

Bilarab award receives 356 entries

The judging panel of the Bilarab Bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design continues evaluating entries vying for the first edition of award following the end of the submission period on February 5. A total of 356 completed entries were submitted so far, while other projects that did not meet the award's conditions were rejected. [SEE P2](#)



P12

CLINICAL CIRBA EMERGES ROUND 2 CHAMP



P13

MOVE TO STRENGTHEN OMAN ELECTRICITY SPOT MARKET



P19

A TOWN THAT SAVED A MOUNTAIN, AND A MOUNTAIN THAT SAVED A TOWN



MUSCAT

‘NOT AVERSE TO NURSERIES’

The Ministry of Social Development is not averse to the idea of setting up nurseries at workplaces in the Sultanate of Oman. According to HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, ‘nursery at workplaces’ is an excellent idea, and the ministry encourages and supports it. “There is a study on the possibility of creating a legal framework in this regard”, the minister said.

However, a decision will be taken only if there is no objection to roll-out in government entities and managed by small and medium enterprises, the minister said.

“There are set standards and basics for nurseries supervised by the ministry, and also there are guidelines in this regard, in addition to the rules and regulations governing them”, she said. [SEE P3](#)

PUT THE BEST PEDAL FORWARD



A boy stands holding an Omani national flag as he watches the peloton as it rides during the third stage of the 2022 cycling Tour of Oman between Sultan Qaboos University and Qurayat on Saturday. – [AFP](#)

REPORT ON P10

Al Bashayer camel fest to kick off on Feb 28

ADAM: The fifth edition of the annual Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racing Festival, will be held at Al Bashayer Racetrack in the Wilayat of Adam from February 28 to March 5 with a wide participation of camel owners from the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC countries.

HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, said: “We will be marking five years since the launch of the annual Al Bashayer Arabian Camel Racing Festival in its new shape designed as part of development and modernisation plan of Al Bashayer Racetrack.”

REPORT ON P2

READ IN

OPINION



INVESTING IN AFRICA'S DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
SUNDAR PICHAI

P8

FOCUS ON DESTINATION

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

P8

INSIDE



FIREFIGHTERS BATTLE TO CONTROL RUWI FIRE

P5



AUSTRALIA WARNS KOALAS 'ENDANGERED'

P6

Countdown begins for Muscat book fair

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnassri](#)

The countdown for the 26th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair, one of the largest cultural events in the Sultanate of Oman, has begun, as final touches are being given for the 11-day extravaganza that is scheduled to start from February 23. Starting from February 23, the book fair will continue till March 5. The event ranks among the top ten fairs in the Arab world and the three most prominent exhibitions in the Gulf.

The exhibition's highlights are cultural, intellectual, literary and artistic events

in coordination with many relevant governmental and private institutions, including the Cultural Club, the Literary Forum, the Omani Society of Writers, the National Youth Committee and the National Youth Human Rights Committee.

The fair's account on Twitter announced opening the door for participation in community initiatives programme within Muscat International Book Fair in the following areas: Reading, authoring and translation, publishing and book industry, literary salons and boards, public libraries, which will continue until February 20. [SEE ALSO P3](#)

Fall in temperature and rains likely

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The weather forecast for the next three days indicates rain and temperature dip.

There are chances of clouds flowing and forming with isolated rain over Musandam Governorate and parts of the coasts of the Sea of Oman and parts of Al Hajar Mountains on Sunday and Monday, which may later include the coasts of the South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates on Monday

evening and Tuesday morning, stated Oman Met Office of Civil Aviation Authority of the Sultanate of Oman in the weather forecast.

The activity of the active northwest winds on Sunday and Monday may lead to high sea waves.

It is (medium/ stormy) at the height of 2.5 metres on the coasts of Musandam and the Sea of Oman and (quiet/ medium) at the height of 1.5 metres on the coasts of the Arabian Sea. [TURN TO P2](#)

New shipping line to lift logistics and trade

PORT OF SOHAR GETS DIRECT LINK TO SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, Feb 12

With the arrival of the Omani-owned container vessel recently acquired by Asyad Shipping, Port of Sohar will be receiving its first direct container shipment on Sunday via the new direct shipping line launched by the Sultanate of Oman represented by Asyad Group, with the Singaporean and Malaysian ports.

The opening of this direct shipping line feeds into the initiatives implemented by Asyad Group to promote the competitiveness of the country's ports, enhance their operational efficiency and harness their logistics potential by linking them via direct lines with various global commercial ports, to provide an added value to the national economy and strengthen



Sultanate of Oman's position as a global logistics hub and transit gateway.

This new container line is set to increase trade relations with Asian countries, provide competitive advantages to the local and regional business community, enhance all national exports to and from Singaporean and Malaysian and neighbouring

markets, and provide Omani traders with a fast, time- and cost-effective access to Singapore as an international distribution hub and subsequently to southeast Asian markets.

Port of Sohar witnessed an 8.7 per cent increase in cargo throughput at 58.647 million tonnes in 2021, up from 53.970 million tonnes a year earlier.

US warns of Ukraine war ‘any day’

KYIV: US President Joe Biden and France's Emmanuel Macron prepared to sound out Russia's Vladimir Putin on Saturday and Ukraine urged citizens not to panic after Washington warned that an invasion could begin “any day”.

Weeks of tensions that have seen Russia surround its western

neighbour with more than 100,000 troops revved up another notch when the Kremlin launched its biggest naval drills in years across the Black Sea. The exercises off the coast of Ukraine's Odessa added urgency to a hastily arranged call on Saturday between Biden and Putin aimed at defusing one of the

gravest crises in East-West relations since the Cold War. Putin is also due to speak later on Saturday with Macron. The talks come after a week of shuttle diplomacy by the French leader and European officials did little to ease fears of war breaking out in eastern Europe.

[SEE ALSO P6](#)

Meanwhile, there is also dust and sandstorm alert for Adam, Fahud, Bidiya, Ibri, Haima, Marmul, Thamrait and Qarn al Alam.

aims at boosting communications and procedures for exchanging information and acquiring more experiences among the participating ships to enhance the security of ports and navigation lines and secure the movement of international ships. — **ONA**

1ST ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



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ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Theme: Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses

Date: March 28 - March 30, 2022

Call for papers

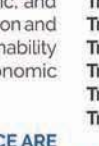
Submission Deadline: Feb 21, 2022

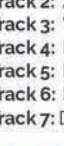
Virtual Conference

ORGANIZED BY

MODERN COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & SCIENCE, MUSCAT, OMAN
In collaboration with

Centre for research on economic relations, Mid Sweden University, Sweden
Oxford Educational Research and Training (OXERT), United Kingdom
Indian Economic Association, India
Faculty of Commerce, Aligarh Muslim University, India
Amity University - Gwalior, India



ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY AIM:
The conference is inspired from the economic and sustainability critical challenges facing the world after Covid pandemic, and therefore the aim of the conference is to share the information and knowledge related to economic transformation and sustainability and various emerging businesses to support world economic growth in a global context.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- To initiate a dialogue and discussion on sustainability and development.
- To explore and explore opportunities to combat the emerging challenges on sustainability and economic front.
- To develop a culture of research and dialogue among the Omani population by attracting global researchers.
- To deliberate on emerging business trends and ideas.

BENEFITS:

- Latest Research Trends
- Global Audience and Speakers
- Best Paper Award for each track
- Opportunity to Publish

TOPICS:
With an exciting theme (Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses) and clearly defined objectives for the upcoming 1st Economic Transformation and Sustainability international conference, the tentative sub-themes/tracks are but not limited to:

Track 1: Sustainable Economic Development
Track 2: Agriculture, Food Management & its impact on Economy
Track 3: Water Management
Track 4: Entrepreneurial interventions and innovation
Track 5: Emerging Business Practices
Track 6: Digital transformation in financial services
Track 7: Digital Media and Communication

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

- Full Paper Submission: **Feb 21, 2022**
- Paper Acceptance Notification: **Mar 07, 2022**
- Final Paper Submission: **Mar 14, 2022**
- Conference Presentation: **Mar 28 - Mar 30, 2022**

REGISTRATION FEES

- Category 1:** USD 55 for all Participants
- Category 2:** USD 40 for Students, Staff, members from Collaborating Institutions, life members of IEA and OXERT

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS
 Authors are invited to submit through conference submission system, please check www.etsiconf.com

For more information

Contact us via the following emails:
 For General information: info@etsiconf.com
 For authors inquires: author@etsiconf.com



26th MIBF from Feb 23 under Covid protocols

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With hundreds of publishers and thousands of titles the 26th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair is ready to welcome booklovers from February 23 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) under strict Covid protocols.

stop shop for bibliophiles, students, and collectors. The fair was held online in 2021.

“On all the days the 26th edition of Muscat International Book Fair will have different attractions,” Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Main Committee of the Muscat International Book Fair informed the media.

This year, South Al Sharqiyah



Governorate will be the guest of honour of the Book Fair. There will be dedicated sections for heritage, history, Quran sciences, science, academy, literature, thinkers and philosophy, children's books, law, education, languages, stories, novels and medicine are other key areas in focus.

Additionally, there will be a programme of cultural activities throughout the exhibition days

where families will be welcomed.

MIBF hosts a search engine to the exhibition's website and application, and there will be a mobile index team during the exhibition, according to the organisers.

Preparations of a diverse range of cultural, intellectual, literary, and artistic events in coordination with government and private institutions are currently under

way. Brainstorming debates, meet the authors, intellectual, literary, and artistic events in association with a number of government and private institutions are being done.

In 2020, a total of 676 publishing houses participated directly while 270 publishing houses through the agencies and as many as 32 countries made their presence at the golden jubilee edition of the Fair.



Govt not averse to nurseries at workplaces, says minister

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyyp

The Ministry of Social Development is not averse to the idea of setting up nurseries at workplaces in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, 'nursery at workplaces' is an excellent idea, and the ministry encourages and supports it.

“There is a study on the possibility of creating a legal framework in this regard”, the minister said.

However, a decision will be taken only if there is no objection to roll-out in government entities and managed by small and medium enterprises, the minister said.

“There are set standards and basics for nurseries supervised by the ministry, and also there are guidelines in this regard, in addition to the rules and regulations governing them”, she said.

The minister spoke during the weekly talk show 'With the Youth' on the Sultanate of Oman TV. The talk touched on different subjects, including the volunteer system, associations, civil teams, women, people with disabilities, and the system of security and social protection.

The ministry is studying a new family protection law to target the groups most in need of support

Referring to social protection, HE Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar revealed that the ministry is studying a new family protection law to target the groups most in need of support.

“This will be implemented after studying the existing legislation, regulations and the shortcomings in the current system. It will have a clear vision that determines the need for a law directed directly in this aspect”, she said.

“The most important objective of the social system is to target the groups most in need of support through the presence of many programmes, whether through cash contributions or subscriptions to the Social Protection Fund”.

According to her, there is no unified definition of “limited income”, but there are several partner agencies working with various government agencies to organise this aspect and frame it in a comprehensive, unified definition at the national level, and it has not been finalised yet.

The system related to the Social

Security Law has undergone many amendments and developments during the past years, but this system needs to be developed and changed to suit the variables and lifestyle.

She stressed that the social protection system is a basic requirement in all countries, and its role is not limited to one government agency alone, but rather it is a national system in which the roles of several government agencies overlap as well as the private sector and partnership by the civil society.

“The ministry worked on studying many provisions of the current Social Security Law, and these changes were raised to target other groups and amend dues during the next stage”, she said.

She confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved a very advanced level in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and is still working on many items in partnership with all relevant authorities to find other gains for women in this agreement.

“Omani women have proven their competence since time immemorial. It will remain an active partner, making its mark wherever it is found, and we are truly convinced of its capabilities and potential to be present in all fields”, she added.

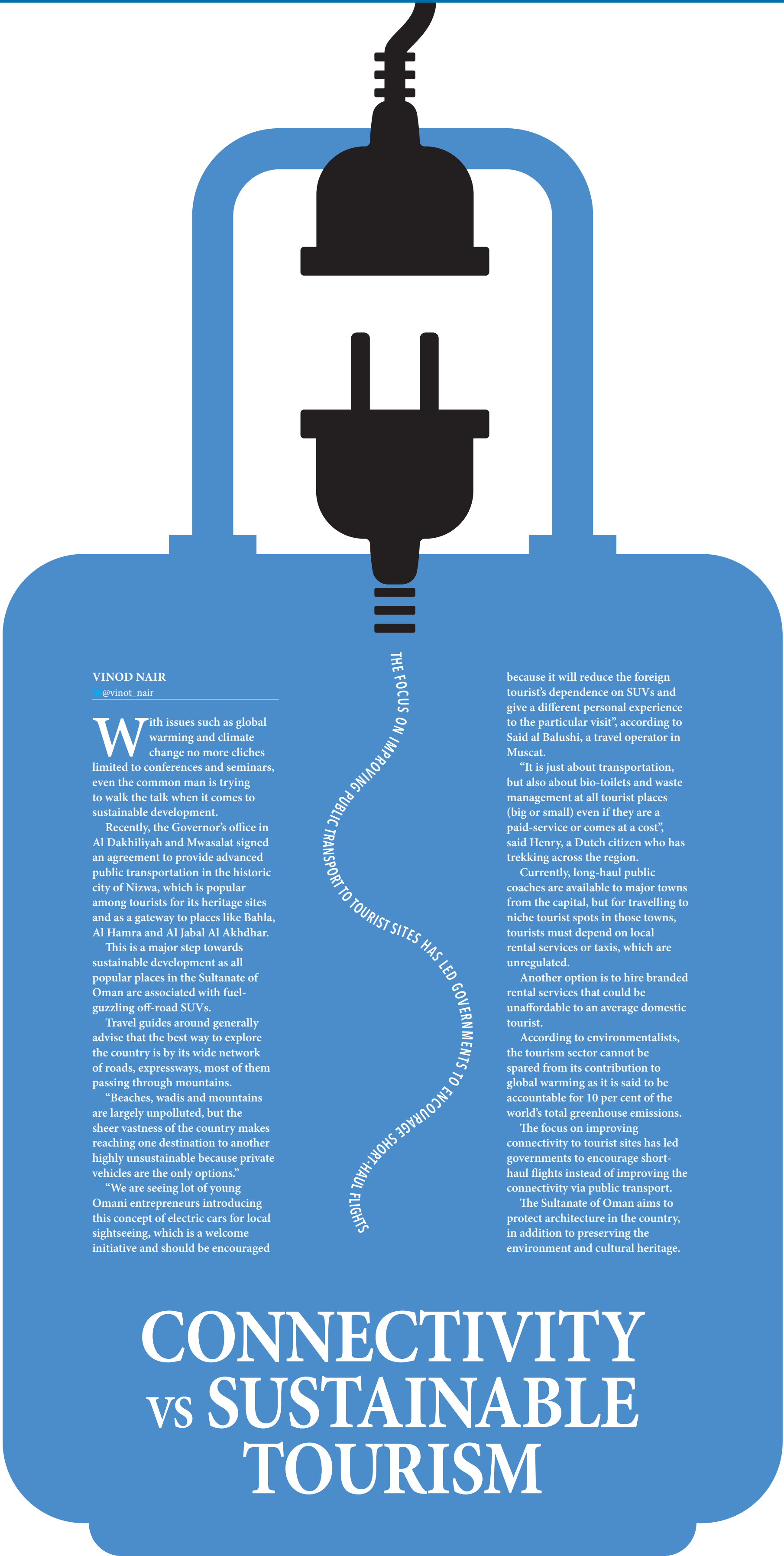
Omani women mark intl day of women and girls in science

DUBAI: A number of Omani female experts, researchers and students took part in the celebrations of the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, which falls on February 11 each year, at Dubai 2020 Expo.

