medical adviser at the World Economic Forum's Davos Agenda, said, "If you look at the history of infectious diseases, we've only eradicated one infectious disease in man, and that's smallpox. That's not going to happen with this virus."

If he is to be believed the current pandemic won't end with the elimination of the coronavirus. Instead, a less dangerous and disruptive strain of the virus will likely take hold and become endemic!

After the outbreak of Covid-19 and its declaration as a pandemic, much has changed not just in terms of research, our knowledge of the virus, but also our attitude towards coronavirus.

We've now developed a certain set of habits for the last two years, and we've just got to get used to them again. It's important that we do not drop our guard, surrender to the virus or downgrade the threat that the virus poses to us.

It's essential that we understand living with the virus isn't the same thing as ignoring the virus. Instead, it represents an adjustment in the way in which we respond to the disease.

We remain vigilant and respond to surges in cases when they occur, doing what's needed to keep transmission as low as possible. Some societal and public health changes brought by the pandemic should continue to be in practice.

Importantly, as experts point out, a disease being considered endemic doesn't mean we consider it mild. It just means it remains a part of our lives, and therefore we still protect the vulnerable from severe illness, as we do with other diseases.

In order to reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging, it's vital we really step up our rollout of vaccines globally to reduce virus transmission. It is still a global concern that millions of people are still not vaccinated!

At the same time, the big question as to when will this transition to endemic happen remains unanswered.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates tweeted last week that once Omicron subsides, "the rest of the year should see far fewer cases so Covid can be treated more like seasonal flu."

Looking at the future of a pandemic that completely caught the world by surprise in 2019, a specialist at Indiana University School of Medicine says it "is like a public health vehicle trying to drive through the bad weather of a pandemic."

And even though we have the best headlights, we can't see beyond this fog. In other words, we really don't know if there's going to be another variant that may create a lot of havoc.

People are slowly starting to realise that we need to learn to live with this, because the virus is not going away.



SUPPORTING WITH FLOWERS!

A man decorated with plastic flowers supports South Korean presidential candidate Yoon Suk-yeol of the opposition People Power Party during an election campaign in downtown Seoul on Tuesday, as the official presidential campaign period kicked off for a 22-day run ahead of the election on March 9. – AFP

Aviation fears grow over Russia fallout from Ukraine crisis

TIM HEPHER & ALLISON LAMPERT

Airlines and the leasing companies that control billions of dollars' worth of passenger jets are drawing up contingency plans for a freeze in business with Russia if the standoff on Ukraine's border boils over into a military conflict.

US officials have warned that Moscow could launch an attack on Ukraine after amassing more than 100,000 troops close to its neighbour's border, with the West preparing heavy sanctions.

Aviation bosses are worried about the impact on dealings with Russian companies. Sanctions could disrupt payments to leasing firms, and any retaliatory move by Moscow to restrict access to Russian airspace might throw east-west trade into chaos.

"We are expecting an asymmetrical Russian response," said a Western source involved in drawing up scenarios, adding the West was unlikely to restrict its own airspace first.

Air corridors between parts of Europe or North America and Asia stretch across Russia, making its 26 million square km of airspace a vital trade intersection.

Cargo is particularly active. US carrier FedEx said on Monday it was making unspecified contingency plans.

Without access to Russia's airways, experts say airlines face having to divert flights south while avoiding areas of tension in the Middle East — adding significant cost at a time when airlines are reeling from the pandemic.

AIR CORRIDORS BETWEEN PARTS OF EUROPE OR NORTH AMERICA AND ASIA STRETCH ACROSS RUSSIA, MAKING ITS 26 MILLION SQUARE KM OF AIRSPACE A VITAL TRADE INTERSECTION

According to some reports, the crisis has resurrected the Cold War prospect of European jets heading over North America to refuel in Anchorage, then dropping down to destinations such as Tokyo, pushing the economics of such flights to the limit.

So far, Alaska's largest airport has not been contacted by any airline exploring that option, which would require an increase in ground-handling capacity, a spokesperson said.

But the scenario is a reminder that Russia's size and position on the aviation map gives it leverage not available to the Soviet Union when economies were less integrated, according to Elisabeth Braw, senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

"So far, Moscow hasn't threatened to revoke overflight rights, but knows it has a phenomenal weapon at its disposal," Braw wrote in a column in *Defence One* last month. Even short of formal retaliation, experts say the impact on crucial Russian overflights is hard to predict.

"Every one of those operations

requires advance clearance and that's not always routinely granted. And there's every reason to believe that if things got serious some of those requests could just go unanswered," analyst Robert Mann said.

Russia's 8,000 air traffic controllers handled 194,296 transit flights, or 532 overflights a day, on average in 2021.

That's up 16 per cent from coronavirus-depressed levels in 2020 but still 37 per cent below pre-crisis traffic in 2019, according to the Federal Agency for Air Transport.

"It would be devastating in normal circumstances, but Asia traffic is lower than normal," the Western source said.

Analysts say Russia earns significant fees from overflights.

As tensions rose in recent months, US airlines raised concerns that Russia could refuse to extend overflights, disrupting connections to Asia, India and the Middle East.

If there is an emergency, we have no choice but to avoid Russia and fly the southern route," said Yuji Hirako, President and Chief Executive of All Nippon Airways Co Ltd. "Since the demand for international flights is so low due to the coronavirus pandemic, we may choose not to fly in the event of an emergency."

In October, US carriers asked the State Department to "act urgently" to secure additional rights to overfly Russia, according to a trade group's letter seen by Reuters. US officials are expected to meet the carriers within days.

For the aircraft leasing industry, Russia has until now been a relative bright spot, as airlines have largely kept up with payments during the pandemic, one leasing company executive said.

Even as some airlines began avoiding Ukraine on Monday, leasing companies were eyeing larger risks in Russia.

Domhnal Slattery, Chief Executive of lessor Avolon, said his biggest concern was the potential for sanctions involving SWIFT, which would disrupt international payment transfers.

"So we're focused on ensuring of how do we get around that from the payment of our rentals perspective," he said.

Russian companies have 980 passenger jets in service, of which 777 are leased, according to analytics firm Cirium.

Of these, two thirds, or 515 jets, with an estimated market value of about \$10 billion, are rented from foreign firms. "If there are sanctions on dealing with Russian companies, this could affect more than 500 aircraft if no exemptions are allowed," said Rob Morris, head consultant at Ascend by Cirium. — Reuters



Travellers wait at the departures board ahead of their flights at the Boryspil airport, some 30 km outside Kyiv. Ukraine vowed to keep its airspace open to international travel despite Western warnings that Russian troops conducting drills near its borders could invade at any point. – AFP

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GAVIRIA REPEATS STAGE 1 SHOW IN LAST STAGE
HIRT KEEPS THE RED



Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux' rider Jan Hirt poses on the podium with his trophy after winning the 2022 Oman Tour in Muscat.



Euskatel-Euskadi's rider Peio Goikoetxea poses on the podium after winning the gold jersey (most aggressive rider).



Uno-X Pro cycling Team's rider Anthon Charmig poses on the podium after winning the white jersey (best young rider) in Tour of Oman 2022.

**ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH**
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Czech rider Jan Hirt of Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux survived the challenge of rivals to take the overall winners red jersey in the Tour of Oman 2022 which concluded here on Tuesday.

Stage 1 winner Fernando Gaviria of UAE Team Emirates stormed to another stage title in the 132.5 km sixth and final stage from Al Mouj to Muttrah Sea Road.

The Colombian 'Misil' capped off the thrilling week of cycling with a fast sprint to take the last stage win ahead of Kaden Groves (BikeExchange-Jayco) and Amaury Capiot (Arkea-Samsic).

Back after a dominant outing at Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain), Hirt emerged the champion with an aggregate time of 22 hours 35 minutes and 43 seconds.

"I thank my team-mates for the great support. As a team member and personally I enjoyed the race. Cycling is a team sport and we perfectly implemented our strategy in the last stage", the Belgium team rider said. Hirt had described his vital win of stage 5 at Jabal Al Akhdhar as "dream accomplished."

Stage four winner Fausto Masnada of Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team came second overall with a timing of 22:36:43 and

Portuguese rider Rui Costa of UAE Team Emirates finished third on 22:36:59.

GREEN FOR GAVIRIA

Gaviria claimed the green jersey with 37 points ahead of Kaden Groves of Team BikeExchange-Jayco with 33 points and Hirt with 32 points.

"I'm really happy to take the last stage here in Oman. It's been a good week for me and the team", Gaviria said after the win at Muttrah.

"I'm happy because my team worked well and stayed focused on winning the stage and we were able to deliver. From the beginning we tried to take control of the race and luckily I had good legs in the finish and could take the sprint", he told the UAE Team Emirates website.

"It was a nice week. One of the beauties of this sport is to travel and discover new countries and cultures. So to ride in amazing places like Oman is great and we'll hope to be back next year", the Portuguese rider added.

Star campaigner UK's Mark Cavendish ended the Tour with 28 points in fourth position in the general points classification.

The Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team rider finished a disappointing 67th in the overall standings after a frustrating sixth in the final stage.

CHARMIG BEST YOUTH

Meanwhile, Denmark's Anthon

Charmig of Uno-X Pro Cycling Team was selected as the best young rider of the Tour. Charmig, who finished fifth overall behind French rider Elie Gesbert of Arkea-Samsic, had won the third stage.

"The Green Mountain stage didn't go as I had hoped for after an early crash, but I'm overall happy about the race and incredibly proud of my stage win! Thanks to the team for the help all week!" Charmig said.