The group toured several pavilions of other countries participating in Dubai 2020 Expo that showcase various fields of science, innovation and creative ideas. The group comprised students from Omani universities and colleges, excelling female employees from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, as part of a programme that aims to enrich the experiences of young women and inspire them towards building the future of the nation with culture and knowledge.

The programme is organised in coordination with the Commissioner-General of the Sultanate of Oman at Expo 2020 Dubai. — ONA





VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With issues such as global warming and climate change no more cliches limited to conferences and seminars, even the common man is trying to walk the talk when it comes to sustainable development.

Recently, the Governor's office in Al Dakhiliyah and Mwasalat signed an agreement to provide advanced public transportation in the historic city of Nizwa, which is popular among tourists for its heritage sites and as a gateway to places like Bahla, Al Hamra and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

This is a major step towards sustainable development as all popular places in the Sultanate of Oman are associated with fuel-guzzling off-road SUVs.

Travel guides around generally advise that the best way to explore the country is by its wide network of roads, expressways, most of them passing through mountains.

"Beaches, wadis and mountains are largely unpolluted, but the sheer vastness of the country makes reaching one destination to another highly unsustainable because private vehicles are the only options."

"We are seeing lot of young Omani entrepreneurs introducing this concept of electric cars for local sightseeing, which is a welcome initiative and should be encouraged

THE FOCUS ON IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO TOURIST SITES HAS LED GOVERNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE SHORT-HAUL FLIGHTS

because it will reduce the foreign tourist's dependence on SUVs and give a different personal experience to the particular visit", according to Said al Balushi, a travel operator in Muscat.

"It is just about transportation, but also about bio-toilets and waste management at all tourist places (big or small) even if they are a paid-service or comes at a cost", said Henry, a Dutch citizen who has trekking across the region.

Currently, long-haul public coaches are available to major towns from the capital, but for travelling to niche tourist spots in those towns, tourists must depend on local rental services or taxis, which are unregulated.

Another option is to hire branded rental services that could be unaffordable to an average domestic tourist.

According to environmentalists, the tourism sector cannot be spared from its contribution to global warming as it is said to be accountable for 10 per cent of the world's total greenhouse emissions.

The focus on improving connectivity to tourist sites has led governments to encourage short-haul flights instead of improving the connectivity via public transport.

The Sultanate of Oman aims to protect architecture in the country, in addition to preserving the environment and cultural heritage.

CONNECTIVITY vs SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Firefighters battle hours to bring Ruwi fire under control



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

A major fire engulfed a store situated in a building in the commercial district of Ruwi on Friday, which took several hours for the firefighters to bring the situation under control.

“Ten people were injured and provided emergency medical care at the site, while two of them were transferred to the hospital with moderate health conditions,” Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said in a statement.

Eyewitnesses said the fire broke out in a store in the Ruwi commercial district, and the ambulance teams from CDAA’s Darsait centre rushed to the site and evacuated the building occupants.

Fire engines and ambulances were

seen parked in the narrow lane near the old police station as firefighters battled the thick layers of smoke to bring the situation under control.

Some occupants were unable to get out as smoke engulfed even the upper floors of the building.

As the efforts lasted several hours, authorities urged that all buildings, especially old ones, must always follow maintenance procedures.

“It is necessary to adhere to the requirements of civil defence in all facilities, periodic maintenance of fire alarms, follow-up of workers in commercial stores, and to ensure that unauthorised electrical connections are not installed and other aspects that may cause fires,” CDAA said.

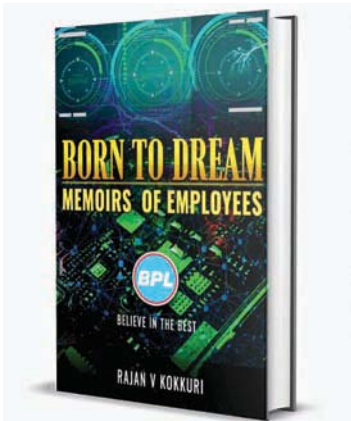
Writer authors motivational book

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An inspirational book by a Muscat-based writer is ready to be launched by Amazon. The book aims to shed light on personality development and positive mindset.

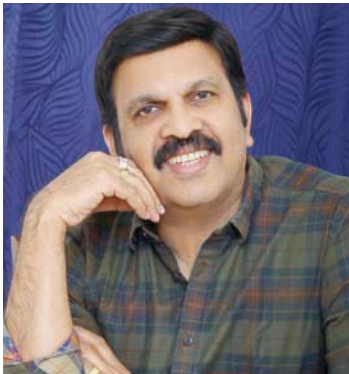
The fourth novel of Rajan V Kokkuri, titled *Born to Dream*, elucidates the need to stay positive at the face of adversities aptly standing within the lives of TPG Nambiar and two other outstanding business tycoons, KPR Nambiar and MA Uppal who built an empire from the minimal means in 393 pages.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Rajan said *Born to Dream* is about the founder of BPL and two other great personalities and helping the youth to



inculcate some of the habits of these successful people to make their own mark in the world. 1st article is ‘Closer to Heart’ by Rajan, who is also an ex-employee of BPL, the author and compiler.

The author had to interview as many as 122 former and current BPL employees to collect anecdotes and articles to



share their experience with the personalities.

The very beginning of the book recounts an emotional experience with TPG Nambiar, titled Closer to Heart. *Born to Dream* tells the story of the three pillars of the company who set out on a rail journey from Bombay to Palakkad in 1963 to start BPL’s first plant, and how

the business grew to become one of the leading electronic corporations in India.

Rajan’s other three titles, *I remain forever yours*, which is also available as an audio book, *My Precious Dreams* and *The Invisible Love* have been widely accepted by readers across the borders and he hopes to see more youngsters get benefitted out of this literary attempt.

His wife, Anitha Rajan, an abstract artist, has always been supportive in bringing out these titles.

Born to Dream will also be available on Kindle and Google Books by New Delhi-based TZP (Taare Zameen Par) Publications besides Amazon, while hardcopies are currently being shipped by order to readers.



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Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Non-refundable)	Tender Purchase Deadline	Clarification Deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/ 2022/02/ FIN/002	Life Insurance	OMR 100	17/02/2022	22/02/2022	03/03/2022
	Medical Insurance				
	Workmen Compensation				
	Money	OMR 30			
	Fidelity				
	Motor Insurance				
	Third party Insurance	OMR 35			
	Contractors plans and missionary				
	Public Liability Insurance				
	Directors and Officers Liability	OMR 20			
	Marine Terminal Operators liability				
	Property All Risks				
Aviation Liability Insurance	OMR 50				
	OMR 25				

Bank Name & Account Number
Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments with CMA and a minimum of 7 years’ experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om. The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling 24610289/24610287/24610355.

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. (SAOG)
PO Box No: 57, PC: 116, Mina Al Fahal, Sultanate of Oman

Promoting yoga through free online classes

MUSCAT: Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna, a yoga teacher, has been sharing her knowledge free of charge for those interested in learning the practice that involves the combination of asanas (postures and poses), pranayama (regulated breathing), and samyana (meditation and relaxation).

Dr Kavitha enjoys teaching, practicing and being involved in the yoga community as it is her passion. “My connection to yoga is a powerful and personal one, which I want to share with others,” she says.

During Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Kavitha has helped many people in the Sultanate of Oman through online and personalised interactions by recommending a series of yoga and breathing exercises depending on the severity of symptoms.

Through Dr Kavitha’s classes you can master yoga at the comfort of your home or at your convenience. She also holds personalised sessions on special request to meet one’s requirement and capability.

For details check out www.KavithaVedanthi.com



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2022	The Technical Fitout and Interior Decoration Works for MOI Auditorium.	Excellent	17/2/2022	6/3/2022	150/-

- All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicate above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not accepted.

Note: The original bank guarantee should be submitted to the General Directorate Of Administrative And Financial Affairs, Project Department building at Ministry of Information, if it **Requested**.

- The Ministry has the right to:
- Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.
- Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943093, 24943785, Email id: (projects@part.gov.om)



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

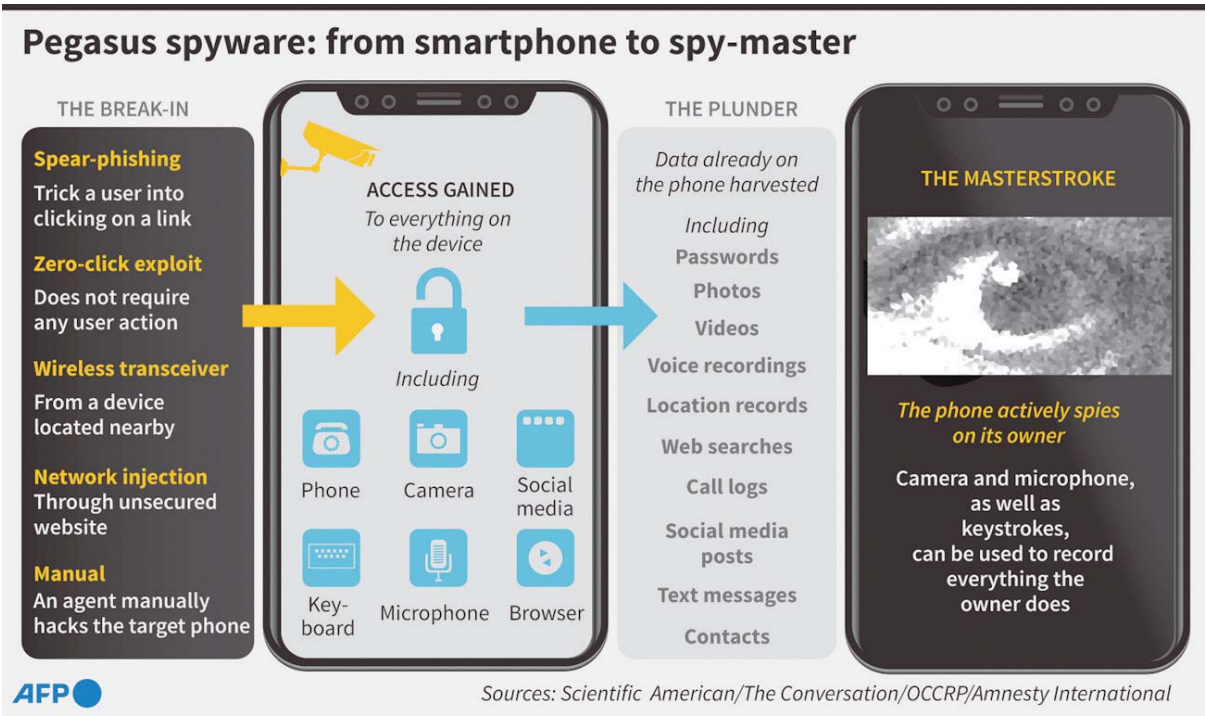
Advertisement No. (4/2022)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated abelow.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/093	2021/MM/ QS-38- Recall-1	Reconstruction and Maintenance of Culverts in Muscat Governorate 2022 (E- Tender) (Recall)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	First
PRE/20/017	2021/MM/ HQ-33- Recall-1	Construction of Storm Water Drainage Channel in AL Ghubrah North – Phase 1C (E- Tender) (Recall)	Rial 245	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Excellent
PRE/20/059	2022/MM/ QS-2	Road Improvements of Dama Street in AL Seeb (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	First
PRE/21/108	2022/MM/ QS-3	Site Preparation for Street Vendors in Wilayat AL Amerat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Second
PRE/22/008	2022/MM/ QS-4	RFP for Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) of Oracle E- Business HRMS & Financial System (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Specialized
PRE/22/010	2022/MM/ QS-5	Site Preparation for Street Vendors in Wilayat Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	05/03/2022	24/03/2022	Second

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200 / 24402330).



Russia launches major Black Sea drills

MOSCOW: Russia’s navy on Saturday launched large-scale exercises in the Black Sea even as Moscow dismissed as “hysteria” a US warning that a Russian attack on Ukraine could begin within days.

“Over 30 vessels from the Black Sea fleet took to the sea from Sebastopol and Novorossiysk in accordance with the exercise plan,” the Russian defence ministry said on Saturday.

“The aim of the exercise is to defend the coast of the Crimea peninsula, the bases of the forces of the Black Sea fleet as well as

the country’s economic sector ... from possible military threats,” the ministry added.

The move comes after the US on Friday gave its starkest warning yet of a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine, saying that it could take place “any day now.”

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters that such an attack would likely begin with air strikes and missile attacks and urged Americans in Ukraine to leave the country “as soon as possible.”

A number of EU countries have also urged their nationals to

leave Ukraine. Moscow poured scorn on the US warnings.

“The White House’s hysteria is more revealing than ever. The Anglo-Saxons need a war. At all cost. The provocations, disinformation and the threats are their favourite method for resolving their own problems,” foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova wrote on Telegram.

Russia’s Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov told *Newsweek* magazine that the US warnings were “alarmist” and repeated that his country was “not going to attack anyone.” — AFP

Ukrainians rally against Russia threat

KYIV: Several thousand Ukrainians rallied in Kyiv on Saturday to show unity amid fears of a Russian invasion, as Ukraine’s leader told people not to panic and pushed back against what he said was a glut of bleak war predictions being reported in the media.