Spanish riders of Euskaltel-Euskadi, Peio Goikoetxea Goigana and Antonio Angula Sampedro emerged the top two aggressive riders respectively.

For the hosts, Mundher al Hasani finished 81st followed by Abdulrahman al Yaqoobi, Said al Rahbi, Mohammed al Wahibi, Faisal al Mamari and Mazin al Riyami — all part of debutant Oman National Team.

ARKEA-SAMISIC TAKE TEAM TITLE

French team Arkea-Samsic consisting Elie Gesbert (France), Winner Andrew Anacona (Colombia), Amaury Capiot (Belgium), Laurent Pichon (France) and Kevin Vauquelin (France) won the overall team title with an aggregate timing of 67:53:48 covering the 891 km over the six stages.

Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux came second with 67:53:55 and Team DSM ended third on 67:55:49. Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team ended fifth below Bardiani CSF Faizane.



Jan Hirt (C) poses on the podium after winning the 2022 Oman Tour, alongside second-place winner Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team's Fausto Masnada (L) and in third place UAE Team Emirates' Rui Costa (R), in Muscat. – PICS BY AFP

TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 6 RESULTS			
POSITION	RIDER	TEAM	TIMING
1	Fernando Gaviria Rendon (Col)	UAE Team Emirates	4:10:16
2	Kaden Groves (Aus)	BikeExchange-Jayco	4:10:16
3	Amaury Capiot (Bel)	Arkea-Samsic	4:10:16
4	Paul Penhoet (Fra)	Groupama-FDJ	4:10:16
5	Hugo Page (Fra)	Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux	4:10:16
6	Mark Cavendish (GBR)	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team	4:10:16
7	Felix Gross (Ger)	UAE Team Emirates	4:10:16
8	Laurenz Rex (Bel)	Bingoal Pauwels Sauces WB	4:10:16
9	Szymon Sajnok (Pol)	Cofidis	4:10:16
10	Kevin Vauquelin (Fra)	Arkea-Samsix	10. 4:10:16

OVERALL GENERAL STANDINGS			
POSITION	RIDER	TEAM	TIMING
1	Jan Hirt (Cze)	Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux	22:35:43
2	Fausto Masnada (Ita)	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team	22:36:43
3	Rui Costa (Por)	UAE Team Emirates	22:36:59
4	Elie Gesbert (Fra)	Arkea-Samsic	22:37:01
5	Anthon Charmig (Den)	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team	22:37:01
6	Kevin Vauquelin (Fra)	Arkea-Samsic	22:37:21
7	Kevin Colleoni (Ita)	BikeExchange-Jayco	22:37:33
8	Rein Taaramae (Est)	Intermarche-Wanty-Gobert Materiaux	22:37:34
9	Henri Vandenabeele (Bel)	Team DSM	22:37:37
10	Mauro Schmid (Swi)	Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team	22:37:44



MAXWELL

MAGIC SEES AUSTRALIA SEAL T20 SERIES

CANBERRA: Glenn Maxwell slammed 39 off 25 balls as a dominant Australia thumped Sri Lanka by six wickets to win their third straight Twenty20 clash and seal the series in Canberra on Tuesday.

The world champions have an unassailable 3-0 lead with two games to play after taking the opening match by 20 runs then clinching the second in a thrilling super over finish after it ended in a tie.

They made a slow start chasing 122 to win at Manuka Oval, losing two early wickets before skipper Aaron Finch (35) and the big-hitting Maxwell steadied the ship.

They achieved the target with 19 balls to spare and the loss of four wickets.

Australia made three changes for the game, with Mitchell Starc returning and Ashton Agar and Daniel Sams given an opportunity, with Finch hailing the depth of the squad.

“That’s one thing we’ve been trying to expose a little bit more, shuffling guys around to get more information on the depth of the squad,” he said. “And it’s looking really good at the moment.”

With Sri Lanka needing victory to keep the series alive, they struck 17 off the first two overs after

The world champions have an unassailable 3-0 lead with two games to play after taking the opening match by 20 runs then clinching the second in a thrilling super over finish after it ended in a tie

being sent into bat.

But they got bogged down by Australia’s economical bowling, crawling to 121 for six with skipper Dasun Shanaka making 39 and Kane Richardson bagging 3-21.

Their prospect of pulling off a victory was hampered by star leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga testing positive for Covid-19 before the match and speedster Nuwan Thushara pulling up injured after bowling only seven balls.

“No positives today, yet again a poor start from our boys,” said Shanaka. “Throughout the series it’s been a major concern. If we had that momentum from the start we could get those runs on the board. We were 20 to 30 runs short in this game.”

ANCHOR ROLE

They got a boost when the dangerous Ben McDermott was out first ball, getting a thick edge to Charith Asalanka at slip off Maheesh Theekshana.

Ashton Agar, who surprisingly opened the innings, made 13

before Theekshana picked up a second scalp to leave Australia at 31 for two after five overs.

But Maxwell rode his luck, surviving three chances, to blast 39 and turn the tables before he too fell to Theekshana going for one big hit too many, after two sixes and three fours.

Finch was happy to play the anchor role before Josh Inglis (21) and Marcus Stoinis (12) steered them home.

Earlier, Sri Lanka made an aggressive start before Danushka Gunathilaka was out to Richardson’s opening delivery in the third over. He has now made 1, 0 and 9 in his three innings on tour, putting his place under threat.

Asalanka came in and smacked a six but departed a ball later, caught behind off Richardson, while Kusal Mendis, on his return after recovering from Covid-19, only lasted 11 balls before being undone by leg-spinner Agar.

Part-time spinner Maxwell bagged the big wicket of Pathum

Nissanka, who has been Sri Lanka’s best batsman this series, but it needed an outstanding diving catch from Sams to remove him for 16 and leave the visitors tottering at 42 for four after eight overs.

Dinesh Chandimal and Shanaka added 47 for the fifth wicket but 122 was never going to be a big enough target. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA
P Nissanka c Sams b Maxwell16
D Gunathilaka c Hazlewood b Richardson -9
C Asalanka c Wade b Richardson -6
K Mendis c&b Agar -4
D Chandimal b Richardson25
D Shanaka (not out)39
C Karunaratne c Inglis b Hazlewood8
D Chameera (not out)5
Extras (B-4, NB-1, W-4)9
Total (For 6 wks, 20 overs) 121
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-23, 3-38, 4-40, 5-87, 6-115
Bowling: Starc 4-0-30-0, Hazlewood 4-0-31-1, Richardson 4-0-21-3, Sams 3-0-18-0, Agar 4-0-14-1, Maxwell 1-0-3-1

AUSTRALIA
B McDermott c Asalanka b Theekshana0
A Agar lbw Theekshana13
A Finch c Asalanka b Vandersay35
G Maxwell c Mendis b Theekshana39
J Inglis (not out)21
M Stoinis (not out)12
Extras (LB-3, NB-1)4
Total (For 4 wks, 16.5 overs) 124
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-26, 3-76, 4-102
Bowling: Theekshana 4-0-24-3, Thushara 1.1-0-10-0, Karunaratne 2.5-0-22-0, Vandersay 4-0-32-1, Chameera 4-0-22-0, Shanaka 0.5-0-11-0



Team Oman returns with rich medal haul at UAE President’s Cup

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Sultanate of Oman national team returned with five medals, two gold, two silver and one bronze, after a fierce and strong competition with the Saudi Arabia team, which was tied in the overall total by 226 points for each team.

The competition was decided after a play-off and the Sultanate of Oman national reserve team won the second place (silver medal) in the doubles rounds and the third place (bronze medal) at the individual level. Hamad bin Saif al Raisi had also bagged the gold medal and first place in the individual sword competitions in the last day of the UAE President’s Cup for tent-pegging in Abu Dhabi.

In the event held at Boudheib International Endurance Village, 14 teams participated in the event namely the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, three teams from Dubai and eight teams from Boudheib Club, organised by the UAE Equestrian and Racing Federation.

Our national team managed to get the (silver medal) and the second place by the contestant Daoud bin Ajib al Mushrafi, the competitor Hamad bin Saif al Raisi, the competitor Zaid bin Hamoud al Saeedi and the coach Mohammed bin Juma al Malki. When the Saudi team came first and won the (gold medal), followed by the contestant Rashid al Marri and the contestant Samer Ali, while the UAE team won the third place and the (bronze medal) and



was represented by the contestant Saif bin Saeed al Junaibi and the contestant Mohammed bin Saleh al Hammadi.

The last day saw eight rounds, three rounds of individual swordsmanship, where the first place and the gold medal was won by Saudi Arabia by the contestant Rashid al Marri with 18 points, and the second place by the UAE and the silver medal by the contestant Malik al Maamari by 12 points.

The contestant Mohammed bin Saleh al Hammadi of the UAE team won the third place and the bronze medal by 12 points (time difference).

The competition continued on the doubles rounds for the sword through three round. The first place and gold medal (was achieved by the KSA through the contestant Rashid al Marri and Samer Ali with 32 points.

The second place (silver medal) for the UAE was clinched by the contestants Fahd and Qassem al Shamri by 29.5 points. The third place and bronze medal also went to the UAE team, represented by Ateeq and Jaber, with 28 points.

The last competition in two rounds was to cut two lemons and a stake with the sword. Our national team managed to achieve the first place and gold medal through Hamad bin Saif al Raisi with 18 points. The UAE came in second place (silver medal) by the time difference by Saeed al Khaili with 18 points. The third (bronze medal) was awarded to the UAE team, with the time difference by the contestant Abdullah al Shamsi by 18 points.

OOC launches Arabic book on Olympic sports

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

The Omani Olympic Committee on Tuesday launched the Arabic version of the book ‘Managing Olympic Sports Bodies’, which is one of the most important curricula taught in sports management courses for the Omani National Olympic Committees and employees of sports federations and the various media.

The book is issued by the International Olympic Committee from English into Arabic with the aim of benefiting from international programmes that cover all areas of sports development.

The inauguration at the OOC headquarters was attended by Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishri, OOC Secretary-General, Ali bin Salim al Busafi, Director of Olympic Solidarity at OOC and a number of sports federation officials.



This initiative comes in cooperation with the International Olympic Solidarity, where this book will contribute to strengthening and facilitating the implementation of sports management courses in Arabic language. The book aims to present a simplified and practical image of the management science that has been developed by Olympic sports organisations around the world, and to development their structure,

and exchange experiences and knowledge among workers in sports institutions.

The book consists of six chapters covering the main aspects of the science of sports management.

The first chapter deals with the organisation of the Olympic sports institution through an understanding of its environment, its structure and its operation. The second chapter deals with the management of the Olympic

sports institution through the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the strategic plan.

The third chapter focuses on managing the human resources of the organisation through the development of rules and regulations, motivation, recruitment and training. The fourth chapter deals with managing the finance of the institution using appropriate procedures and transparency of working.

LONDON: Novak Djokovic is prepared to miss the French Open and Wimbledon if Covid-19 vaccination becomes mandatory at the Grand Slams but he is not against inoculation, the world number one tennis player said.

Djokovic, who is unvaccinated, was barred from competing in this year's Australian Open, depriving the 34-year-old Serbian of the chance to become the most successful men's player of all time with 21 Grand Slam titles.

He was instead deported from Australia after an 11-day rollercoaster experience involving two visa cancellations, two court challenges and five nights in two stints at an immigration detention hotel where asylum seekers are held.

"I understand the consequences of my decision," Djokovic told the BBC, adding that he was prepared not to travel to Australia due to his unvaccinated status.

"I understand that not being vaccinated today, I am unable to travel to most of the tournaments at the moment. Yes, that is the price that I'm willing to pay."

A steely-eyed Djokovic said he hoped to compete for "many more years" but added that the freedom to choose what he wants to put into his body was more important to him than any title.

The Serbian, however, distanced himself from the anti-vaccination movement and said he was keeping an open mind about taking the jab.

"I was never against vaccination," he said, adding that he took vaccines as a child. "But I've always supported the freedom to choose what you put in your body."

"I understand that globally, everyone is trying to put a big effort into handling this virus and seeing, hopefully, an end soon to this virus."

Djokovic, who won Wimbledon and the French Open last year, is set to return to competitive action at an ATP tournament in Dubai next week for the first time since his deportation from Melbourne ahead of the Australian Open.

Another win at Melbourne Park, where Djokovic has won nine titles, would have statistically made him the most successful men's player but instead it was his long-time rival Rafa Nadal who nudged ahead of him by lifting the trophy last month.

DJOKOVIC PREPARED TO MISS GRAND SLAMS IF COVID JAB MADE MANDATORY



I understand the consequences of my decision. I understand that not being vaccinated today, I am unable to travel to most of the tournaments at the moment. Yes, that is the price that I'm willing to pay

NOVAK DJOKOVIC
20-time Grand Slam champion



The Serbian said he was ready to sacrifice his shot at the milestone. Swiss Roger Federer, who is recuperating from multiple knee surgeries, has also won 20 major titles.

MELBOURNE SAGA

Djokovic fuelled widespread anger in Australia when he was given a medical exemption from mandatory COVID-19 vaccination to compete at Melbourne Park on grounds that he recently contracted the virus.

But he was detained by immigration authorities on arrival, released by a court order and then detained again before being deported.

The case stoked global debate and Australian Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said Djokovic could be a threat to public order in the country because his presence would encourage anti-vaccination sentiment.

"I was really sad and disappointed with the way it all ended for me in Australia," Djokovic said, adding that he was deported despite following all rules. "It wasn't easy."

"The reason why I was deported from Australia was because the Minister for Immigration used his discretion to cancel my visa based on his perception that I might create some anti-vax sentiment in the country or in the city, which I completely disagree with." — Reuters



Al Bashayer camel fest winners to get gold, silver swords and 25 SUV cars

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Al Bashayer Annual Festival for Arabian camel racing 2022 programme was unveiled by Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Junaibi, race director, at the Al Bashayer Square on Tuesday.

The annual festival will be held from February 28 to March 5 with support of HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

During the press conference, Dr Abdullah confirmed that the variety of prizes will include 25 SUV cars, including 11 cars of Land Cruiser Station and 14 Land Cruiser Pick-up. There will be also 14 precious symbolic prizes (icon) — two silver and gold swords — will be awarded for the winners on the closing day.

On the first day, for young category (Hagayag, 2 years old) from 4 km there will be 16 races (cash prizes) in the morning, and 8 race (prizes are cars) in the afternoon.

On second day, there will be 15 races (cash prizes) for young category (Lagaya, 3 years old) from 5 km in the morning and 5 races (prizes are cars) in the afternoon.

The third day will be for (Elythaa, 4 years old) for 6 km in 10 races (cash prizes) in the morning and 5 races (prizes are cars) in the afternoon.

'Thanaya' 5 years and 'Alhool' 6 years old will be in the fourth day morning for 8 km divided into 8 races. Additionally, there are two

2 km races for human riders above 18 years old.

On the last day, the competition will start in the evening with an endurance race (12 km) for human riders above 18 years old. The prize is land cruiser station for the winner and

The variety of prizes will include 25 SUV cars, including 11 cars of Land Cruiser Station and 14 Land Cruiser Pick-up. There will be also 14 precious symbolic prizes (icon) — two silver and gold swords — will be awarded for the winners on the closing day

cash prizes for top 10 places. Four other races (8 km) will be held for the grand prize of golden sword and Land Cruiser Station (institution), silver sword and Land Cruiser Station for the individual participant.

The concluding ceremony will be held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The Bashayer Square race committee affirmed that all necessary measures will be taken regarding the Covid-19 medical protocols.

Jotun, Mazoon UP, Aflag Group, Israr Ghala post wins

MUSCAT: Raj Amal's excellent all-round display helped Winner's Jotun to a 5-wicket victory against OCT Al Mabela in a D Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 3 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Joby Abraham bowled exceptionally well for his 3 for 26, getting good support from Joby Balan (2 for 14) and Raj Amal (2 for 15) as OCT Al Mabela was bowled out for 92 in 17 overs. Asif Al Balushi top-scored with 21.

It took Jotun 13.1 overs and five wickets to surpass the total as

it reached 93 for a well-deserved victory. Raj Amal led the way with a solid 51 not out off 40. Basim Nazir took 2 for 18.

KHADER, SHAJEER STAR IN MAZOOON VICTORY

In another D Division match, Mazoon UP rode on Khader Mohammad's superb 84 off 57 and Shajeer Puthiya's fabulous 4 for 19 to thrash Pitspot by 52 runs on Friday.

Khader's top knock was the highlight of Mazoon's 182 for 9. Monty Navani was the pick of Pitspot bowlers, taking 3 for 32.

Shajeer's brilliant bowling was instrumental in restricting Pitspot to 130 for 7 in 20 overs. Mohazin Moosa top-scored with a fluent 46 off 39.

ALAM, ABBAS HELP AFLAG GROUP TO EASY WIN

Haris Alam and Shah Abbas were the heroes of Aflag Group's 60-run win over Sam Royals in an E Division T20 League match at OAC 3 ground in Seeb on Friday.

Aflag Group amassed 199 for 5 thanks to stylish 40 by Junaid Iqbal, 36 by Haris Alam and 31 by Farrukh Jamal. Sathisha

Gundu claimed 2 for 35.

Sam Royals failed to fight hard, managing to score only 139 for 8 in 20 overs despite Sathisha Gundus' classy 77. Shah Abbas picked up 3 for 23 whereas Haris Alam claimed 2 for 22.

AMIR BOWLS ISRAR GHALA TO EASY WIN

In another E Division game at the same venue, Amir Munir's impressive 3 for 7 paved the way for Israr Ghala's 6-wicket victory against Capital Star.

Amir and Mohammed Saqib (3 for 27) were outstanding

BRIEF SCORES

D DIVISION

OCT Al Mabela 92 all out in 17 overs (Asif Al Balushi 21 - 4x4, Joby Abraham 3-26, Joby Balan 2-14, Raj Amal 2-15) lost to Winner's Jotun 93 for 5 in 13.1 overs (Raj Amal 51 - 6x4, Basim Nasir 2-18) by 5 wickets. Mazoon UP 182 for 9 in 20 overs (Khader Mohammed 84 - 9x4, Monty Navani 3-32, Valiyapeediyekkal Fasil 2-27, Anees Chaziyottill 2-40) beat Pitspot 130 for 7 in 20 overs (Mohazin Moosa 46 - 5x4, Shajeer Puthiya 4-19) by 52 runs.

E DIVISION

Aflag Group 199 for 5 in 20 overs (Junaid Iqbal 40 - 9x4, Haris Alam 36 - 4x4, Farrukh Jamal 31 - 4x4, Sathisha Gundu 2-35) beat Sam Royals 139 for 8 in 20 overs (Sathisha Gundu 77 - 10x4, Shah Abbas 3-23, Haris Alam 2-22) by 60 runs. Capital Star 88 all out in 14.2 overs (Maheswaran Annadurai 16 - 2x4, Amir Munir 3-7, Mohammed Saqib 3-27) lost to Israr Ghala 91 for 4 in 12.2 overs (Ali Gul 29 - 3x4, Nazar Abbas 25 - 3x4, Saravanan Manickam 2-25) by 6 wickets.

with the ball as Capital Star was dismissed for a paltry 88 in 14.2 overs.