Tension has mounted as Russia has built up more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine and carried out large-scale exercises. The United States said on Friday an invasion could start at any moment. Russia denies planning to invade.

Ukrainians filed through the centre of Kyiv in a column, chanting “Glory to Ukraine” and carrying Ukrainian flags and banners that said “Ukrainians will resist” and “Invaders must die”.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who attended police drills in southern Kherson region, said a Russian attack could happen at any time, but pushed back against what he called excessive amounts of information about a major looming war.



Demonstrators shout slogans as they march behind a banner which reads “Ukrainians will resist” in the colours of the national flag during a rally in Kyiv on Saturday. — AFP

“The best friend of our enemies is panic in our country. And all this information is just provoking panic and can’t help us,” he said. “I can’t agree or disagree with what hasn’t happened yet. So far, there is no full-scale war in Ukraine.”

The United States and numerous Western governments have urged their citizens to leave Ukraine, and Washington on Saturday said it was ordering most of its Kyiv embassy staff to leave.

“We have to be ready each day. It did not begin yesterday. It began in 2014, so, we are ready and this is why we are here,” Zelenskiy said in a reference to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and backing for an anti-Kyiv separatist insurgency in the east.

Zelenskiy voiced frustrations just last month with dire assessments of a war. Such warnings have taken their toll on the economy, piling pressure on the national currency. — Reuters

Australia warns koalas ‘endangered’

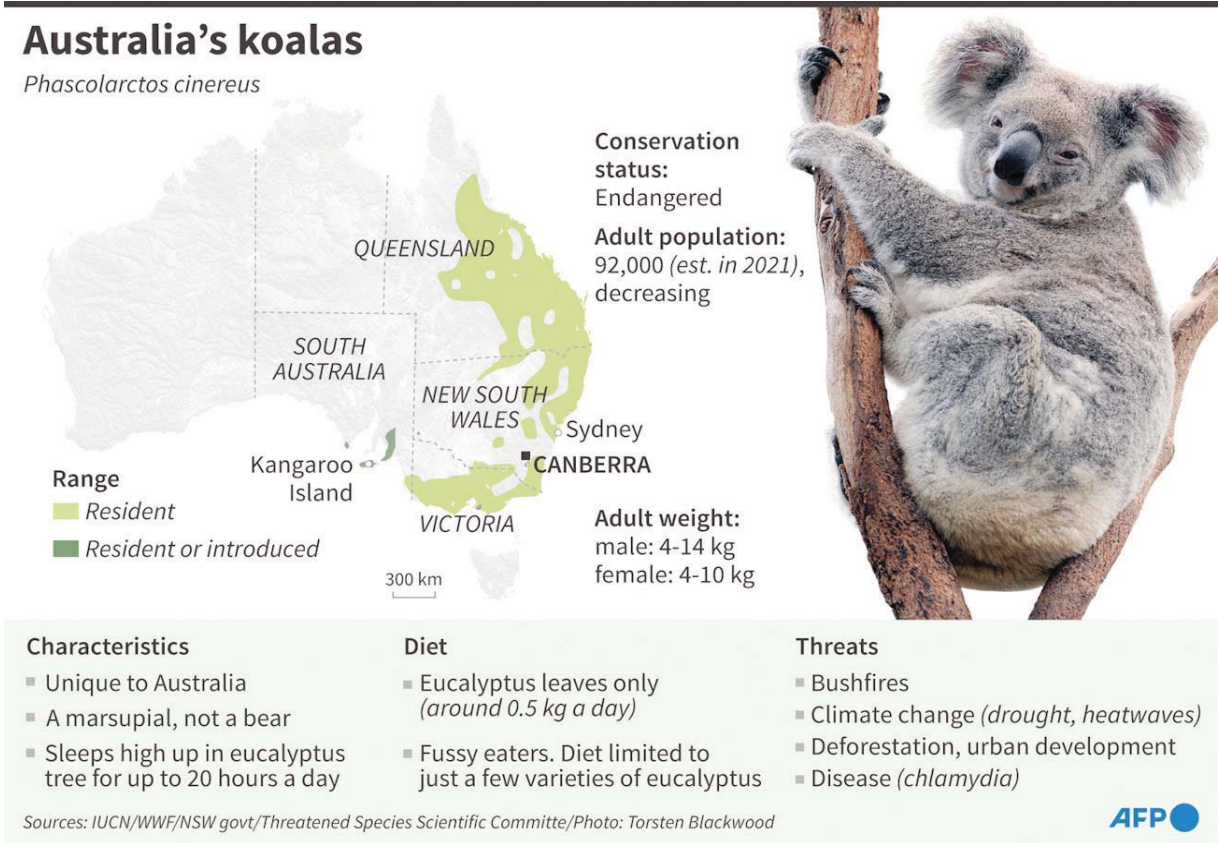
SYDNEY: Australia officially listed koalas across a swathe of its eastern coast as “endangered” on Friday, with the marsupials fighting to survive the impact of bushfires, land-clearing, drought and disease.

Conservationists said koala populations had crashed in much of eastern Australia over the past two decades, warning that they were now sliding towards extinction.

Environment Minister Sussan Ley said she had designated koala populations as “endangered” to offer them a higher level of protection in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland.

The koala, a globally recognised symbol of Australia’s unique wildlife, had been listed as “vulnerable” on the eastern coast just a decade earlier.

“We are taking unprecedented action to protect the koala,” the minister said, highlighting a recent government promise of Aus\$50 million (US\$36 million) to protect and recover koala



habitats.

Environmentalists welcomed the koalas’ new status but condemned Australia’s failure to protect the species so far.

“Koalas have gone from

no-listing to vulnerable to endangered within a decade. That is a shockingly fast decline,” said WWF-Australia conservation scientist Stuart Blanch.

“Today’s decision is welcome

but it won’t stop koalas from sliding towards extinction unless it’s accompanied by stronger laws and landholder incentives to protect their forest homes.” — AFP

Indian industrialist Bajaj dies at 83

MUMBAI: Veteran industrialist Rahul Bajaj, whose name was synonymous with road transport in India, died on Saturday aged 83, his company said.

He “had not been keeping well”, the Bajaj Group said in a statement, adding he would be cremated on Sunday in Pune, western India.

Bajaj was born into the Indian elite — his grandfather was one of Mahatma Gandhi’s closest aides.

He led the eponymous family-owned conglomerate for more than 40 years, and was best known for overseeing the stratospheric success of the Bajaj Chetak scooter in the 1970s and ‘80s.

The sturdy and affordable vehicle — based on a design by Italy’s Vespa and named after the legendary

horse ridden into battle by a Hindu Rajput king in the 1500s — became wildly popular with the Indian middle class following its 1972 launch.

But in the heavily regulated economy of the time the firm was only allowed to make 6,000 units a year, leading at one point to a 10-year waiting list.

Bajaj was considered relatively clean in a country where corruption is widespread.

After stepping down as head of the firm in 2005, he served a term in the upper house of the Indian parliament, for the Congress party.

He was unusually outspoken for an Indian billionaire, many of whom seek to avoid conflict with the authorities. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

Paris police clamp down ‘freedom convoy’

A French “freedom convoy” of cars and vans began arriving in Paris on Saturday for a protest over coronavirus restrictions, but the police moved quickly to prevent a Canadian-style blockade of the capital by issuing hundreds of fines.

Inspired by the truckers that shut down the Canadian capital Ottawa, thousands of demonstrators from across France said they planned to form “a mass of vehicles that the security forces would find impossible to con-



tain”. Several hundred vehicles, mostly vans, mobile-homes and cars, converged on the main ring road around the city after spending the night camped on the outskirts of the capital.

CAIRO

‘Arms exports to Egypt linked to human rights’

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock has told Egypt that the human rights situation in the country will play a greater role in future arms deliveries.

Exceptions to a “restrictive policy” should only be made in justified individual cases and after careful examination, Baerbock said on Saturday in Cairo during a joint appearance with her Egyptian colleague Sameh Shoukri.

Egypt has occupied a top position in German arms export



statistics for three years. Arms deliveries to the North African country are therefore extremely controversial.

In addition to Shoukri, Baerbock also met Al Sissi in Cairo.

ISTANBUL

Turkey cuts VAT on basic foods as inflation spirals

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday slashed sales tax on dairy products, fruit, vegetables and other basic food items from 8 per cent to 1 per cent as inflation surges to a near 20-year high.

The rising cost of living has become a major source of public discontent in Turkey, where it is expected to feature prominently in next year’s presidential election.

Inflation hit 48.69 per cent in January, the highest level since



Erdogan’s Islamic-rooted party stormed to power two decades ago. Erdogan said the fall in VAT would apply to a host of products, including cooking oil and dried fruit.

New York deer infected with Omicron

EMILY ANTHERS AND SABRINA IMBLER

White-tailed deer on Staten Island have been found carrying the highly transmissible omicron variant of the coronavirus, marking the first time the variant has been reported in wild animals.

The findings add to a growing body of evidence that white-tailed deer are easily infected by the virus. The results are likely to intensify concerns that deer, which are widely distributed across the United States and live near humans, could become a reservoir for the virus and a potential source of new variants.

Researchers have previously reported that the virus was widespread in deer in Iowa in late 2020 and parts of Ohio in early 2021.

The US Department of Agriculture has confirmed infections in deer in 13 additional states — Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Virginia — Lyndsay Cole, a spokesperson for the agency’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said on Thursday. Those animals were infected with earlier variants of the virus.

Research suggests that deer are catching the virus from humans and then spreading it to other deer, and there is no evidence that the animals are transmitting it back to people.

But longer-term, widespread circulation of the virus in deer would give the virus more opportunity to mutate, potentially giving rise to new variants that could spill over into people or other animal species.

“The circulation of the virus in deer provides opportunities for it to adapt and evolve”, said Vivek Kapur, a veterinary microbiologist at Penn State University, who is part of the Staten Island research team. “And it’s likely to come back and haunt us in the future.”

The researchers also found that one deer with omicron already had a high level of antibodies to the virus, suggesting that it may have been previously infected. Omicron has proved able to evade some of the immune system’s defenses in humans. If it is similarly immune-evasive in deer, animals infected during earlier outbreaks may be vulnerable to reinfection.

The news that omicron had breached white-tailed deer populations was not unexpected, experts said.

“It’s disappointing, but it’s not surprising”, said Dr Scott Weese, an infectious diseases veterinarian at the University of Guelph in Ontario.

“Omicron is quite ubiquitous”, said Dr. Samira Mubareka, a virus expert at Sunnybrook Research Institute and the University of Toronto

The new research, which has not yet been published in a scientific journal, is a partnership among the Penn State researchers, conservation nonprofit White Buffalo, the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and other institutions.

As part of a deer population-control study, White Buffalo



A researcher tries to swab a white-tailed deer at a wildlife center at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

has been working with the city to capture local deer and sterilize some of the young males.

Between mid-December and the end of January, the field workers collected blood samples from 131 captured deer, as well as nasal and tonsillar swabs from a smaller subset of animals.

Nearly 15 per cent of the deer had antibodies to the virus in their blood, the researchers found, suggesting that the animals had previously been infected with it.

Polymerase chain reaction testing of the swabs from 68 deer also revealed that seven of the animals were actively infected with the virus at the time of sampling.

The PCR tests also revealed that viral samples from all seven deer had a pattern of mutations that was suggestive of the omicron variant.

The researchers have now sequenced four of those samples and confirmed that at least four deer were infected by omicron, which spread rapidly through New York City’s human population in December.

The researchers cautioned that it was impossible to make sweeping conclusions based on the single deer that tested positive for the virus and also had high levels of antibodies in its blood.

They could not rule out the possibility that the animal had developed those antibodies during the course of its current infection.

But if the findings hold up, and deer can be repeatedly reinfected by new variants, it raises the risk that the animals

could become a reservoir for the virus, the scientists said.

How humans are spreading the virus to deer remains unknown. People could spread the virus to the animals directly — perhaps by hand-feeding deer in parks or yards, the researchers noted — or indirectly, through wastewater or contaminated trash.

Mubareka emphasised the need for longitudinal surveillance of the Staten Island deer to determine how the variant evolves, whether it spills over into other wildlife, and what level of illness it causes.

Deer have appeared asymptomatic when infected with earlier variants.

The researchers are hoping to conduct laboratory studies of the antibodies they detected in the Staten Island deer to try to determine which version of the virus each animal was infected by — and how much those antibodies might protect against other variants.

Does a delta infection protect deer from being reinfected by delta? Does it protect against omicron? Does an omicron infection protect against a future delta infection?

“These are all open questions”, said Kurt Vandegrift, a disease ecologist at Penn State and a member of the research team. “We’re brand-new in finding these infections in the wild. And so that’s why we’re taking data, and that’s why we need to do more surveillance.”

In the meantime, the researchers said, New Yorkers should not fear their local deer, but keeping a safe distance away from wildlife is always a good practice.

Disabled hikers forge a new path

AMANDA MORRIS

Beneath the wooden boardwalk where Syren Nagakyrie, 40, was on a hike through Lettuce Lake Conservation Park in Tampa, Florida, dark shadows of fish moved in the vegetation-clogged waters, while red-eyed herons strode between the cypress roots that stuck out from the water like knobby, twisted knees.

Nagakyrie, who is nonbinary, pointed out a turtle sunning itself on a log. But to see the wildlife, Nagakyrie’s mother, Vickie Boyer, 59, had to lean out of her wheelchair and peer through cracks between the wooden railings. The short wooden boardwalk loop, near Boyer’s home in Riverview, Florida, was supposedly on an accessible trail. Nagakyrie jotted down the railing’s height measurements in a notebook. It was 42 inches, 6 inches higher than what someone using a wheelchair could comfortably see over.

While some organisations offer to have non-disabled people carry, push or otherwise help people with disabilities navigate the outdoors, Nagakryie, who has conditions that cause chronic pain and fatigue, reflects a growing movement of disabled people pushing for more independent access to the great outdoors, taking steps themselves by publishing trail guides, establishing nonprofits to empower others through equipment, advocacy and training, and testifying before Congress.

As a result of the pandemic, more people nationwide have turned to outdoor recreation. A March 2021 report commissioned by the Outdoor Industry Association found that 53 per cent of Americans older than 6 participated in outdoor recreation in 2020 — the highest rate on record. Many destinations managed by the National Park Service also welcomed record numbers of visitors in 2020.