Israr Ghala chased the total down in only 12.2 overs,

scoring 91 for 4 thanks to vital knocks of 29 and 25 by Ali Gul and Nazar Abbas respectively. Saravanan Manickam bagged 2 for 25.

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39.7% increase in price of Oman crude

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

The average price of Oman crude oil saw an increase of 39.7 per cent by the end of December 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, according to the latest data from the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI). Oman crude oil prices rose from an average of \$46.00 per barrel in 2020 to \$64.30 per barrel last year, the Centre noted. Also, Omani crude oil exports increased by 0.7 per cent last year. Daily production rose to an average of 971,200 barrels per day at the end of December 2021 compared to 950,700 barrels per day at the end of December 2020, with a production increase of 2.2 per cent. On the other hand, total production of crude oil ‘without



oil condensate’ decreased by 1.6 per cent during this period. China retained its leading position as the biggest importer of Omani crude, which amounted to 242,247,300 barrels in 2021, down from 248,125,900 a year earlier, a marginal decrease of 2.4 per cent. Crude oil exports to Japan, South Korea and India recorded a noticeable increase. According to the data, the

Sultanate of Oman’s exports of crude oil to Japan grew by 6.7 per cent from 3,925,000 barrels in 2020 to 4,187,600 barrels last year, representing an increase of 31.1 per cent. Exports to South Korea climbed from 4,996,200 barrels to 6,547,800 barrels over the same period. Meanwhile, the country’s crude oil exports to India rose 62.5 per cent from 17,804,800 barrels in 2020 to 28,940,300 barrels last year. Natural gas production (including imports) witnessed an increase of 8.2 per cent in 2021 to 50,191,000 cubic metres, compared to 46,396,000 cubic metres a year earlier. Consumption of natural gas in industrial areas increased by 51.7 per cent, while oil fields saw an increase of 12.9 per cent in their gas consumption.

Oman crude spikes to \$93.39/barrel



MUSCAT: The price of Oman crude climbed upwards to hit \$93.39/b in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Tuesday, mirroring trends seen globally as tensions between Ukraine and Russia continue to roil markets. The marker price of Oman crude oil futures contract gained 45 cents per barrel on top of the \$2.46/b garnered during the previous day to reach levels last seen in 2014.

On Monday, international benchmarks surged over 2 per cent to their highest in more than seven years as the threat of war loomed between Russia and Ukraine. Fears of conflict have driven the rally in oil closer to \$100 per barrel, a level not seen since 2014. “The market remains hyper-sensitive to the developments over the Russian/Ukraine situation,” said John Kilduff, partner at Again Capital in New York. “This is now intensifying to a terrific degree. Right now, it’s buy now, ask later.”

Brent crude rose \$2.04, or 2.2 per cent, to settle at \$96.48 a barrel, after touching its highest since September 2014 at \$96.78. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose \$2.36, or 2.5 per cent, to settle at \$95.46 a barrel, after hitting \$95.82, the loftiest since September 2014.

International Energy Agency (IEA) chief Fatih Birol urged Opec+, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allied producers, to close the gap between words and its actions.

Shortfalls in Opec+ production and spare capacity concerns are likely to keep the oil market tight and prices could hit \$125 a barrel as early as the second quarter of this year, JP Morgan Global Equity Research said. **(With inputs from AFP)**

Oman retains crown as world’s biggest gypsum exporter with growing global share

RESURGENT DEMAND: With leading exporters increasingly constrained in their ability to boost supplies, the Sultanate of Oman now finds itself in an unrivalled position to dominate the Asian, South/East African and GCC markets

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Gypsum shipments from the Sultanate of Oman, currently the world’s biggest exporter of the industrial mineral, are projected to grow exponentially over the next decade as consumption rebounds in key markets, while traditional exporters curtail outflows of the commodity to meet domestic demand. Exports of Omani gypsum — a key raw material for the cement and gypsum board manufacturing industries — amounted to 8.74 million tonnes in 2021. The principal market was India, lifting around 3.10 million MT from the Sultanate of Oman, followed by Bangladesh (1.40 million MT), Vietnam (1.34 million MT), Japan (0.70 million MT), Indonesia (0.64 million MT), South/East Africa (0.60 million MT), and the remaining 0.96 million going to the Gulf states, Philippines, South Korea and Sri Lanka. But with demand growing significantly in many of these key markets, importers will increasingly pivot to the Sultanate of Oman for their gypsum requirements in the



Mineral exports from Port of Salalah.

face of slumping supplies from longstanding exporting nations, according to a key industry executive. Ramachandran, Director – Zawawi Gypsum, a key exporter of Omani gypsum, envisions a dramatic ramp-up in exports from the Sultanate of Oman to satisfy rising demand growth in Asian, South/East African and GCC markets. “Gypsum imports by countries in these regions are anticipated to grow at a CAGR of over 5.70 per cent over the 2022-2031 timeframe, cumulatively totalling over 270 million MT. This compares with imports totalling around 162.79 million MT from 2010 to 2019 when the same region witnessed a CAGR in gypsum imports of 10.22 per cent. “At this current moment in

time, no other gypsum producing country in the region has the resources, capacity and appetite to this demand growth as the Sultanate of Oman,” he stated. According to the industry professional, the Sultanate of Oman’s share of exports to the three afore-mentioned regions has grown significantly over the past 12 years. From 2010 to 2019, Oman’s shipped a total of 45.57 million MT, representing 28 per cent of the total. However, Thailand — long the Asia’s dominant supplier — exported 79.27 million MT (48.71 per cent). Exports from Iran accounted for 27.24 million MT (16.74 per cent), which primarily went to the west coast of India, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. However, over the 2020-

2021 timeframe, the dynamics have dramatically changed in favour of the Sultanate of Oman, which has since emerged as the largest exporter with 44.40 per cent of total exports (17.54 million MT). Thailand slipped to second position with a 30.18-per cent share (11.92 million MT), followed by Iran 23.08 per cent (9.12 million MT). With exporting heavyweights Thailand and Iran increasingly constrained in their ability to boost supplies, the Sultanate of Oman now finds itself in an unrivalled position to dominate the regional export market (Asian, South/East African and GCC), says Ramachandran. “Going forward, importing countries will be increasingly looking to the Sultanate of Oman to meet their gypsum

Boding well for Omani gypsum exports is robust demand growth in India, one of the largest importers globally. India’s dependence on imports is projected to rise significantly as local supplies are squeezed

RAMACHANDRAN
Director, Zawawi Gypsum

requirements. At the current rate of growth in exports, Oman’s share is projected to rise to around 48-50 per cent of demand, which equates to over 130 million MT over the 2022-2031 timeframe.” Thailand has placed curbs on the volumes of locally mined gypsum that can be exported — a move designed to support its domestic gypsum industries. Iran has seen exports decline sharply in recent years over concerns the country faces a supply crunch. Boding well for Omani gypsum exports is robust demand growth in India, one of the largest importers globally. India’s dependence on imports is projected to rise significantly as local supplies are squeezed. Moreover, supplies of Flue Gas Desulfurization (FGD) gypsum — a byproduct of coal-fired power generation — are shrinking due to high capital costs.

Omantel ICT offers Teamway ERP & POS solution

MUSCAT: As more and more businesses adopt for digital solutions for their operations, Omantel has stepped in to fill the need for secure, tested and reliable solutions by leveraging its capabilities and strong ecosystem of partners and sister companies.

Omantel's new product "Teamway" supports government initiatives to boost micro and small businesses across the Sultanate by offering cloud-based ERP & POS solutions to provide ease of doing business without any initial investment in setting up the system. Teamway is a flexible product that can be scaled up as per the needs of individual businesses.

Omantel believes that businesses need to continuously adopt cloud-based solutions to



operate their business efficiently, hence Omantel ICT introduced Teamway cloud solutions to Oman's market in corporation with Intelligent Projects and Qaid Al Ard LLC — an Omani SME company, starting with most demanded ERP & POS products.

Teamway ERP consists of different standard modules like Inventory, Accounting, Project & Task, HR Management and Supply Chain readily available to start using on the go and also open for any customised requirement based on customer's business nature.

Business owners opting for standard Teamway ERP solution can subscribe online and for any customised Teamway ERP requirement can connect with Omantel's ICT Expert. Customers can access Teamway from anywhere via the Internet and can choose from two offerings – ERP & POS – based upon their requirement.

Eng Baha al Lawati, Enterprise Business Unit VP at Omantel, said: "Omantel continues to be an enabler of digital transformation in the Sultanate of Oman. This transformation is not just about shifting to digital options but offering society safe and secure solutions that allow for cost optimisation and operational excellence. "Teamway ERP & POS are the latest business solution for our SME customers. They can rely on Omantel's technological efficiencies, infrastructure, agility and expertise to derive more from their businesses."

Hyundai Ioniq 5 wins world champion at Best Cars of the Year 2021/2022 Awards



MUSCAT: Hyundai Motor Group's (HMG) pioneering all-electric sustainable mobility model the Hyundai Ioniq 5 have taken top spot at the first-ever 'Best Cars of the Year' 2021/2022 Awards. The joint world champions were singled out for quality, innovation, design and state-of-the-art tech by a judging panel that features global industry leaders from across the automotive spectrum.

Both the Hyundai Ioniq 5 and Kia EV6 claimed the title of the 'Best Cars of the Year' 2021/2022 by beating new models from established premium brands, including the Audi e-tron, Ford Mustang Mach-e and Porsche Taycan. Each of the top ten places was occupied by a different brand covering six countries spread across the world's top three car producing continents — Asia, Europe and North America.

This latest prestigious industry honour is further evidence that HMG's sustainable mobility vision is being realised, with Hyundai and Kia becoming recognised leaders in this field. "We are proud that our first two dedicated battery electric vehicles are jointly honoured as the first-ever Best Cars of the Year," said Heung Soo Kim, Head of the EV Business Division at Hyundai Motor Group.

"It sends a clear message that not only are both Hyundai Ioniq a world-class electric vehicle, but also that we are on the right track with our electrification strategy. The

world can expect more great EV models from our brands in the coming year."

The Hyundai Ioniq 5 was launched in 2021 as the first model in the company's Ioniq dedicated battery electric vehicle (BEV) line-up brand. Ioniq 5's modern take on retro design includes Hyundai's first clamshell hood and eye-catching V-shaped positioning lamps.

The front and rear forms of the vehicle merge together at its doors to illustrate the 'Parametric Dynamics' design ethos. By being based on the E-GMP architecture, the fully electric CUV has generous interior proportions thanks to the 3,000mm wheelbase with its short overhangs front and rear. Such a combination delivers exceptional interior space, dynamic performance, ultra-fast charging and an optimal in-car experience, all of which adds to the Ioniq 5's universal appeal.

The 'Best Cars of the Year' Awards were formed to produce an unaffiliated, unique and totally democratic view of the 'best' vehicles on offer around the world.

The judging panel was curated from leaders in the automotive industry, bringing together a diverse background that incorporates designers, engineers, motorsport pioneers, acclaimed journalists, broadcasters and media professionals alongside outstanding vehicle retailers, automotive consultants, major event organisers and real-world car buyers.

BankDhofar offers attractive interest rates starting from 3.5% on short term personal loans

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has announced discounted rates on short term personal loans for school fees, marriage, travel, health, beauty treatment, etc. Customers transferring their salaries to BankDhofar may avail for the loan and enjoy attractive rates starting from 3.5 per cent.

Commenting on the offer, Muhannad al Raisi, (pictured) Executive Manager – Assets Products Development and Bancassurance, said: "At BankDhofar we cater to the various needs of our customers. With this offer, we are giving them convenient financial solutions to fulfil their various personal requirements.

"We understand that life is



demanding, thus, we opted to provide flexible short-term loans with tenures of up to 3 year. We encourage our customers to benefit from this offer and we look ahead to design further products, services and financial

solutions that fit with their requirements."

To avail the offer, customers may visit nearest BankDhofar branch to apply for the short-term personal loan. More details on the terms and conditions and the eligibility are available on BankDhofar's website (https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/Personal_Loan.aspx).

BankDhofar is one of the best banks in the region, catering to customers' needs and requirements, and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate through innovative products and creative solutions.

Following best international

banking practices, provision of outstanding customer experience, in addition to its commitment to community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy, have placed BankDhofar at the top of the list of best banks in the region.

To learn more check out BankDhofar pages on social media; Facebook (www.facebook.com/BankDhofar), Twitter (@BankDhofar), Instagram (www.instagram.com/BankDhofar), or visit the official website www.BankDhofar.com or contact the 24/7 Customer Engagement Hub on (+968) 24791111 for inquiries.

Own the large and powerful Ford Expedition with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Now is a good time to own a Ford Expedition and avail exclusive benefits. The benefits include service 3 years/60,000 kms, petrol card worth RO 100 and registration 1 year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.) The offer is valid until March 9, 2022.

Powered by a 3.5-litre EcoBoost engine with standard Auto Start-Stop plus a class exclusive new 10-speed automatic transmission, the Expedition offers best-in-class fuel economy and power, with up to 400 horsepower and 650Nm torque available.

The Ford Expedition is built to take you places as you enjoy the advantage of confidence and capability. Eye-catching design, leading-edge features, powerful performance, impressive capability and more make the Expedition a perfect companion for every journey.

The Expedition offers more driver-assist technologies than any other full-size SUV. In addition, an all-new high-strength, aluminium-alloy body and redesigned high-strength steel frame form the foundation for Expedition's rugged off-road and strong towing capabilities. More than 40 features and driver-assist technologies in the Expedition help make the journey as enjoyable as the destination.

Its collision avoidance detection system helps drivers avoid other vehicles or pedestrians, while available Blind Spot Information System helps monitor blind spots outside the driver's immediate view.

In addition, Expedition offers new



connectivity technologies and convenience features, including Wireless charging, SYNC 3, Power in every row: With four 12-volt power points, six USB chargers and a 220-volt power outlet that lets passengers stay charged and connected; Advanced cargo manager with an adjustable shelf, and Panoramic Vista Roof.

The Ford Expedition also offers the best towing capability of any full-size SUV, together with features such as Pro Trailer Backup Assist, which makes backing up a trailer as easy as turning a knob. Plus, an available hands-free liftgate makes loading cargo easy.

The Expedition has a roomy, flexible interior. With seating for up to eight people and their gear, this full-size SUV makes modern family adventures more comfortable during short and

long trips alike.

The Expedition is the first full-size utility to feature a sliding second-row seat with tip-and-slide functionality, providing easy access to the third row without the need to first remove a child safety seat. Once in the third row, even adults will appreciate more legroom and reclining seats.

Those interested in experiencing the Ford Expedition can visit their nearest Ford showroom. In the Sultanate of Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.



Land earmarked for seasonal crop and potato farming



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Seeking to support the diversification of crop cultivation and farming activities, as well as boost private sector investment in the agriculture industry, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has unveiled investment opportunities in the governorates of Al Buraimi and North Al Batinah.

These opportunities centre around seasonal feed and potato farming, the Ministry said in a post on Tuesday.

In Al Buraimi Governorate, the Ministry has identified around 300 acres of land for seasonal crop cultivation in two locations in Wilayat of

Mahdha. In North Al Batinah Governorate, around 200 acres have been allocated for potato farming in three different locations in Wilayat of Al Suwaiq. Interested investors have until March 17, 2022 to submit their offers.

By encouraging investments in the agricultural and farming sectors, the Ministry is keen, on the one hand, to support the Sultanate of Oman's food security objectives, while on the other, open up opportunities for job creation as well.

The Ministry sees significant commercial potential for investment in commercially valuable fruits and vegetables based on the use of modern farming and irrigation methodologies.

Omani companies ink export, import contracts at Gulfood 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 15

Omani companies participating in Gulfood 2022, under the umbrella of Madayn, have inked a number of export, import and distribution related contracts and deals this week, while also attracting large crowds of business owners, investors, commercial agents and suppliers.

Through the Gulfood 2022 platform, which concludes on Thursday, Madayn aims at introducing the Omani products to visitors from across the globe, explore new regional and international markets and consumers for the Omani industries, and allow the participants under Madayn to learn about the latest products, trends and technologies in the food, beverage and hospitality industries.

Representatives of the participating companies highlighted the importance of Gulfood for the food and beverage industry.

"This is our third participation at Gulfood," says Khamis al Yarubi, Chairman of Overseas Food Industries, adding: "Although the previous participations were successful; however, we have received greater impact at this year's version compared to the previous ones despite the conditions imposed by Covid-19 pandemic.

In fact, we have signed initial import and export related



contracts and MoUs with Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi and Emirati companies this week."

May al Harthy, Marketing Specialist at Nakheel Oman Development Company, commented that the company is present for the first time at Gulfood, and is focusing through its participation on promoting Omani dates and introducing the visitors to the 'Million Date Palm Plantation Project', which is one of the leading agricultural projects in the Sultanate.

Nakheel is also promoting its three brands at the event: Tamrah — luxury brand of fine Omani dates and sweets, Nizwa — high quality natural dates targeting local and international retail markets, and Zaad — targeting export and wholesale in local and

international markets.

Al Harthy said, "We have received a great turnout from suppliers and international retailers and wholesalers at the exhibition."

Maryam al Ghazali of Al Joudah Food Tech Laboratory, said: "Through Gulfood 2022, we aim at highlighting on our company's vision in becoming the most reliable laboratory in the region that is capable of analysing a range of products under local and international specifications and Halal assurance system requirements. These products include farm to fork food products, beverages, water, cosmetics including sanitisers, feed and feed raw material, and veterinary drugs finished products and raw material."

Malallah al Hamadani, Marketing Director at Oman Foodstuff Factory (Al Mudhish) said: "We constantly aim at promoting our products at local and international platforms under 'Made in Oman' campaign that is managed by Madayn. Our participation at Gulfood allows us to get familiarised with the recent trends in food manufacturing and meet business owners from all over the world."

Osaid al Houqani, Director of Operations at Nizwa Food Industries, said, "We aim at achieving the greatest possible benefit at Gulfood by meeting representatives of food and beverage industries and promoting our products to a large segment of local, regional and international visitors."

Tight oil market could see prices hit \$125 in Q2: JP Morgan

NEW YORK: Shortfalls in Opec+ production and spare capacity concerns are likely to keep the oil market tight and prices could hit \$125 per barrel as early as the second quarter of this year, JP Morgan Global Equity Research said.

"Supply undershoot set to rise through 2022 as Opec+ unlikely to deviate from targeted quota increases — driving a higher risk premium of more than \$30 per barrel to oil prices," the bank said in a note dated February 11.