As visitation increases, so do the number of visitors with disabilities, said Jeremy Buzzell, an accessibility programme

manager with the National Park Service.

Last April, several disability activists testified at a hearing on Capitol Hill, in front of members of the House Natural Resources Committee, which oversees the Park Service, to push for greater accessibility in outdoor spaces and call attention to barriers in public parks.

More national parks are partnering with local disability organisations to get accessibility, Buzzell said, and the agency is assessing trails to see if there are improvements that could be made — such as increasing the width of a trail or removing obstructions or steps — that could increase access.

Some trail guides are already available for free on the Disabled Hikers website, but Nagakyrie also plans to publish a guidebook, which is available for pre-order. Each trail is given a rating of how many “spoons” it takes to complete, in reference to a popular term used by those with chronic fatigue to describe how much energy they have to complete a given task. The more spoons a task requires, the harder and more energy-consuming it is.

The trail descriptions also include in-depth descriptions that start from the parking lot. Details Nagakyrie provides include trail width, steepness, surface material, landmarks, obstacles like roots or boulders, places to rest, accessible bathrooms, cellphone reception and water sources.

This is the type of information Georgena Moran would like more available on websites for national, state and local parks. Since being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis two decades ago, Moran, 64, has held on to her identity as an avid outdoor enthusiast. A former canoe racer and scuba diver, she uses her chin to drive her power wheelchair on hikes near her home in Portland, Oregon. She particularly loves to get off paved trails.

While she usually brings an able-bodied companion the first time she tries a new hike, she said that going on hikes

My adventurous spirit never died because my disability increased. I still want to go out and challenge myself as much as possible

GEORGENA MORAN
An avid outdoor enthusiast

independently is equally important for her to connect with her spiritual self. “It’s a way of re-rooting”, she said.

But simple obstacles can prevent her from even getting onto a trail — sometimes there is no available handicapped parking, or curb cuts for her to get out of the parking lot. At the trail head, she has found concrete barriers designed to keep out cars and ATVs but that also block her from entering.

Experiences like these pushed Moran to start Access Recreation, an organisation that created guidelines for the type of information parks should provide disabled hikers. The group wrote sample trail guides for around three dozen trails in Oregon with the intention of getting larger organisations involved.

Access Recreation is now working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to improve accessibility at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge outside of Ridgefield, Washington, with the aim that it will serve as an example for other parks. Juliette Fernandez, a project manager with the Wildlife Service, said the agency is collecting and publishing better information about the trail, as well as installing new signs at the park that blind people can read through touch. “We can really move mountains with very subtle touches”, she said.

Sometimes, more regular trail maintenance could make a huge difference. David Nickelson, 42, of Winter Garden, Florida, is partially paralysed from the waist down and uses an off-road handcycle to tackle all sorts of terrain. But he cannot get around fallen logs.

His off-road handcycle cost him more than \$7,000, an out-of-pocket price he paid for his independence outdoors.

“So often with a disability you’re reliant on others to help you do things you used to do on your own”, he said.

“One of the things I love about nature and hiking and trail running and stuff is being out there just with my own thoughts.”

Focus on destination, forget the pain of journey



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Last week I was watching a movie about a group of people climbing Mount Everest. I was covered in my blanket in my sofa sipping a hot cup of coco and asked what motivated those people to climb through the snow storms risking their lives?

Motivation is defined as the behaviours we do to satisfy our wishes, desires or goals. According to psychologists, motivation is rooted in a basic impulse to optimise well-being, minimise physical pain, and maximise pleasure and performance.

Psychologists suggest certain tips to help you generate that motivation. You may recall a time we had to do a particular task such as studying for an exam, or preparing a report but found it a big challenge to do that. You may doubt thinking ‘am I going

to be able to write something interesting or relevant?’ ‘Is it even important to my work?’ These thoughts can make you feel less motivated to do any productive work.

So what can we do when we lack motivation?

According to psychologists, the first step is to acknowledge these feelings and not deny them. If these thoughts come to you while studying, write them down so you can think about them when you finish your work. The second step is to avoid running away from doing the task. Remember the result of not completing your work is worse than having to go through the frustration of reading for your incomplete paper.

Stop blaming yourself for delaying your work. Try to think about why you are doing it. Are

START WITH SMALL STEPS, EVEN IF IT INCLUDES WORKING FOR JUST 20 MINUTES. SEE YOURSELF AS AN AIRPLANE ACCELERATING ON A RUNWAY AND THEN TAKING OFF TO ITS DESTINATION

you finding the task difficult or is it boring? What can you do to motivate yourself to work? Try to make studying as interesting as possible. Take short breaks and discuss any questions you may have with your friends or colleagues.

Be aware of any negative thoughts that may slow you down, for instance we sometimes compare ourselves with people around us and think they are better and smarter. Such thoughts make us more frustrated and less motivated. Remember that every one of us is different and each one of us has strengths and weaknesses.

Start with small steps, even if it includes working for just 20 minutes. See yourself as an airplane accelerating on a runway and then taking off to its destination.

Prioritise the most important tasks to start with to avoid multitasking. Communicate to others any difficulties and/or what you intend to do.

This can help you engage with the process and identify the

important tasks. Communication/ externalisation can help you to commit to immediate goals and you could also find out others’ points of view and tips.

Schedule your tasks

Ask yourself how much can I achieve in the next 2 hours instead of can I complete all tasks? In this way you do not get overwhelmed by the volume of study you need to do. Remember that studying can be challenging and take you out of your comfort zone. Think of hiking in Mountain Kilimanjaro. Pain gives way to pleasure when you begin to see the view from the peak and feel the fresh air on your face.

When you reach the destination you get a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Focus on the outcome and not the struggle to get there!

‘Global Britain’ runs into Russian ridicule

ANNA MALPAS AND JITENDRA JOSHI

Prime Minister Boris Johnson stands accused of trashing the UK’s diplomatic standing since Brexit, just as his ambition to forge a new “Global Britain” met a frosty reception in the Moscow chill this week.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss was the latest Western dignitary to emerge bruised from an encounter with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, as Britain presses a hard line on the Ukraine crisis.

“To be honest, I am disappointed that this is turning out to be a conversation between a mute person and a deaf person,” Lavrov told a joint news conference, accusing Truss of ignoring Russian demands. The combative minister also goaded Truss in Thursday’s talks for mistaking regions of Russia and Ukraine, although she denied getting her geography wrong.

For her part, Truss said assurances that Moscow has no plans to invade Ukraine needed to be backed up by a withdrawal of Russian troops massed on the border.

But for some UK media, the bigger headline from Truss’s visit was her sporting a fur coat and fur hat, evoking an outfit worn by Margaret Thatcher when she went to Moscow in 1987.

Truss, during a visit to Estonia in November, also channelled the Conservative “Iron Lady” in posing atop a British tank. The arresting imagery was not lost on commentators given Truss is seen as a leading contender to replace Johnson, should he be forced out of office over Downing Street parties held during Covid lockdowns.

After Truss, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace was also in Moscow on Friday, after Johnson said he was putting 1,000 more British troops on standby to respond to any humanitarian crisis linked to Ukraine. Wallace’s meeting with his Russian counterpart was the first between defence ministers from both sides since 2013.

Ruth Deyermund, senior lecturer in post-Soviet security at King’s College London, said the diplomatic offensive risks looking “more to do with the Tory leadership crisis than what is happening in Ukraine”. — AFP

FOREIGN SECRETARY LIZ TRUSS WAS THE LATEST WESTERN DIGNITARY TO EMERGE BRUISED FROM AN ENCOUNTER WITH HER RUSSIAN COUNTERPART, SERGEI LAVROV, AS BRITAIN PRESSES A HARD LINE ON THE UKRAINE CRISIS

Investing in Africa’s digital transformation



SUNDAR PICHAI
The author is CEO of Google and Alphabet

A few years ago, I was in Lagos to see Alphabet’s digital skills programmes at work. There was excitement for the future of technology in Africa and all the jobs and opportunities it could bring. From job-seekers learning new skills to entrepreneurs building promising new apps and businesses, the people I met were deeply inspiring.

These people were on my mind again when I addressed regional leaders at the African Union’s annual Business Forum this week.

Although the continent is facing big challenges — from the ongoing pandemic to a difficult economic recovery — it also has plenty of reasons for optimism, led by its engineers, developers and entrepreneurs.

Africa is increasingly a place where innovation begins. There were more investment rounds for African tech start-ups last year than ever before. People everywhere now use mobile payment systems first developed in Kenya. Renewable energy solutions created in Africa are shaping a more sustainable future for us all. And thanks to the Internet, African businesses can reach markets all over the world, while also providing solutions to Africa’s – and the world’s – most pressing challenges.

This is meaningful to me personally. Growing up in India, my family had to wait for every new technology to come to us, from the television that gave us a view into other parts of the world, to the rotary phone that meant we could get test results faster. Today, India is exporting technologies to the world.

Africa has the same opportunity. Despite having 18 per cent of the global population, the continent currently accounts for just 0.4 per cent of high-tech exports, and only 2 per cent of the world’s broader service exports, which are now heavily reliant on technology. Boosting these exports will accelerate growth for the continent, much like it has in India.

Fortunately, Africa is on the cusp of a digital transformation. Over the next five years, 300 million more people are coming online in Africa — many of them young, entrepreneurial and digitally savvy. The African Internet economy has the potential to grow to \$180 billion — roughly 5.2 per cent of the continent’s GDP — by 2025.

Working in partnership with gov-

ernments, companies like Google can play an important role in accelerating this shift. In 2020, we outlined some of those opportunities in our Digital Sprinters report, and in 2021 we committed an additional \$1 billion to Africa over the next five years. Now, we are calling on others to make their own investments. We recommend focusing on four key areas that will ensure that the digital transformation benefits every African.

First, we must help to expand affordable and reliable Internet access throughout the continent. We have seen during the pandemic that digital connectivity is a lifeline, helping people find essential information and connect to critical services. Our Equiano subsea cable will bring faster, better-

DESPITE HAVING 18 PER CENT OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION, THE CONTINENT CURRENTLY ACCOUNTS FOR JUST 0.4 PER CENT OF HIGH-TECH EXPORTS, AND ONLY 2 PER CENT OF THE WORLD’S BROADER SERVICE EXPORTS, WHICH ARE NOW HEAVILY RELIANT ON TECHNOLOGY. BOOSTING THESE EXPORTS WILL ACCELERATE GROWTH FOR THE CONTINENT, MUCH LIKE IT HAS IN INDIA

quality Internet to more people, helping to bring down costs by more than 20 per cent. Working with partners like Econet Wireless, our Taara team is deploying wireless optical communications links that use light to transmit information at super high speeds through the air, improving both affordability and connectivity. We are also focusing on lowering the barriers to smartphone adoption, including by working with Safaricom in Kenya to introduce that country’s first device financing plans.

The second priority is to help African businesses of all sizes with their digital transformations. According to the Por-

tulans Institute, business sophistication (defined as “knowledge workers, innovation linkages, and knowledge absorption”) lags well behind the availability of digital infrastructure. Closing that gap means enabling businesses to move online, training more people to pursue careers that depend on technology, and ensuring that companies take advantage of cloud computing.

Companies should invest in products and solutions that are fit for Africa, and African governments need to adapt regulatory environments and their own development strategies to be digital-first. Small businesses need to be at the centre of digitisation and training efforts, as they employ around two-thirds of the continent’s formal workforce.

A third priority is investing in African entrepreneurs. Where entrepreneurship flourishes, innovation and investment will follow. That is why we will be investing directly in African start-ups through a dedicated \$50 million Africa Investment Fund, as well as through our global Black Founders Fund. We have already invested in SafeBoda — an app that connects passengers to a community of safe, trusted drivers — and we hope that other companies will help to provide additional funding for start-ups across the continent.

The final priority is to support non-profits and institutions working to unlock the benefits of technology. For example, the AirQo team at Makerere University in Uganda is using artificial intelligence and sensors to monitor air quality. We are providing them with \$3 million so that they can take their work beyond Kampala, as part of a broader \$40 million commitment to help NGOs respond to challenges in their communities.

Any company seeking to invest in Africa should be open to learning. Google’s presence on the continent is already helping us improve the technology that we build for everyone. Looking ahead, deeper partnerships will be key to ensuring that Africa’s digital progress is sustainable.

We hope more companies will join us in these efforts, helping to ensure that every person in Africa can take advantage of the opportunities technology creates.

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A day for love, some roses and chocolates



Ray Petersen
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It's rather convoluted, but the origins of Valentine's Day (February 14) as we know it may have been rather divorced, if that is appropriate, from the hearts, and roses celebration it is today. Historians agree that its origins lie in the ancient Roman fertility festival of 'Lupercalia,' held to celebrate the Ides of February, on February 15 of each year, dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, at a time when that civilisation had gods of, and celebrations for, everything under the sun!

The 'Luperci' High Priests of the time would make an animal sacrifice in the very cave where the city's founders, Romulus, and Remus, were believed to have been raised by a she-wolf, Lupa, and they would afterwards display the skin of the dead animal throughout the city. Of course, while it was newly skinned it was soft and delicate to the touch while it was still fresh.

Over time, rumours began to surface that the women who touched the animal skin becoming pregnant soon after. Of course, as you can understand, enthusiasm took over, and the rumour became a self-fulfilling, eventually self-perpetuating prophecy, as their men took their chances to be a right. Talk about never letting a chance go by.

Later, another ritual emerged as those women unable to touch the fresh skin, were seduced maybe (?) into a Plan B, where they would place their names in giant containers in their town square, and youthful young men would draw the name of their partner for a year. If the women conceived, the couple were deemed fated to marry, and many did... though history papers over what happened to the others. "Oh well, try again next year," I guess?

Centuries later, the Emperor Claudius II of Rome issued a decree that "All single men being the best soldiers," decreed that marriage was to be outlawed. Well, I guess that is one way to become unpopular. Anyway, many were married in secret by a priest by the name of Valentine (of course), and he was sentenced to death. Maybe he perished, or maybe not, as stories suggest that another, different priest named Valentine was beheaded by mistake after a clerical error. Well, such things do happen in bureaucracies!

Fast forward to the Middle Ages, when a fickle and dissolute, often drunken and debauched European royalty, with Papal support, celebrated February 14 as the beginning of birds mating in Europe. Really? Valentine's Day though was coined in tribute to an otherwise obscure young romantic poet who dared to look romantically, that day at the feast, upon a gorgeous Princess.