The Organization of the



A man fills a car with gas at a station in New Delhi, India. — Reuters

Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and its allies, a group known as Opec+, has raised its monthly output target by 400,000 barrels per day recently but has repeatedly failed to achieve those increases. Some participating countries are struggling to ramp up output following years of under-investment.

The International Energy Agency in its last monthly report said the gap between the Opec+ target and actual output in January had widened to 900,000

barrels per day.

"This underperformance comes at a critical juncture — and in our view, as other global producers falter, the combination of under investment within Opec+ nations and post-pandemic rising oil demand will dovetail to a potential point of energy crisis," JP Morgan said.

"In addition, we note a muted supply response by non-Opec producers to higher prices (led by a greater focus on transition/cash return) could add a further \$10 per barrel premium." — Reuters

Oman retains crown as world's biggest gypsum exporter

FROM PAGE 13

In 2021 alone, India imported 5.26 million MT of gypsum, representing around 30 per cent of its total gypsum consumption — a share that is anticipated to rise to over 50 per cent in the coming years, says Ramachandran. Given this upbeat outlook for Omani gypsum exports, the Sultanate of Oman should leverage this advantageous position to ensure better returns for the local industry and national economy, the executive stresses. "These market projections open up enormous opportunity for Omani gypsum exports," he explains.

"The Sultanate of Oman is emerging as the single most important source for natural gypsum with almost no rivals across the Asian, GCC and South/East African regions. The tightening demand-supply scenario will be reflected in an upward trend in Omani gypsum export volumes and FOB prices. This dominant position will also give the Sultanate of Oman big leverage to control the aforementioned regional gypsum market and FOB prices in the region — actions that will help maximise non-oil GDP from minerals and also export revenue growth," he added.

Japan's economy rebounds on solid spending

TOKYO: Japan's economy rebounded in the final three months of 2021 as falling coronavirus cases helped prop up consumption, though rising raw material costs and a spike in new Omicron variant infections cloud the outlook. Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda also highlighted escalating tensions in Ukraine as a fresh risk to the central bank's forecast for a moderate economic recovery.

The world's third-largest economy expanded an annualised 5.4 per cent in October-December after contracting a revised 2.7 per cent in the previous quarter, government data showed on Tuesday, falling short of a median market forecast for a 5.8 per cent gain. Some analysts expect the economy

to slump again in the current quarter as rising Covid-19 cases keep households from shopping and supply chain disruptions hit factory output.

"The economy will likely stall in January-March or it could even contract, depending on how the Omicron variant affects service-sector consumption," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

Economic growth was driven largely by a 2.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter rise in private consumption, which accounts for more than half of Japan's gross domestic product (GDP).

The expansion in consumer spending, which was bigger than market forecasts for a 2.2 per cent gain, came after Japan ended coronavirus curbs in October.



Pedestrians wearing protective masks make their way at the Ameyoko shopping district in Tokyo. — Reuters

Capital expenditure also rose 0.4 per cent, roughly in line with market forecasts. External demand added 0.2 per cent point to growth, a sign exports continued to benefit from the global recovery. "As the economy re-opened, service consumption, such as for hotels, restaurants and entertainment, got a big boost," said Wakaba Kobayashi, an economist at Daiwa Institute of Research.

Japan's recovery, however, continues to lag other advanced economies, forcing the BOJ to keep monetary policy ultra-loose, even as other central banks eye interest rate hikes. The country's real GDP, sized around 541 trillion yen (\$4.69 trillion), remains below the pre-pandemic level of late 2019. — Reuters

India’s crown jewel IPO deserves healthy discount

Bigger isn't always better. Life Insurance Corp of India's eagerly awaited initial public offering prospectus arrived on Sunday and underscores its unrivalled reach with more to like. Even so, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's sale of the century read more deserves a healthy discount.

LIC's 283 million policies in force are enough to cover every Indian household and the former monopoly retains a 64 per cent share of industry-wide gross written premiums. Assets under management amount to \$536 billion, more than 10 times closest rivals SBI Life and HDFC Life combined. There's plenty of room for industry growth: Life insurance premiums per capita are one quarter those in China, per Swiss Re Institute.

At the same time, LIC's gross written premiums increased at a tepid annual rate of 9.2 per cent over the past two full financial years, at least half the pace of top rivals, and its latest annual 9.9 per cent value of new business margin lags by at least 10 percentage points. That takes some shine off its lower operating costs.

Copying the competition could lift profitability. LIC's rivals focus more on products designed to offer protection rather than savings and put less emphasis on ones that share profit with policyholders: Strict regulations around "participating products" are one reason Indian life insurers are less profitable than international peers such as AIA.

Harder to fix is LIC's readiness to mop up India's troubled financial assets. For example, the insurer doesn't rule out having to inject more money into IDBI Bank.

A \$165 billion market capitalisation is achievable for LIC, by applying a 30 per cent discount to the 3.2 multiple of embedded value commanded by SBI Life, a state bank-backed rival. On that basis, selling a 5 per cent stake would raise some \$8 billion, perhaps enough to help cash-strapped New Delhi hit its budgeted target for asset sales by end-March.

Up to 10 per cent of LIC shares on offer are reserved for policyholders, inducting millions of first-time Indian investors just as expected US interest rate hikes could roil markets. Taking a conservative view on price would be prudent.

— Reuters

LIC's 283 million policies in force are enough to cover every Indian household and the former monopoly retains a 64 per cent share of industry-wide gross written premiums



PRECIOUS REST

Illegal gold miners rest on a broken machinery at an illegal gold mine in Sao Felix do Xingu, Para state, Brazil. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro launched a plan to expand gold mining in the Amazon rainforest, drawing criticism from environmentalists for bolstering an industry accused of rampant deforestation, pollution and attacks on indigenous peoples. — AFP

Russian firms will suffer with sanctions



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

ANY RUSSIAN BUSINESS THAT HAS "ECONOMIC OR STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE" TO RUSSIA COULD BE SHUT OUT OF OPERATING AND THAT THEIR OWNERS WILL FACE A TOUGH SERIES OF SANCTIONS

With the certainty of sanctions being imposed on Russia in the event of them invading Ukraine, British Foreign Minister, Liz Truss said that the UK will not hesitate to freeze the assets of any major Russian business or any oligarch linked to the Kremlin. Truss said, any Russian business that has "economic or strategic significance" to Russia could be shut out of operating and that their owners will face a tough series of sanctions as a part of new legislation.

This includes having their assets frozen. Being banned from doing business in the UK and being banned from entering the country. It came from Truss, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson travelled to Ukraine to discuss the unfolding crisis with President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"Those in and around the Kremlin will have nowhere to hide. We will make sure those who share responsibility for the Kremlin's aggressive and destabilising action will share in bearing a heavy cost"

Truss said, "I will not say exactly who we may target or with what measure. Moscow should be clear that we will use these new powers to maximum effect if they pursue their aggressive intent towards Ukraine.

Nothing is off the table."

There is widespread evidence that much of Putin's wealth is held in the name of Oligarchs that the new legislation in the UK seeks to target. Fund manager and prominent Russia critic, Bill Browder, said: "The cleanest, safest and simplest way of deterring Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine is to go after his money.

"We know who these oligarchs are who hold Putin's assets, we know that they are held in London, the easy way of doing things for us in a very asymmetric way as far as Putin is concerned is to freeze the money of a certain number of Oligarchs", Browder told Sky News.

Earlier this month Johnson had said: "I think that an invasion of Ukraine, would be an absolute disaster for the world, and above all it would be a disaster for Russia."

On the issue of sanctions, as of yet the UK and its international partners have remained purposefully vague about what their new sanctions regimes might look like. The secretive approach is aimed at keeping the Kremlin guessing and limiting its ability to prepare itself, said David Savage, head of financial crime at London firm Stewarts, the litigation specialists.

From the rhetoric coming out of Westminster (parliament) as well as the

White House, it seems both London and Washington will focus their sanctions on individuals linked to the Kremlin, as they edge away from imposing more far-reaching sanctions on the wider Russian economy.

The UK has already broadened its powers to slap sanctions on people linked to Putin, while the Biden administration has said it plans to target Putin's inner circle.

The European Union is keeping the option of more far-reaching sanctions on the table. This could see the EU lock Russian banks out of the global financial system, by blocking them from Swift.

"This would cause quite a significant amount of global turmoil", savage said as he warned that Russia is "highly likely to retaliate" against any major sanctions by restricting flows of oil and gas to Europe.

However, any drop in Russia's energy exports would have a major impact on the Russian economy — which generates 60 per cent of its export revenues from energy — and come as a major hit to Europe at a time of soaring gas prices. Nonetheless, experts warned that any UK business with links to Russia or supply chains in the country should be ready to cut ties. Smart businesses will already be thinking about whether they can get their supplies from other countries.

The return of global inflation



CARMEN M. REINHART

The author is Chief Economist of the World Bank

Inflation has come back faster, spiked more markedly, and proved to be more stubborn and persistent than major central banks initially thought possible.

After initially dominating headlines in the US, the problem has become a centrepiece of policy discussions in many other advanced economies.

In 15 of the 34 countries classified as AEs by the IMF's World Economic Outlook, 12-month inflation through December 2021 was running above 5 per cent. Such a sudden, shared jump in high inflation (by modern standards) has not been seen in more than 20 years. Nor is this inflationary surge limited to wealthy countries.

Emerging markets and developing economies have been hit by a similar wave, with 78 out of 109 EMDEs also confronting annual inflation rates above 5 per

cent. That share of EMDEs (71 per cent) is about twice as large as it was at the end of 2020. Inflation thus has become a global problem — or nearly so, with Asia so far immune.

The primary drivers of the inflation spike are not uniform across countries, particularly when comparing AEs and EMDEs.

Diagnoses of "overheating", prevalent in the US discourse, do not apply to many EMDEs, where fiscal and monetary stimulus in response to Covid-19 was limited, and where economic recovery in 2021 lagged well behind the AE rebound.

Moreover, the pandemic-induced bust-and-recovery patterns differ markedly across country income groups, with recovery being defined as an economy's return to its 2019 level of per capita income.

About 41 per cent of high-income AEs met that threshold at

the end of 2021, compared to 28 per cent of middle-income EMDEs and just 23 per cent of low-income countries.

But the disparity between advanced and developing economies is even greater than this comparison suggests, because many EMDEs were already experiencing declines in per capita income before the pandemic, whereas AEs were mostly at new highs.

While many EMDEs have marked down their estimates of potential output over the past two years, there is little to suggest that their inflationary pressures are driven primarily by overheating in the aftermath of significant policy stimulus.

One development that is common across advanced and developing economies is the increase in commodity prices alongside rising global demand. As of January 2022, oil prices were up

77 per cent from their December 2020 level.

Another major issue affecting advanced and developing economies alike is global supply chains, which continue to be severely affected by the events of the past two years.

Transport costs have skyrocketed. And unlike the oil-based supply shock of the 1970s, the Covid-19 supply shocks are more diverse and opaque, and therefore more uncertain, as the World Bank's most recent Global Economic Prospects stresses.

In EMDEs, currency depreciation (owing to lower inflows of foreign capital and downgrades of sovereign credit ratings) has contributed to inflation among imported goods. And because inflation expectations in EMDEs are less anchored and more attune to currency movements than in AEs, the pass through from exchange rates to

prices tends to be faster and more pronounced.

Another important factor is food price inflation. During 2021, 12-month increases in food prices exceeded 5 per cent in 79 per cent (86 out of 109) of EMDEs. While AEs have not been immune to rising food prices, just 27 per cent of them experienced price hikes exceeding 5 per cent.

Worse, food price inflation also generally hits lower-income countries (and lower-income households everywhere) particularly hard, which makes it tantamount to a regressive tax. Food accounts for a much larger share of the average household consumption basket in EMDEs, which means that inflation in those economies is likely to prove persistent.

Today's higher energy prices will translate directly into higher food prices tomorrow.

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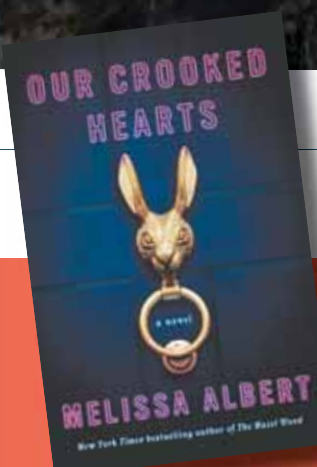

features



Take a break and hike!

In the 17th edition of Lonely Planet's annual Best In Travel lists, the Sultanate of Oman won the seventh must-visit country in the world for 2022. A haven for an adventure traveller, whether heroic or inexperienced, the Sultanate of Oman offers an abundance of hiking trails, rock-climbing and caving... **P20**

READ



OUR CROOKED HEART
BY MELISSA ALBERT

Seventeen-year-old Ivy's summer break kicks off with an accident, a punishment and a mystery: A stranger whose appearance in the middle of the night, heralds a string of increasingly unsettling events.

FASHION

Louis Vuitton set to raise price tags this week as costs climb

LOUIS VUITTON will raise prices globally on Wednesday as a result of increased manufacturing and transportation costs, a spokesperson for the French luxury goods company in China said. Louis Vuitton, the world's largest luxury brand, will become one of the first big labels in the industry to hike prices widely this year to protect its margins as costs soar.

The price increases will affect Louis Vuitton stores worldwide and cover leather goods, fashion accessories and perfumes, the spokesperson said on Tuesday. She did not give further details on the scale of the rises, beyond saying that they would vary depending on the product. "The price adjustment takes into account changes in production costs, raw materials, trans-



portation as well as inflation," the label said in a statement given to Reuters. Some bloggers on Chinese social media said the price of some models of handbags such as Capuchins and Neverfull, now

priced at 46,500 yuan (\$7,323) and 12,000 yuan (\$1,890) respectively, would rise by 20 per cent or more in China, without citing sources. PurseBop, a website tracking the luxury market, cited specu-

lation that the increase would be between around 4 per cent on the lower end and 15-18 per cent on average on the higher end. Presenting record 2021 sales and profits for the fashion and leather goods division, which is led by Vuitton and Dior, LVMH's billionaire boss Bernard Arnault said in January the group had enough wiggle room to increase prices in an inflationary environment but would have to be "reasonable". "Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, luxury goods companies have been taking advantage of surging demand for high-end fashion and accessories to push their brands even more upmarket. Chanel increased prices on some of its handbags three times last year, with the popular Classic Flap bag, currently selling at \$8,200, now costing \$3,000 or nearly 60 per cent more than before the pandemic in 2019. — Reuters



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

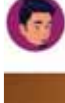
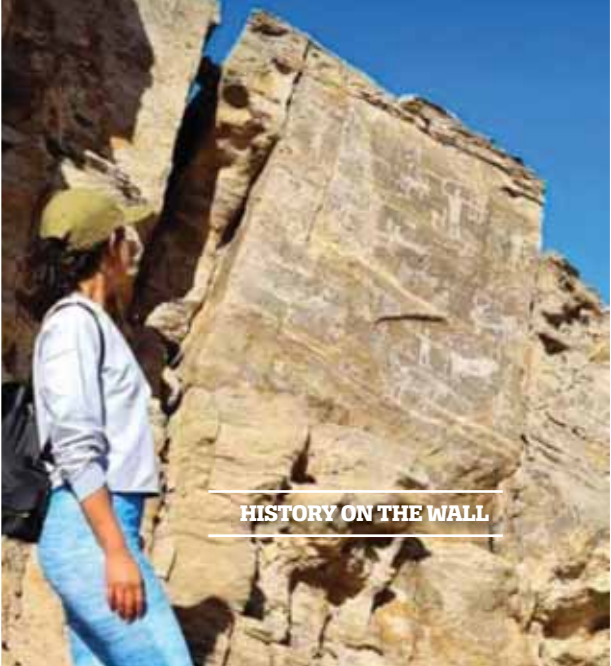


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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

LaQuan Smith aims to lift spirits with new line at New York Fashion Week



DESIGNER LAQUAN Smith presented “a high-spirited” womenswear collection at New York Fashion Week, teaming oversized cosy jackets with skimpy leotards and sparkling mini dresses.

Actress Julia Fox opened the show on Monday in a long black dress, with a cutout at the front. She was followed by models wearing high-legged leotards or corsets, slit and cut-out dresses as well as shiny jackets or jumpsuits.

“This collection is really about the revival and the celebration of New York City... and what it means to be a LaQuan Smith woman (which) is that she is all about being unapologetically sexy,” Smith said.

“Because we’ve been through so much trauma in the world I think this collection is just high spirited, it’s exciting, it’s electrifying.”

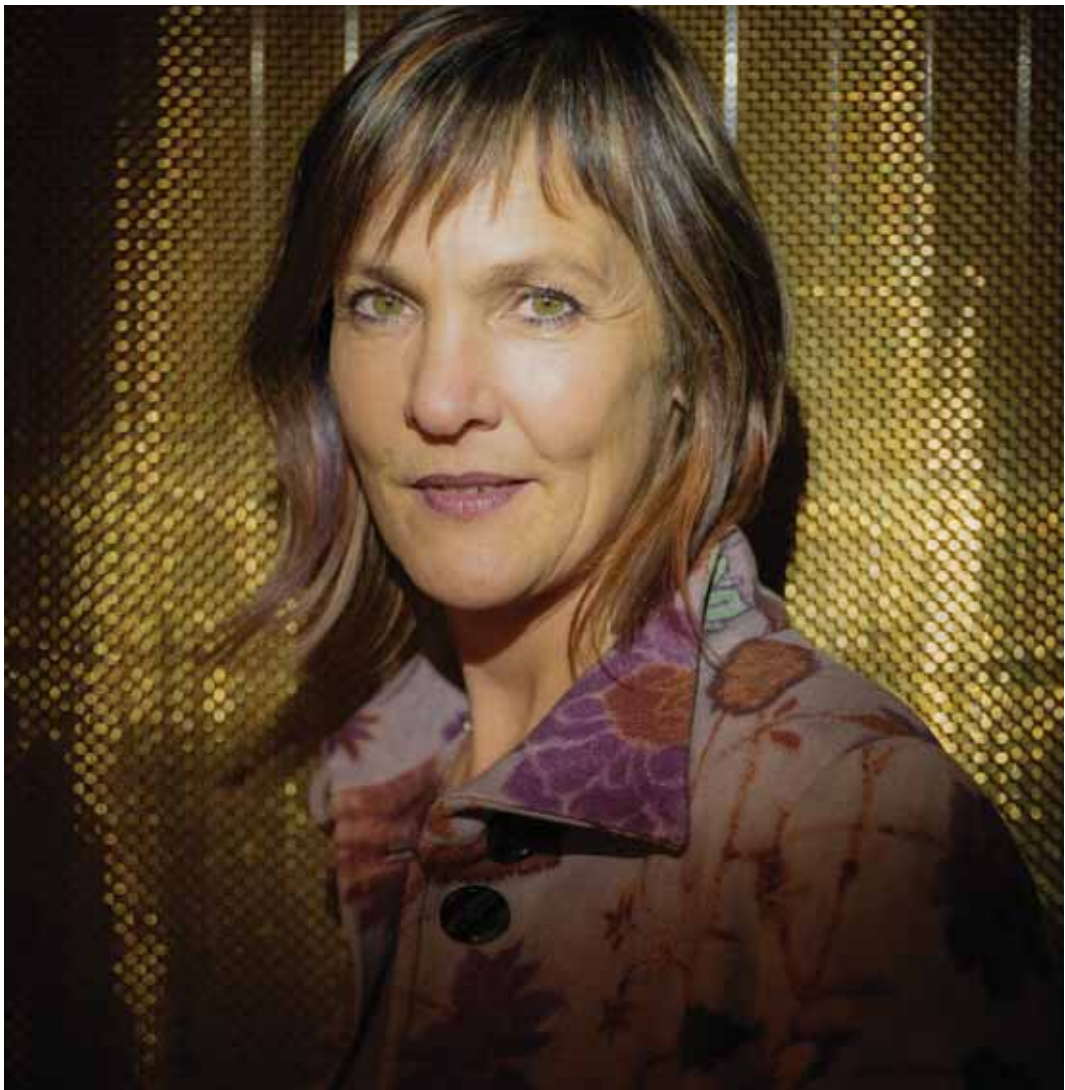
The Queens-born designer put zips on jackets, trousers and skirts. For the evening there were shiny red tops, jackets and matching ensembles.