She was swept off her feet by his passionate prose and was caught in his arms. The poet, Valentin, was rumoured (once again) to have been put to death at the hands of her drunken royal, pain in the butt, cuckolded Prince. Wouldn't you think that by then, Valentine would have been a name to steer clear of?

Others imply that the drunken Prince came to his senses before the execution and relented on his reaction, even forgetting about this prisoner after a while. Meantime, the young man, romantically, and foolishly perhaps, had a love letter smuggled to the object of his affection, the beautiful Princess, which touched her deeply, and she fell asleep clutching the note to her breast.

Unfortunately, the Prince came upon his wife as she treasured the romantic missive and became even more furious when he saw it was signed, "Your loving Valentine," and had the Princess and her poet thrown to their deaths from the castle walls.

Thus, Valentine's Day is perpetuated each year, around the globe, as a day upon which to show your love and affection.

Whether young or old, chaste, or passionate, millions of secret, and not-so-secret adorations will be written and read, all in the name of romance tomorrow. Women are, for this day at least, the moon, sun, stars, and perfect... at least on this day. Happy Valentine's.



SHOT IN THE ARM

Ukrainian servicemen are at work to receive the delivery of FGM-148 Javelins, American man-portable anti-tank missile provided by US to Ukraine as part of a military support, at Kyiv's airport Boryspil on Saturday, amid the crisis linked with the threat of Russia's invasion. — AFP

Tiny chips, big headaches



John Markoff

Imagine for a moment that the millions of computer chips inside the servers that power the largest data centres in the world had rare, almost undetectable flaws. And the only way to find the flaws was to throw those chips at giant computing problems that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

As the tiny switches in computer chips have shrunk to the width of a few atoms, the reliability of chips has become another worry for the people who run the biggest networks in the world. Companies like Amazon, Facebook, Twitter and many other sites have experienced surprising outages over the last year.

The outages have had several causes, like programming mistakes and congestion on the networks. But there is growing anxiety that as cloud-computing networks have become larger and more complex, they are still dependent, at the most basic level, on computer chips that are now less reliable and, in some cases, less predictable.

In the past year, researchers at both Facebook and Google have published studies describing computer hardware failures whose causes have not been easy to identify. The problem, they argued, was not in the software — it was somewhere in the computer hardware made by various companies. Google declined to comment on its study, while Facebook did not return requests for comment on its study.

"They're seeing these silent errors, essentially coming from the underlying hardware," said Subhasish Mitra, a Stanford University electrical engineer who specialises in testing computer hardware.

Increasingly, Mitra said, people believe that manufacturing defects are tied to these so-called silent errors that cannot be easily caught.

Researchers worry that they are finding rare defects because they are trying to solve bigger and bigger computing problems, which stresses their systems in unexpected ways.

Companies that run large data centres began reporting systematic problems more than a decade ago. In 2015, in the engineering publication *IEEE Spectrum*, a group of computer scientists who study hardware reliability at the University of Toronto reported that each year as many as 4% of Google's millions of computers had encountered errors that couldn't be detected and that caused them to shut down unexpectedly.

In a microprocessor that has

billions of transistors — or a computer memory board composed of trillions of the tiny switches that can each store a 1 or 0 — even the smallest error can disrupt systems that now routinely perform billions of calculations each second.

There is growing evidence that the problem is worsening with each new generation of chips. A report published in 2020 by chip maker Advanced Micro Devices found that the most advanced computer memory chips at the time were approximately 5.5 times less reliable than the previous generation. AMD did not respond to requests for comment on the report.

AS THE TINY SWITCHES IN COMPUTER CHIPS HAVE SHRUNK TO THE WIDTH OF A FEW ATOMS, THE RELIABILITY OF CHIPS HAS BECOME ANOTHER WORRY FOR THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THE BIGGEST NETWORKS IN THE WORLD

Until now, computer designers have tried to deal with hardware flaws by adding to special circuits in chips that correct errors. The circuits automatically detect and correct bad data. It was once considered an exceedingly rare problem. But several years ago, Google production teams began to report errors that were maddeningly difficult to diagnose. Calculation errors would happen intermittently and were difficult to reproduce, according to their report.

A team of researchers attempted to track down the problem, and last year they published their findings. They concluded that the company's vast data centres, composed of computer systems based upon millions of processor "cores," were experiencing new errors that were probably a combination of a couple of factors: smaller transistors that were nearing physical limits and inadequate testing.

In their paper "Cores That Don't Count," the Google researchers noted that the problem was challenging enough that they had already dedicated the equivalent of several decades of engineering time to solving it.

Modern processor chips are made up of dozens of processor cores,

calculating engines that make it possible to break up tasks and solve them in parallel. The researchers found a tiny subset of the cores produced inaccurate results infrequently and only under certain conditions. They described the behaviour as sporadic. In some cases, the cores would produce errors only when computing speed or temperature was altered.

Increasing complexity in processor design was one important cause of failure, according to Google. But the engineers also said that smaller transistors, three-dimensional chips and new designs that create errors only in certain cases all contributed to the problem.

In a similar paper released last year, a group of Facebook researchers noted that some processors would pass manufacturers' tests but then began exhibiting failures when they were in the field.

Intel executives said they were familiar with the Google and Facebook research papers and were working with both companies to develop new methods for detecting and correcting hardware errors.

Bryan Jorgensen, vice-president of Intel's data platforms group, said that the assertions the researchers made were correct and that "the challenge that they are making to the industry is the right place to go."

He said that Intel recently started a project to help create standard, open-source software for data centre operators. The software would make it possible for them to find and correct hardware errors that were not being detected by the built-in circuits in chips.

Computer engineers are divided over how to respond to the challenge. One widespread response is demand for new kinds of software that proactively watch for hardware errors and make it possible for system operators to remove hardware when it begins to degrade.

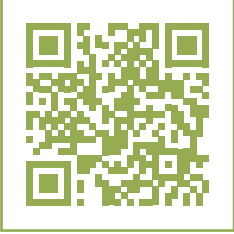
That has created an opportunity for new startups offering software that monitors the health of the underlying chips in data centres.

One such operation is TidalScale, a company in Los Gatos, California, that makes specialised software for companies trying to minimise hardware outages. Its chief executive, Gary Smerdon, suggested that TidalScale and others faced an imposing challenge. "It will be a little bit like changing an engine while an airplane is still flying," he said.

— *The New York Times*

sport

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UnoX Pro Cycling team's rider Anthon Charmig (L) rides to win the third stage of the 2022 Tour of Oman. – AFP

Charmig clinches testy third stage of Tour of Oman

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Anthon Charmig of UnoX clinched the third stage of the Tour of Oman coming up trumps after the short final climb at Qurayyat, here on Saturday.

The Danish rider defeated Jan Hirt (Intermarché-Wanty-Gobert) in the closing stages of the 2.8

km climb, which had an average gradient of 6.5 per cent.

Towards the end, Arkea-Samsic's Elie Gesbert wrapped up the race in two seconds to claim the final podium spot and conclude the day's proceedings.

Second stage winner and the highly decorated Mark Cavendish was off-colour as he finished several minutes down and so



The peloton rides during the third stage of the 2022 Tour of Oman. – AFP

Charmig moves into the red jersey as overall leader.

The two opening stages that were flat set up the Tour for the riders but coming into the steep third stage, it was always going to test the nerves of the peloton.

The third stage headed for Oman's hilly terrain brought the general classification contenders into the picture ahead of Sunday's

punchy stage and the critical summit finish on Green Mountain.

The 180 km stage started at the Sultan Qaboos University and offered a preview of the central climb on stage 4's hilly circuit before heading over undulating terrain towards Qurayyat, where Alexey Lutsenko won en route to overall victory at the last edition in 2019.

Ishan star of the show at IPL auction, Shreyas goes big



Ishan Kishan

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Indian cricket's shining young light Ishan Kishan fetched a whopping 15.25 crore INR (USD 2 million approx) on the opening day of the mega IPL 2022 auction in Bangalore on Saturday.

The five-time IPL champions brought back Ishan to their fold in a hotly contested battle on a day that witnessed high drama when IPL auctioneer Hugh Edmeades collapsed.

Shreyas Iyer, who stood out with his match-winning 80 in India's 3-0 ODI whitewash of the West Indies on Friday, was won by Kolkata Knight Riders for \$1.62m.

Kolkata secured a return for Australia's Pat Cummins, who went to the same team for a record \$2.17m in 2019 but was released last year, for nearly \$1m.

Cummins and Iyer remain Kolkata's options for the captaincy



Shreyas Iyer

after they did not retain England's Eoin Morgan — who led them to the runners-up spot last season.

Pace bowler Harshal Patel, who played just two T20 matches for India last year, went for \$1.42 million to Royal Challengers Bangalore, who also got Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga at the

same price.

Kishan's fee fell short of the Indian record of \$2.2m paid to Yuvraj Singh in the 2015 edition of the auction, which sets players' salaries for the tournament.

South Africa's Chris Morris is the most expensive IPL player ever, selling for \$2.23 million last year.

The auction kicked off with Shikhar Dhawan, the Indian opener going to Punjab Kings for \$1.09 million.

Punjab also got South African pace bowler Kagiso Rabada for \$1.22 million.

New Zealand pace bowler Trent Boult also crossed the million-dollar threshold with his \$1.06 million signing by Rajasthan Royals, who also won the bidding for Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

South Africa's Faf du Plessis went to Royal Challengers Bangalore while Delhi Capitals got David Warner for \$826,000.

AL RUSTAQ STORM INTO HM CUP SEMIFINALS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Al Rustaq cruised into the semis of the prestigious HM Football Cup as they ended the second leg match of quarterfinal round by 1-1 draw and progressed on a 3-1 aggregate victory against Nizwa late on Friday.

The Southern Batinah team had romped to a 2-0 win over Nizwa in the first leg game which was held on January 20 at Nizwa Sports Complex.

At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Rustaq players managed to register a historic move to the semis round of the coveted cup for the first time in history. The players and fans celebrated for this historic achievement after the match. Coach Deno Katlin's battalion will be chasing their dreams with two remaining steps left until reaching the title.

After a goalless draw in the first half, Abdulrahman al Ghasani broke the draw as he netted the first goal in the game to lead Al Rustaq in the 55th minute from header.

Rustaq's joy did not complete it as the Mutaz Khalfan managed to return the match to the original position and equalised the result. After the equaliser, Tidian Kamar, Mahdi al Rawahi and other players pressed hard and seeking for another goal but Rustaq's defenders and the goalkeeper Ammar al Rushaidi broke all their attempts.

In the other previous matches, Dhofar sealed a direct ticket to the semis after beating Al Suwaiq 6-5 on penalties in the second leg of the quarterfinal after the regulation and extra time ended 1-0 for Al Suwaiq.

The first leg match ended with the same result for Dhofar 1-0 at Al Saada Stadium on January 19.



With the aggregate result ending 1-1, the match went into penalties where Dhofar pipped Al

Suwaik 6-5 in a battle of nerves. Seeb booked a slot in the semi-final of the coveted cup as they

beat Sur 3-0 at Seeb Stadium. The first leg match of the quarterfinal ended in a goalless draw at Sur

The Southern Batinah team had romped to a 2-0 win over Nizwa in the first leg game which was held on January 20 at Nizwa Sports Complex

Sports Complex. With the aggregate result ending 3-0, the Muscat based team qualified to the next round.

Al Nasr managed to earn the third spot to the semifinal round as they defeated nine times winner Fanja 2-0 in the second leg fixture of the quarterfinal round of the HM Cup at Seeb Stadium.

The first leg game had ended with the same result for Al Nasr 2-0 and the aggregate triumph is 4-0.

The draw of the semifinal round will take place on Sunday at Seeb Stadium. The draw will start at 13:00. Dhofar, Seeb, Al Nasr and Al Rustaq confirmed their attendance in semifinal and they are awaiting the results of the draw.

The first leg matches of the semifinals will take place on February 20 and 21, 2022 while the second leg will be on March 2 and 3, 2022.

Ireland cruise past Oman; UAE beat Nepal by 25 runs



A snap from the post-match presentation ceremony.

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Ireland dashed Oman's hopes of a comeback in the quadrangular T20 series with a resounding nine-wicket win at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat here on Saturday.

With the second loss in two matches, Oman are now left with a last match against the UAE in the series ahead of the ICC World T20 qualifiers from February 18 to 25 at the same venue.

Batting first, Oman were all out for 137 in 19.2 overs. Only Shoaib Khan (57), Ayaan Khan (22) and Naseem Khushi (24) were in two digits as rest of the batters fell to some quality bowling from Ireland.

Simi Singh was the pick of the bowlers with 3-9 in 4 overs. Mark Adair took 3 wickets for 25.

In reply, Ireland were hardly challenged as star batter Paul Stirling (51 from 42 balls) and captain Andie Balbirnie (75 not out from 49 balls) led a confident chase.

Gareth Delany remained not out at 12 as Ireland reached 140-1 in 17.1 overs.

UAE PREVAIL

In the first match of the day, UAE comfortably beat Nepal by 25 runs.

Chirag Suri continued his brilliant form from the ODI series against Oman to emerge the man of the match with a 53-ball 84 not out that involved five boundaries and five sixers.

Rohan Mustafa hit 49 runs from 35 balls after opener Muhammad Waseem made 22 runs as UAE posted a good total of 192 for three wickets.

Nepal won the toss and opted to bowl first.

In reply, Nepal chase ended at 167 for 5 wickets in 20 overs.

Dipendra Singh Airee continued his fine form but could carry on till the end and got out after a well-made 41 from 33 balls.

Aasif Sheikh (34) and Lokesh (33) also contributed with the bat.

Rohan Mustafa and Kashif Daud took two wickets apiece for the UAE.

On Sunday, UAE will take on Ireland. Both teams have two points each.

ANNOUNCEMENT



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN 2020-2021 (LD) Dodge Charger

Starting Date of Campaign: 13/02/2022
Recall Segment: **Body**
Recall Type: **Safety**
Recall Code: **Y47**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE		NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
	From	To	
2020-2021 (LD) Dodge Charger	2C3CDXCT2MH504202	2C3CDXBG4MH511480	23

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicle builds.

Description of Recall:

Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, through its endeavor to deliver continuous quality improvement, has informed the market that in a batch of 23 vehicles sold in Oman, the clear coat paint may be non-conforming which may lead to inadequate front windshield adhesion to the vehicle body. A windshield that is not adequately retained to the vehicle in a crash may increase the risk of injury to the occupants.