Smith used a colour palette of bold blue, red, black and brown for the autumn/winter 2022. New York Fashion Week ends on February 16, with the seasonal catwalk presentations moving to London.

— Reuters

THE OPERA

A Shape-Shifting Opera Singer, With a Debut to Match



YOU MIGHT KNOW her as world-famous diva Emilia Marty. Or as Ellian MacGregor — maybe even Eugenia Montez or Elsa Müller. It’s an open question in Janacek’s operatic thriller “The Makropulos Case,” about the twilight of a woman who has adopted an assortment of identities throughout her unnaturally long life.

Her real name is Elina Makropulos, born 337 years ago on Crete and still going, thanks to an elixir her father tested on her as a teenager. She’s not so different from Marlis Petersen, the soprano playing the part in a new production that premieres at the Berlin State Opera on Sunday.

Petersen is a mere 54. But like Emilia, she comes from Greece and is currently inhabiting just the latest in a long line of personas. There are few singers with Petersen’s dramatic ferocity and intelligence — who understand that opera is, fundamentally, theatre.

“In the beginning of my career, the singing was most important,” she said in a recent interview at the Berlin opera house. “Then the music became as important as the text, and then came playing the role. And I wouldn’t say it’s 33-33-33. It’s three times 100.”

She loves to linger in and

study the psychologies of women. It’s what has made her, despite a voice on the slender side, one of today’s greatest singer-actors — a small club with the likes of Barbara Hannigan, Asmik Grigorian and Karita Mattila — and a director’s dream.

“She’s in this extra class of singer,” said Claus Guth, who is directing the new “Makropulos Case.” “This is to a certain degree people with an energy and a little craziness, in a positive way. I would tell Marlis, ‘We do everything upside down and on the moon,’ and she would say, ‘Let’s go for it.’”

Perhaps surprisingly, Petersen never studied acting beyond basic movement in school. “It’s like a gift from nature that I have,” she said. “It came to me by God.”

Opera, too, was more of a random discovery than a deliberate plan. Born in Southern Germany, Petersen said music was “a big nothingness” in her house while she was growing up. She learned piano and flute but didn’t hear much classical music; she listened to pop, but her parents considered a lot of it dirty, like her treasured ABBA cassette tape.

Still, they were supportive, and Petersen’s piano teacher exposed her, she recalled, to

“everything from Bach to Hindemith.” In a school music class, her voice was noticed, which led to singing in a church choir and learning the sacred repertory of Schubert, Mozart and more. When she was 15, her parents took her to her first opera, Verdi’s “Rigoletto.” She fell asleep.

“I didn’t understand anything,” Petersen said. “I came late to opera, actually.”

That happened when she studied voice in Stuttgart, financing her education in part by performing in a cover band called Square on weekends. Petersen played keyboard and sang hits like Celine Dion’s “The Power of Love” and Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance With Somebody.” With a keyboardist colleague, she would do gigs that included performing “Starlight Express” on roller skates.

“It was good training because the nights were long, and there was a bit of toughness involved,” Petersen said. She imitated the voices of the original singers, a skill that paid off later when she entered a competition with categories for classical repertory, then chansons and musical theatre. She won the top prize in both, channeling Barbra Streisand in “Yentl” for her show tune. — NYT



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

The pandemic and normalcy of life!

THE PANDEMIC has always been a deceptive behavioural spectacle for individuals to spread among them and move around. But now, it is as if we are all — if I may say so — walking on an isthmus between islands of dread and fear and the mainland still out of sight!

However, the truth is at every point along this continuous period and over the past two years, some people are still trying to reduce the risk as much as they can and in one way or another we are all trying to make decisions for ourselves, while every pandemic choice still affects us all at once.

Perhaps the best step at present is not to dive into a miserable hole without continuing to adhere to health-protective measures. Not to mention that, is better not to give up and remain motionless, as binary as our options may sometimes seem, it’s possible to undo some of the ruthlessness of a pandemic while helping it reach a less disastrous end. Undoubtedly, social communication and enjoying things on a personal level, we do not compromise with the health of society!

At the very least, our basic infection prevention model has not changed! At this point, many people can read the rules in their sleep! Outdoors are better than indoors and smaller gatherings are better than large ones: Masks, ventilation, tests, vaccinations and distance can all be safe.

However, the possibility of a small or a large risk still depends greatly on the circumstances, for instance, luck in being healthy and young. It is, therefore, useful to always remind ourselves of the potential benefit that small actions can do: for those who can, wear a mask, take a test, or reduce gatherings. Aren’t you with me that it doesn’t

take much when we consider the reasons in exchange for the protection that others might get?

In the end, if we are truly heading into a low-number cooldown, this is the time to get ready — to come to a mutual understanding about taking risks wisely, choosing

Perhaps the best step at present is not to dive into a miserable hole without continuing to adhere to health-protective measures. Not to mention that, is better not to give up and remain motionless, as binary as our options may sometimes seem

delightful things wisely and distributing protection as widely and equitably as possible. Of course, during a pandemic, there will always be a loss: sickness, death, avoidance and limitations. But in light of this crisis, we must be aware of our collective opportunity to take care of each other! The next phase of the pandemic should not revolve around what we cannot do, but rather focus on how to restore normalcy with each other, as individuals in this community.

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



Take a break and hike!

By Samuel Kutty

The Sultanate of Oman is the land of the mountains and its varied landscapes make it one of the most relaxing and safest vacation destinations in the world.

A haven for an adventure traveller, whether heroic or inexperienced, the country offers an abundance of hiking trails, rock-climbing and caving.

In the 17th edition of Lonely Planet's annual Best In Travel lists, the Sultanate of Oman won the seventh must-visit country in the world for 2022.

In a feature 'Wadi and soul: The best hikes in Oman', Lonely Planet lauds the country's vibrant cultural heritage by saying that "it is deeply intertwined with the gifts of its terrain, and it permeates every travel experience here".

For adventurers, the Australian travel magazine says, away from the cities, white-sand beaches and fishing villages along the coast, Oman's craggy interior is truly rewarding for adventurers in hiking boots.

"The country's stories are found everywhere you go, from the atmospheric lanes of Muttrah Souq in Muscat, where ornate khanjars (traditional daggers) and patterned kumma (headpiece worn by Omani men) showcase excellent craftsmanship and pride, to the cliffside villages of Jabal Al Akhdhar where old men in sandals expertly navigate narrow farm trails and distill rose water in silver bowls".

Every encounter in Oman evokes a strong sense of the land, it says.

At the same time, for those tired of museums, buildings and people with all the many things to do in the capital city of Muscat, there is an option that they can take a break and hike a little to get nice views of the city.

In a feature, Wadi and soul: The best hikes in Oman, the Lonely Planet writer, identifies a network of marked and well-maintained trails which make adventure trekking in the Sultanate of Oman easy for



independent (if experienced) hikers.

"While popular trails can be busy on the weekends, you might not come across other hikers for long sections of more-challenging trails. Should you get lost, Omanis are usually friendly enough to escort you back to the trail, point you in the right direction or even give you a lift", it says.

In Muscat, short hikes are very popular thanks to their easier features. The Riyam-to-Muttrah hike is an excellent way to make the most of an afternoon while seeing the capital from a different perspective.

This easy-to-moderate route takes the hiker along what was once the only overland route between Muttrah and old Muscat. From Riyam, the old rocky trail continues up a hill via stone steps once used by villagers to bring agricultural produce, wares and goats to sell at Muttrah Souq.

The rusty pipeline along the steps is from a time when the country's only power station was located in Riyam, fuelled by diesel oil pumped through the pipes from a ship docked in Muttrah.

This route offers fantastic views over Muttrah harbour, Riyam Park and old Muscat, with glimpses of the sea beyond. One can also find rock pools of water and some water in the wadis between November and April.

The trail leads to the ruins of an abandoned village before it descends to a wadi with steep walls, where some scrambling is required, it adds.

Still, recommends the feature writer, "trekking with a local guide means you'll get valuable insights into Omani traditions and the way of life in remote villages".