Rectification Procedure:

Remove and replace the front windshield urethane sealant.

Parts Number	Description
See Recall	Windshield Adhesive

Service Procedure:

Should your vehicle fall in the range mentioned above, please contact our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive on 24500530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 245 005 30

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com

dhofar ذوفار
AUTOMOTIVE للسيارات

Wattayah, Sohar, Nizwa, Salalah, Mabela
For more information 245 005 30 | info@da-oman.com | www.dhofarautomotive.com

Clinical Cirba emerges Round 2 champ



DAHAM ENDS RUNNER-UP, BAGGSY BAGS THIRD AGAIN

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Lithuania's Benekdita Cirba overcame the challenge of Jordan's Ahmad Daham to emerge champion of the Oman International Drift Championship Round 2 at the Muscat Drift Arena on Friday night.

Cirba, who emerged second in the OI DC Round 1 on January 21-22, was clinical in his performance to clinch the top honours of Round 2.

Daham grabbed the top spot in the Mena section followed by Kuwait's Ali Maksheed and Oman's Haitham al Hadidi.

Drifting fans flocked to the Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) Drift Arena to enjoy the international drifting action, thanks to the latest decision of the Supreme Committee to allow 70 per cent capacity at the sports events.

OAA Vice-Chairman Jamal al Tae was enthused after watching the top drifters battle it out for top honours.

"This event is turning out to be a truly international class with the presence of professional drifters. The standard is going up in every edition of the championship. It is exciting to watch," Al Tae told the *Observer*.

OAA Managing Director Suleiman al Rawahi said it was heartening to note that the fans immediately took advantage of the Supreme Committee decision.

"The fans were desperate to watch the action at the Drift Arena and we allowed them following the full protocol requirements

suggested by the authorities on Covid-19," Al Rawahi said.

Former racer Shaikh Nisar bin Saud al Shanfari, special guest for the night, gave away the prizes to the top winners in presence of Jamal al Tae.

BAGGSY FINISHES THIRD

United Kingdom's Steve Baggsy repeated his performance in OI DC Round 1 to claim the third position after a thrilling contest with Ali Maksheed in the play-off.

Maksheed had to retire due to a technical problem in the second

run.

In the semifinals, Daham prevailed over Baggsy and Cirba got the better of Maksheed in contests that enthralled the audience.

OI DC Round 1 winner Clint Oort of the Netherlands progressed to the last 16 as did last season runner-up Sebastian Fontijn. But both the Dutch drifters' challenge ended in the last 16 as Oort lost to Tymur Lypski of Ukraine and Fontijn missed out to Daham.

Oman's Haitham al Hadidi

made it to the quarterfinals but missed out on the last four along with another Omani drifter Tariq al Shaihani.

Haitham couldn't go past Serhii Kremets of Ukraine in the last 8 duel.

However, Haitham finished top in the Oman national section, followed by Tariq al Shaihani and Riyadh al Mabsali.

The third and final round of Oman International Drift Championship 2022 will be held on February 17 and 18 at the OAA Drift Arena.



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Omani ports post positive growth in 2021

Key trends: Uptick in cargo throughput, vessel movement

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Cargo volumes handled by the country's main maritime gateways grew 9 per cent to 77.1 million tonnes last year over the previous year's tally, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said.

Cargo throughput at Port of Salalah amounted to 16.861 million tonnes in 2021, up 10.2 per cent from the previous year's total of 15.296 million tonnes.

Sohar Port witnessed an 8.7 per cent increase in cargo throughput at 58.647 million tonnes in 2021, up from 53.970 million tonnes a year earlier.

Khasab Port in Musandam Governorate reported an 82.4 per cent increase to 91,344 tonnes of goods in 2021, up from 50,770 tonnes in 2020.

Port Sultan Qaboos in Muscat saw cargo volumes decline 7.1 per cent to 799,687 tonnes last year, down from 860,766 tonnes of goods in 2020.

In all, Omani ports handled



more than 5.2 million TEUs of containers in 2021, which was up 2 per cent compared to the previous year's total. Of this number, Port of Salalah handled 4.5 million TEU, while Sohar Port handled about 716,000 TEUs of containers.

Port calls were up 1 per cent to 10,600 across all the ports in 2021, up from around 10,500 in 2020.

According to Muhanna bin Moosa Baqir, Director General

of Ports, the uptick in cargo throughput and vessel calls came despite pandemic-induced challenges and disruptions in the global supply chain, which led to a severe dearth of available shipping containers, congestion at various international ports, higher freight costs, and pile-ups of containers and cargo at transit ports.

But despite the global difficulties, Omani ports performed better than 2020, he

said, attributing the improved performance to effective follow-up, coordination and integration between the ministry, relevant government agencies, global and local partners and the operators of these ports.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he added that the positive performance of Omani ports will continue the current year as the ministry continues to work with other government and private sector stakeholders,

as well as port operators, to streamline process and improve the overall business environment in the ports.

According to Aida bint Yousef al Rahbiya of Oman Logistics Centre, the positive results are a reflection of the efforts of the government and its partners in implementing the objectives of the Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy 2040, which is overseen by the Oman Logistics Centre at the ministry. — ONA

TRA partners with US firm to enhance 5G networks in the Sultanate of Oman



JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) of the Sultanate of Oman has entered into a collaborative partnership with Ookla, a US-based digital media and Internet company, as part of the regulator's aim to harness the latest technologies and up-to-date insights for enhancing mobile and fixed broadband performance across the country.

Seattle-based Ookla is an internationally recognised leader in network testing and intelligence. Its portfolio includes leading brands in technology, entertainment, shopping, health, cybersecurity, and martech. This partnership comes at a time when 5G rollout in the country is gaining momentum, and Ookla's enterprise solutions and first-party data are set to empower TRA in assessing the adoption of 5G networks in the Sultanate of Oman.

This partnership will help drive network improvements in the Sultanate of Oman, delivering significant new value to local mobile carriers who build the networks and the consumers who use them.

Commenting on the partnership, Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Haddabi, TRA's strategic planning unit executive manager said, "Ookla's unique data insights will help TRA identify weak spots and consequently guide network operators to improve their networks, in turn creating a better experience for the Omani people. We look forward to leveraging Ookla's data to assist us in making informed decisions for advancing Oman's ranking internationally in support of the government's Oman Vision 2040."

Ookla's high-calibre network intelligence solutions will give the TRA an insightful view of network performance in the Sultanate of Oman, and allow it to benchmark against its regional peers.

Move to strengthen Oman Electricity Spot Market

Efficient performance: Regulator invites bids for advisory services contract to formulating market monitoring and surveillance procedures

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Having overseen the launch of the Oman Electricity Spot Market earlier this year — the first of its kind in the Middle East — the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), which regulates public utilities including the power sector, is taking steps to strengthen transparency and integrity in the operation of the new wholesale electricity market.

The goal is to put in place effective monitoring and surveillance procedures aimed at deterring anti-competitive behaviour, and price manipulation and abuse, among other prohibited conducts by market players.

To this end, the regulator recently floated a Request for Proposals (RfP) inviting qualified consultants to assist in the development of monitoring and surveillance procedures to



strengthen the role of its Market Monitoring Team in efficiently overseeing the conduct of the Oman Electricity Spot Market.

Brought into operation on January 1, 2022, the spot market currently enables all generation companies operating within the Main Interconnected System, which covers much of the northern

half of the Sultanate of Oman, to compete to sell electricity on a platform overseen by a Market Operator (MO) established within Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP), the state-owned power procurer and member of Nama Group.

As the single buyer of all electricity output in the

Sultanate of Oman, OPWP is also the sole offtaker of electricity on the spot market. Explaining how the new wholesale market functions, APSR said: "The Oman Spot Market is designed as a mandatory pool and all generators in the Main Interconnected System (MIS) are required to submit half-hourly

offers into the spot market for the purpose of calculating the market schedule and System Marginal Price (SMP).

In accordance with the Oman Electricity Market Rules, market offers are submitted in detailed form and strictly based on generators' short run marginal costs (SRMC).

However, generators with an existing Power Purchasing Agreement (PPA) will continue to be settled according to their contract terms (until the end of the PPA term)."

In the present stage of its launch, only around 10 generators operating within the MIS will be offering their capacity on the spot market. These are primarily gas-based power plants at this stage, with other renewable / alternative energy-based generators expected to play a bigger role in the future.

Upon the completion of the ongoing North-South Interconnection Project, linking the MIS with the network of Dhofar Governorate, other generators will be able to participate as well. Interested consultants have until February 27, 2022, to submit their proposals in response to the regulator's RfP.

Bank Muscat: An innovative journey in offering banking services and products

MUSCAT: Over the past four decades, Bank Muscat has firmly established itself as one of the leading financial institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. It has been contributing to enhancing the services provided in the banking sector and has become the customers' first choice as a banking partner.

Moreover, the bank has played a pioneering role in planning and implementing CSR programmes and initiatives as well as developing Omani human resources. Its long-standing experience since the 80s has culminated in the broad success of its outstanding suite of services and products, which were developed in alignment with the technological transformation of the modern age.

This success would not have been possible without the strong support of its valued customers who have been partners in the bank's journey since the beginning



and its constant development over the past 40 years. Bank Muscat is delighted to dedicate this success to its loyal customers and assures them that it is working to continuing this inspiring journey with them and play a part in making their dreams come true.

Today, Bank Muscat leads the financial services sector in the Sultanate of Oman with over RO 12 billion in assets, 174 branches and more than 800 ATMs and CDMs spread across the country making it the preferred choice for customers. Speaking on the occasion,



Ahmed al Balushi (pictured), Chief Banking Officer, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted with the bank's outstanding achievements over the past four decades and are proud of the prominent role it plays in the Sultanate of Oman. As one of the great success stories of the Blessed Renaissance, Bank Muscat has become a trusted partner to one and all, whether

to the government, corporates or individuals. The bank has strengthened the Sultanate's banking sector as an Omani institution that provides a full suite of banking products, services and solutions. It is also notable that the bank is contributing greatly to helping our valued customers achieve their dreams and aspirations."

Ahmed al Balushi, explained that Bank Muscat would continue to harness all its capabilities and expertise to provide the best possible services. He added, "Digital transformation has elevated the services and facilities offered to our large family of customers.

"The bank's efforts have been instrumental in achieving greater financial inclusion in the Sultanate of Oman and today, customers can obtain banking services quickly and promptly whether they are at their homes, offices or even on the move. We would like to assure our customers that Bank Muscat will continue its journey of inspiring innovation powered by new global banking trends, valued feedback from our customers and the government's efforts to take the fruits of growth and development to all parts of the country as part of the ambitious and forward-looking Oman Vision 2040."

Milipol Qatar returns to DECC on May 24-26



MUSCAT: Milipol Qatar, the Middle East leading international event for homeland security and civil defence, returns to the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) from May 24-26 against a background of rising demand for innovative solutions and advanced security systems to face increasingly complex issues to homeland security.

Held under the patronage of His Highness the Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, the 14th edition of Milipol Qatar will be officially opened by the Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Interior HE Shaikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz al Thani. The event is organised by Qatar's Ministry of Interior in partnership with Paris-based international event organiser Comexposium, acting on behalf of the GIE Milipol headed by Civipol, the cooperation implementer of the French ministry of interior.

Milipol Qatar 2022 is expected to attract over 240 official delegates and dignitaries from 30 nations including ministers from Iraq, Lebanon, Moldavia and Ukraine.

"In a context of heightened security challenges (Covid, intensification of cyber threats, geopolitical instability), decision makers, security forces, technical implementers, infrastructure developers and citizens are seeking new solutions to tackle rapidly evolving security issues. To this regard, this year's event will be a powerhouse of innovation," explained Prefect Yann Jounot (pictured), CEO of Civipol and President of Milipol events.

Do more, live more with the exciting Kia Sonet SUV

MUSCAT: Kia's compact yet thrilling Sonet SUV is fuel-efficient and powerful too. Sporting a stylish design, impressive interior and storage space, the Sonet is popular among those who seek to enjoy the city streets as well as weekend getaways. The powerful and affordable 5-seater Sonet SUV has a 1.5L engine paired to a CVT transmission and offers 17.5Kmpl fuel average.



Designed around the driver with a well laid-out, intuitive infotainment and cluster interface, the Sonet was built taking into consideration the end user's experience. The Sonet comes with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay feature, Audio Remote Control, Bluetooth, USB charger.

Underlining the Sonet's attractive looks are the body colour outside mirror, 2-tone bumper, power outside mirror, body colour

door handles, side repeater lamps in outside mirror, 16" alloy wheels, chrome radiator grille, rear fog lamps, LED front fog lamps, roof rack, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lamps and more.

Boasting multiple segment-first features that offer the ultimate driving experience for customers, the Sonet provides comfort, convenience and safety. Fitted with 8" Audio Display, the Sonet also comes with other smart features such as remote engine start, auto cruise control and more.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in the Sultanate of Oman, provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

Bank Nizwa, CSS hold Islamic finance workshop

MUSCAT: As part of its strategic corporate social responsibility, Bank Nizwa, the Sultanate of Oman's first dedicated Islamic bank, co-organises the 'Settlement of Islamic Finance Disputes by Conciliation and Arbitration' workshop in collaboration with College of Sharia Sciences (CSS). Organised in line with its efforts to support the national agenda of Oman Vision 2040, the workshop aimed at empowering the national cadres to manage and resolve disputes settlement in Islamic finance by following conciliation and arbitration methods.

Dr Mansoor Ali al Qudah, Head of Sharia Department at Bank Nizwa, said, "The Sultanate of Oman has witnessed a remarkable development in the Islamic banking sector in recent times, and Bank Nizwa has played a vital role in stimulating the growth of Islamic banking. The bank continuously records outstanding financial results and provides Sharia-compliant products and services.

"However, the development of this industry has led to an increase in Islamic finance disputes due to



conducting Islamic banking contracts and transactions. Therefore, rigorous efforts must be made to qualify the national cadres to explore and dissolve disputes in Islamic banking by following the methods of conciliation and arbitration.

"At Bank Nizwa, we are committed to supporting the development of the Islamic banking landscape, and enhancing awareness of the Islamic finance role as it is one of the important sectors for building a sustainable national economy, as well as we endeavour to mark a positive impact on the comprehensive Islamic banking system, which will certainly witness promising growth in the near future."

Own your favourite Toyota car with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Toyota's popular passenger vehicle range has some of the most inspiring and rewarding to own vehicles. From stylish exteriors, to advanced technology, powerful and fuel-efficient engines and more, every model is a joy to own. The passenger car range is now available with service 2 years/20,000 kms and 8 years/80,000 kms (On Corolla 1.8 HEV Only) (Whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 125 to RO 450. The campaign is valid until March 9, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.).

In the Sultanate of Oman, Toyota range of cars includes the Yaris Sedan with a smart exterior

and an interior design. Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Yaris Sedan is equipped with a choice of 1.3L and 1.5L engine and hatchback is equipped with a 1.5-litre engine. The 1.3-litre four-cylinder engine in the Yaris Sedan generates a maximum output of 98 hp and 12.5 kg-m of torque and is mated to either a five-speed manual transmission or a CVT transmission.

Toyota Yaris hatchback has plenty of stylish touches that have won the hearts and minds of customers. The Yaris hatchback has an instant appeal, thanks to the exterior that grabs attention from every angle.

The Corolla's striking look is complemented by an exciting drive personality imbued by three powertrain options; it includes a newly developed 2.0-litre four-



cylinder dynamic force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque which is mated to a new direct shift CVT transmission and a 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque, which is paired with a CVT transmission.

The Hybrid Electric Corolla combines two power sources

consisting of a gasoline engine and an electric motor with a combined power of 121 hp. It is also mated with an electrically controlled continuously variable transmission, which provides an outstanding fuel economy of 27.6km/L while enhancing the driving experience.

The stylish Camry is available in

two engine options. The 2.5-litre engine delivers 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m torque and 3.5L engine delivers 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m torque. Camry is also available in the 3.5L sports edition that adds to the thrill.

The Camry Hybrid offers a remarkably clean, silent and smooth drive, thanks to the increased power and reduced fuel consumption of a dynamic force 2.5-litre CVT (Electrically Controlled) engine with EV mode.

The Avalon is a wonderful statement of luxury.

Complementing the Avalon's stunning looks is a thrilling drive personality imbued by a 3.5-litre V6 engine, which produces a maximum output of 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque and is equipped with a direct injection 4-stroke gasoline engine superior

version (D-4S) and variable valve timing-intelligent wide (VVT-iW) systems to achieve top-notch power performance, environmental performance, and fuel efficiency.

The Supra name evokes the power, performance and handling that defined a succession of world-class cars for a quarter of a century, which built a reputation both as formidable performers on the road and all-conquering machines on the racetrack.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



Oman has excellent wind resources for renewable energy development: Masdar

HAMMAM AL BADI
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Optimal wind conditions in parts of the Sultanate of Oman, notably Dhofar Governorate in the south of the country, offer an attractive proposition for wind-based renewable energy development, according to a top official of Masdar, one of the region's leading renewable energy companies.

Abu Dhabi-based Masdar supported the development of the Gulf region's first wind farm — a 50 MW facility in Dhofar Governorate — which came into operation nearly two years ago.

Speaking to media on the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW), held in the UAE capital recently, Fawaz al Muharrami, Executive Director at Masdar Clean Energy, outlined opportunities for renewable energy development in the Sultanate of Oman and the wider Gulf region.

"The Sultanate of Oman, compared with other GCC countries, has good solar, as well

as wind, resources. All the GCC countries, of course, have good solar resources. The Sultanate of Oman, by the way, even has a little bit better than the other GCC with respect to solar, but on top of that, it has excellent resources when it comes to the wind, especially in the southern part," Al Muharrami said.

"And that is why we developed the Dhofar project, which was 50 megawatt wind project, in the right location where you have wind speeds of around 8-metres per second, which is excellent to develop wind projects in an economical way. I think, the Sultanate of Oman has definitely potential to grow even much bigger (in the renewable energy space)," Al Muharrami stated.

Masdar City: Hub of sustainability

One of Masdar's flagship initiatives — Masdar City — continues to serve as a paradigm for sustainable community development, said Abdulla Balalaa, Executive Director, Masdar City.



A pioneer in sustainability and a hub for research and development, Masdar City — constructed close to Abu Dhabi — is home to a rapidly growing clean-tech cluster, business free zone and residential neighbourhood with restaurants, shops, and public green spaces. It is also billed as the world's first zero-carbon urban development.

Abdulla Balalaa said in an interview to visiting journalists that the success of Masdar City will inspire similar initiatives in various parts of the world.

"We have developed a cumulative knowledge in sustainable development. And today we are considered the largest developed sustainable

community in the world. We have been approached by deferent countries within the region, GCC, Middle East and North Africa and even Asia to basically share that knowledge and build on the existing knowhow Masdar and the Abu Dhabi government have developed over the past 16 years. So, yes, we are about to export this

knowledge and we will provide consultancy to support whoever is seeking to develop such a noble goal," he commented.

At the heart of the Masdar City project is the idea of sustainability, said the Executive Director.

"The UAE has been always at the forefront of anything sustainable. We play a significant role in the region in spreading the knowhow of sustainability."

Set up 16 years ago, Masdar has become synonymous with sustainability, he said. "At that time, the word sustainability was rarely known. (Its establishment) reflects the wisdom of the UAE and Abu Dhabi leadership, as well as their great foresight, and sense of responsibility towards future generations," he noted.

Masdar is keen to share its expertise and partner with other nations and communities in supporting sustainable development, Balalaa said, adding that the company is exploring how the Masdar model can be replicated outside the UAE.

WEG wins Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park contract

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Leading electric motor manufacturer WEG Industries says it has won a contract to provide the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park project in Duqm with flameproof tube-cooled motors and medium voltage drives.

The Omani government is currently developing major crude oil export capacity at Ras Markaz, near the Duqm Special Economic Zone, as part of a vision to become a global player in the oil storage market. At the heart of this strategy is the Ras Markaz Crude Oil Park being established by Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTTCO), a subsidiary of OQ Group.

Located approximately 70km south of the Port of Duqm, the new crude oil park has a strategic location on the Sultanate of Oman's Indian Ocean coastline, offering easy access to markets in South Asia, the Far East, Africa and the Middle East. It will cover an area of 1,253 ha with a total capacity of 200mn bbl of crude oil upon its completion.

This facility is a critical element to position the Sultanate of Oman as a major hub in the region and a key link to the Duqm Refinery, which also features WEG products.

At the crude oil park, WEG will supply four W22XdT 900K/J 3400kW four poles 11000V B3R tube-cooled flameproof motors, four MVW3000 medium voltage variable speed drives, as well as start-up and commissioning of the combined solution.

MSX ends week lower, led by financial and industrial index

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week down by 0.85 per cent. The Financial Index fell by 0.71 per cent while the Industry Index fell by 0.18 per cent. Services Index was up 1.31 per cent and the Shariah Index rose 0.71 per cent. Omanis and Arabs absorbed the selling pressure from GCC and foreign investors.

Oman Fisheries Company says it plans to double production to 56,000 metric tonnes in 12 months. CEO Suleiman al Ghannami told Arab News: "In 2021 we processed around 28,000 metric tonnes and we are targeting double that quantity in 2022. We anticipate exponential growth." The company, one of the oldest fish processing operations in the country, plans to hit this target by expanding its international joint ventures to take advantage of technologies from companies around the world.

The Sultanate of Oman jumped to 6th place in the area of business fundamentals and ranked overall as the 14th most competitive emerging market, according to the 2022 Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index. The UAE (3), Saudi Arabia (6) and Qatar (7) ranked among the top 10 emerging markets in the 2022 index, which was led by China (1) and India (2).

The Sultanate of Oman was ranked first in the growth rate of total investments in the Arab world, in the 2021 report of the Arab Investment and Export Credit Guarantee Corporation. The final Quarterly Investment Guarantee report for 2021 issued by Daman indicated that the Sultanate of Oman's total investments grew by 37.3 per cent to RO 6.3 billion in 2021. The figure is expected to hit RO 7 billion this year. The Sultanate of Oman was ranked second



among the Arab countries in the highest increase in GDP per capita in 2021 with a percentage of 23.7. GDP per capita increased by 23.7 per cent from \$14,200 in 2020 to \$17,600 in 2021. Per capita GDP is expected to grow to \$18,200 in 2022. Total Arab countries per capita GDP rose by 1.3 per cent to \$9,300 on average. The report indicated that the Sultanate of Oman's GDP increased by 2.5 per cent in 2021 and the growth in GDP is expected to reach 2.9 per cent in the current year.

During the week, it was announced that with the aim of strengthening cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and various government bodies in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, the ministry announced the launch of the Strategic Research Projects Programme (SRPP). The Research programme is directed to address research challenges of national priority government institutions.

Furthermore, the technical committee of the National Programme for Investment and Exports Development, a public drive codenamed "Nazdahir", also held its annual meeting during the week under the auspices of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Investment Promotion Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce,

Industry and Investment Promotion. The meeting brought together representatives of government departments concerned.

The meeting familiarised the members about major initiatives undertaken by the programme, including "Fast Track", "Economic Diversification Investment Initiatives" and "Foreign Investor Residency". The meeting also looked into the 2022 annual plan, delegating tasks and roles to sectors tasked with enhancing the competitiveness of the investment climate in the Sultanate of Oman and the outcome of the Fast Track Initiative during 2021. The National Programme for Investment and Exports Development figures among the efforts of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to improve entrepreneurship, attract foreign investments and expedite the implementation of investment projects.

Latest statistics from NCSI showed that exports from the Sultanate of Oman crossed RO 12 billion during 9M21.

NCSI numbers show that out of the RO 12.28 billion exports during the period, RO 7.8 billion came from oil and gas exports, while RO 4.18 billion was earned through non-oil exports.

Courtesy: U-Capital



New Duqm Port container cranes to be 5G enabled

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 12

Work on the assembly and installation of modern container cranes and container handling equipment at Port of Duqm is now around 60 per cent complete, according to the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

When operational, they will handle the port's commercial berth to handle the world's largest container ships.

As part of the second phase of the commercial berth's development, OPAZ awarded a contract for the design, manufacture, supply, installation, testing and commission of four ship to shore (STS) container cranes and 12 rubber tyred gantry cranes to Liebherr of Ireland.

Featuring 5G technologies, remote control and other high-

tech capabilities, the new STS cranes are part of a package that includes an automatic driving system, yard monitoring system and automatic landing system. It has a reach of 71 metres and a rear reach of 18 metres, enabling it to handle the world's largest container ships.

The project to supply containers cranes includes allocating 10 per cent of the contract value to SMEs, which will be implemented during installation phase. The project also includes a training programme for four young Omanis in the basics of mechanical engineering and structures at Liebherr plant.

OPAZ has also agreed with the Port of Duqm that the cranes will be operated by male and female Omani youth using a 5G technologies operation system that enables remote control from the control rooms of the port.

Shipping news makes grim reading for central banks

Denmark's shipping magnates are on a different wavelength to central bankers. AP Moller-Maersk and DSV, two of the biggest names in global logistics, predicted another bumper year of profits due to continued backlogs in ports and other bottlenecks. That scuppers rate-setters' hopes that falling freight prices might lend a hand in the fight against high inflation.

Container operators have been one of the biggest beneficiaries of pandemic-related disruptions. Port closures threw ocean-going timetables into disarray.

With a largely fixed cost base, companies like \$63 billion Maersk have been able to surf the wave. Chief Executive Officer Soren Skou said Maersk made \$24 billion in EBITDA last year, as much as six times what it achieved in "normal" years like 2018.

His shareholders' delight will contrast with the queasiness this may induce at the US Federal Reserve and European Central Bank. That's because the longer shipping costs stay elevated, the longer it will take inflation to subside.

This is a problem for Fed Chair Jerome Powell and his global peers, since it means they may have to tighten monetary policy more aggressively to curb price pressures, jeopardising growth.

The cost of the average trans-Pacific shipment has eased since September's spike, but is still around \$15,000, compared with its \$11,250 average for the whole of 2021.

If it remained steady for the first half of the year the price would then have to average \$7,500 for the rest of the year.

If anything, the pressures are to the upside. DSV predicted a 15%-plus increase in operating profits for this year, even though oil prices have nearly doubled in the last 12 months and show no signs of retreating. Ocean-goers' gain will be central bankers' pain. — Reuters

Maersk made \$24 billion in EBITDA last year, as much as six times what it achieved in "normal" years like 2018

SOREN SKOU
CEO, Maersk



INFLATION FIGURES

Small figurines are seen in front of displayed word 'Inflation', US flag and rising stock graph in this photo illustration.

– Reuters

The auto industry in 2022



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

MANY ARE SEEING THE LIKELIHOOD THAT PRICES WILL SOON START TO DROP, MAKING EV MORE AFFORDABLE

The automotive industry has not been doing great. We are all aware of the various issues that are currently plaguing the supply chain, with chip shortage being on of the most damaging elements. But probably the automotive crisis has deeper roots than the recent events might suggest.

For the first time since 1931, General Motors did not come out as the top seller in the USA. Japanese automaker Toyota outsold GM for the first time. The performance does not come as a total surprise.

Toyota has proven to be solidly resilient in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011.

Although the industry is not doing well, 2021 was not the worst year. Looking at the sales chart in the USA, starting from the '70s, an observer might feel on a roller coaster ride.

The deepest crisis was between 1980 and 1982, with the latter still being the worst year on records, counting 10.3 million cars sold. It took just a few years to the industry to recover.

By 1986, car sales crossed 16 million for

the first time. The next record came in the year 2000, crossing the 17 million line.

Then the great financial crisis hit hard: In 2009 there were only 10.4 million cars sold. Recovery took longer than expected, with sales crossing the 16 million mark in 2014, and 17 million in 2015.

That became the average level for the subsequent years, until Covid hit. In 2020, sales fell below 15 million units and surprisingly also 2021 failed to climb back to 16 million cars sold.

However, the market demand is there, with orders placed by customers in the range of 4.5 million to 5 million, but shortages and supply chain delays are holding back the market.

An evidence that the underpinning issue is not the demand, is the fact that incentives have dried up. A couple of years ago, auto buyers could have been welcomed by up \$4,000 in incentives, while now the figure seems to be settling at a mere \$1,500.

Meaning that there is no need for more buyers, but more inventory. Another strong indicator that the market is ready to buy more vehicles, is the average purchase price, which in the US has reached \$45k, a stunning 20 per cent higher compared to

last year.

Despite the difficulties, most car makers are investing massively in electric vehicles. In the past month there have been several announcements that have injected a boost of confined in the industry.

Both legacy car makers as well as new players, are "spicing up" the competition. Among the rising starts, EV maker Fisker launched the model Ocean, a beautiful SUV.

Meanwhile, Ford is increasing the production of F-150 lightning, GM just unveiled two new EVs: The very aggressively priced Silverado EV pick-up truck and the compact SUV Equinox EV.

Finally, Volkswagen is also announcing a new electric vehicle in the market. With all these new Electric Vehicles brought to the market, many are seeing the likelihood that prices will soon start to drop, making EV more affordable.

As for the affordability of used cars, during the past 2 years prices skyrocketed in the second hand market, due to the delays in getting new vehicles. However, as the orders are picking up again for new cars, the price of used one is likely to drop quite significantly.

Make capitalism competitive again



RUBEN MAXIMIANO

The author is a senior competition expert at the OECD

Not every sitting US president invites comparisons with a Roosevelt, let alone two members of that storied family. Since taking office just over a year ago, Joe Biden has frequently been likened to president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who introduced the New Deal in the 1930s, because of the boldness and scope of his economic agenda.

But Biden may have more in common with America's first president Roosevelt — Theodore, or "Teddy" — whose economic agenda is remembered for its embrace of the then-novel tool of competition law in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Biden's most recent Teddy Roosevelt moment came at the start of this year, when his administration announced that it would spend \$1 billion in post-pandemic economic recovery funds to boost competition in the US meatpacking sector —

an industry in which the White House says four firms control 85% of all beef processing and 70% of the pork market.

The administration's move against the industry's giants comes against the backdrop of soaring food prices and a rapid rise in overall US inflation, and is aimed at bringing new players into the meat-processing chain in the hope that stiffer competition will help to tame price increases.

Whatever the outcome, it was an audacious move that should be understood less as overweening intervention against capitalist market mechanisms and more as an attempt to support those mechanisms. Such interventions to correct market failures have become bolder and more frequent during the Covid-19 pandemic, with governments everywhere adopting a "whatever it takes" attitude and spending almost \$17 trillion so far to get through the crisis.

The bill for this unavoidable

largesse will inevitably come due, requiring razor-sharp policy-making to mitigate adverse effects. But if a greater role for the state is the price to pay for saving the economy, it will have been worth it if governments use this moment to restore the competitive energy that has been sapped from the economy in recent decades.

During the pandemic, as under Teddy Roosevelt's presidency, a robust defence of market competition has required decisive government action. In Roosevelt's day, this paved the way for the emergence of a large middle class in the United States. Over the past year, as the pandemic has exposed inefficiencies throughout the economy, a renewed appreciation of the links between competition, wealth generation and distribution, and economic performance has rapidly gained traction among US and other global policymakers.

Notably, Biden appointed competition law experts (and Big Tech critics) Lina Khan and Tim

Wu to chair the Federal Trade Commission and serve on the president's National Economic Council, respectively. And last July, the president issued an executive order to promote competition, mandating 72 initiatives, involving a dozen federal agencies, to tackle a range of challenges.

Some say competition problems have manifested themselves partly through higher inflation, some of which has been attributed to companies taking advantage of their dominance of highly concentrated markets.

But, as the pandemic has demonstrated, insufficient competition has also increased the fragility of supply chains — an issue that Biden's recent meat-industry initiative is designed to address.

Without assertive competition policy and enforcement, such market failures — in the US and elsewhere — will persist and potentially get worse as the post-pandemic recovery takes hold and the much-hoped-for green

economic transition gathers pace. And, despite battling the longstanding assumption that competition occurs spontaneously, antitrust authorities in America and around the world have been dogged in their pursuit of anti-competitive conduct.

But competition policy can and must play a more decisive role in the way that economies are run and markets are managed.

The Biden administration's intervention in the meat industry points to a possible way forward. Far from going it alone, the FTC — which, along with the Department of Justice, traditionally oversees US competition policy — is working closely with the US Department of Agriculture on fostering competition and the entry of new players into the sector.

More generally, competition authorities, with their in-depth understanding of market dynamics, must have a place at the policy-making table.

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توفر كافة وسائل السلامة والوقاية من الحرائق

features

A star amongst Omani translators

One of the most celebrated translators in the Sultanate of Oman today is Aiman al Owisi who was not only awarded for some of his translation works but because of his superb work has become one of the go-to persons to translate high-calibre literary works. Check out how he got started and what books he has worked on... **P20**



READ

PURE COLOUR
BY SHEILA HETI

Pure Colour is about a young woman who turns into a leaf. "Unrequited love's a bore," Billie Holiday sang. So, it turns out, is photosynthesis. The young woman's name is Mira. Her transformation is disorienting, to us if not her. One moment, the reader is consuming shot after shot of Heti's strong, familiar brand of espresso. The next, we're sipping as if out of M  ret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup at MoMA.

LOST SECRET

Tunisian enthusiast recreates sea snail purple dye that defined ancient royals

A TUNISIAN HISTORY enthusiast is making dye from sea snail shells inspired by a school project decades ago on ancient Carthage and the purple colouring that brought fabulous wealth to the classical world. Mouhamad Ghassen Nourira works from a hut in his garden to process murex snails using techniques first developed by the Phoenicians to produce a dye known as Tyrian purple that sells online for about \$2,500 a gramme.

So expensive was the colour even in ancient times that the Romans restricted its use to the elite, whose purple fringed robes became the mark of the Mediterranean's most powerful dynasty. For the ancient Phoenicians, from modern-day Lebanon, the trade in Tyrian purple helped build a mercantile empire that established new colonies across the Mediterranean, including at Carthage, near modern Tunis, under the mythical Queen Dido.

"This hobby started when I was a boy in history class studying the Canaanites, the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians and how they were famous for extracting purple from murex and it was more expensive than gold," Nourira said. Years later, he noticed a dead murex on the beach and recalling his history classes decided to experiment with ways of making the dye. "From that time I started my adventure," he said.

LOST SECRET Phoenician settlers are believed to have founded Carthage roughly 3,000 years ago and it eventually became one of the great powers of antiquity with a mighty navy based at a near impregnable port complex. Under its greatest general Hannibal, who marched war elephants across Spain and over the Alps, Carthage nearly conquered Italy. But it was Rome that finally prevailed. The city was later rebuilt by the Romans and is now a suburb of



Tunis, with the pillars of ancient buildings protruding along residential streets and the once-mighty port home to little fishing boats, with murex shells dotting the beaches nearby. As the centuries passed, the secret of turning murex into Tyrian dye was gradually lost until a few enthusiasts started trying to recreate the formula. Nourira spent 14 years working out how to produce the dye from nets of murex he buys from a local fisherman, extracting the glands, crushing the shells, fermenting and cooking them and eventually producing tiny amounts of purple powder. — Reuters



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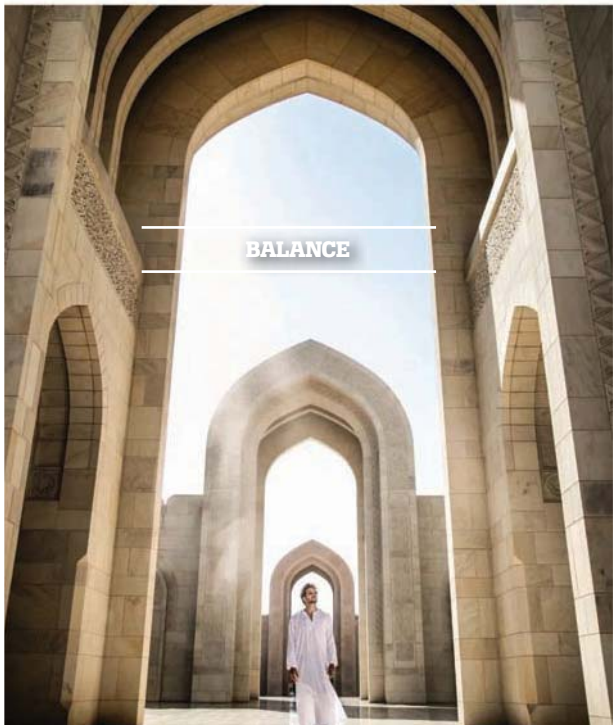
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

All-women news organisation in rural India elated at Oscar nod



THE PIONEERING team at an all-women, rural news organisation in northern India say they are ecstatic after a documentary film on their crusading reporting, especially around the hardships faced by lower caste communities, won an Oscar nomination on Tuesday.

"Writing with Fire", a 93-minute film about the women behind the online news outlet "Khabar Lahariya" — meaning News Waves in Hindi — was nominated in the Best Documentary Feature category for this year's Academy Awards.

"I am so happy. But I can't express it well," Meera Devi, a reporter with Khabar Lahariya told Reuters by telephone while she was out reporting on local elections in India's most populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which is where the news outlet is based.

Devi features prominently in the documentary, wading through fields, hitching a bike ride along potholed roads, and recording smartphone videos of villagers as they narrate their issues.

Started by a group of women 20 years ago, Khabar Lahariya focuses on women's and local issues in rural Uttar Pradesh, a land where caste faultlines are sharply drawn and violence against lower-castes is common.

"We are proud that 20 years of our rural reporting and hard work is being appreciated and loved by a global audience; encouraging us to further our women-led grassroots media revolution," Kavita Devi, one of the co-founders of the organisation, said in an email.

Khabar Lahariya operates out of a farmhouse and trains local women to use phones and conduct interviews.

The trailer of the film, directed by Rintu Thomas and Sushmit Ghosh, shows them as they travel on foot and in crowded buses, and learn how to use a mobile phone for the first time.

News of the Oscar nomination drew praise from some in Bollywood, India's popular Hindi language film industry.

"This feels like a personal victory. Congratulations my fellow Indians! You have made us all a little emotional today," actor Parineeti Chopra said on Twitter.

Both Ghosh and Thomas could not be reached immediately for comment. The Academy Awards will be announced on March 27 in a televised ceremony. — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

A Town That Saved a Mountain, and a Mountain That Saved a Town



JIM LYALL BRISKLY skied up Mount Ascutney, eagerly pointing out the view. We were skinning up a ski area in southern Vermont, but the chairlifts are long gone. At the top of the mountain we arrived at an abandoned ski patrol cabin and lift station. A cold breeze whipped through the deserted structures. It had a ghostly, post-apocalyptic feel.

Lyall beckoned me up an old chairlift ramp. He swept his ski pole across the panorama and pointed to the snow-covered summits of Okemo and Killington, ski resorts that lie within a 30-mile radius. The White Mountains of New Hampshire felt close enough to touch.

"There would be many times that I would stand up here and watch storms dump snow on those ski areas and just bypass Ascutney. We couldn't win," said Lyall, an avid backcountry skier.

In its heyday, the Ascutney ski resort boasted 1,800 vertical feet of skiing on more than 50 trails and included a high-speed quad chairlift, three triple chairlifts and a double chairlift. But when it closed in 2010 because of scant snow and mismanagement (twin killers of small ski resorts), it threatened to take with it the nearby community of West Windsor, Vermont, population 1,099.

"Property values plummeted, condos on the mountain saw their value decrease by more than half, and taxes went up," recalled Glenn Seward, who worked at the resort for 18 years, once as the director of mountain operations. The town's general store, the gathering place of the community, also went broke and closed.

"We were desperate," said Seward, who at the time was chair of the West Windsor Selectboard, a Vermont town's equivalent of a city council.

That desperation led the community to hitch its fortune to the mountain, becoming a model for how a small ski area

At the heart of this revival is Ascutney Outdoors, a nonprofit with more than 100 volunteers that now runs recreation on the mountain. Instead of high-speed quads and snow-making, skiers take a rope tow or T-bar that accesses 435-vertical feet of skiing

and its community can thrive in the era of climate change. Working with the state of Vermont as well as the non-profit Trust for Public Land, the town bought the failed ski area in 2015. But instead of allowing a private company to run the mountain, contracting out its operations, the local residents themselves would chart a sustainable, volunteer-driven path for the ski area.

Seven years later, Mount Ascutney and West Windsor are magnets for families and outdoor enthusiasts. Between 2010 and 2020, the town's population jumped more than 20%,

and median single-family home sale prices more than doubled, to \$329,750. A bustling new general store featuring local products has opened in the village of Brownsville, reinvigorating the centre of the West Windsor community. The town and mountain draw people year-round, from endurance runners and mountain bikers in the warm months to skiers in winter.

At the heart of this revival is Ascutney Outdoors, a nonprofit with more than 100 volunteers that now runs recreation on the mountain. Instead of high-speed quads and snow-making, skiers take a rope tow or T-bar that accesses 435-vertical feet of skiing, found on 10 natural-snow trails that are groomed. There is also a lift for snow tubing. A lift ticket costs \$20, or \$100 for a season pass. The lifts run on Saturday and Sunday when there is enough snow, and it takes about 40 volunteers to staff a busy weekend.

The upper 1,300 vertical feet of the mountain, maintained by Ascutney Trails Association, is reserved for backcountry skiers to ski up and ski down for free — although donations are appreciated. Thursday night ski races take place under lights, and an after-school programme brings children to the mountain every afternoon. The mountain is also home to 45 miles of renowned mountain bike trails, numerous hiking trails and Mount Ascutney State Park. It is one of the top hang-gliding sites in New England.

"When there's snow, we ski, and when there's not, we do other things," said Seward, who is now executive director of Ascutney Outdoors. "That's a pretty easy model to sustain."

COLUMN



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The Last Hour

IN 1969, ABIMAEL GUZMÁN (also known as Chairman Gonzalo) founded The Communist Party of Peru — Shining Path that was based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and his own thoughts. It started its war against the government of Peru in 1980 with the goal of overthrowing it and replacing it with New Democracy that would lead eventually to full communism.

The Shining Path was well known for its brutality, being responsible for the death or disappearance of 48,000 people in its reign of terror that ended in 1992 with the arrest of Guzmán. In 2017, Peruvian director Eduardo Mendoza de Echave released a movie called *The Final Hour* to mark the 25th anniversary of Guzmán's capture.

The movie follows members of the Peruvian Special Group of Intelligence that has been trying to find Guzmán for the past ten years. The group had put many members of the Shining Path under surveillance and filmed hours of footage of what they suspected to be Guzmán's safe houses.

Carlos Zambrano (Pietro Sibille) is one of the agents whose life goal is to capture Guzmán and bring him to justice. He's a workaholic and divorced; his wife is planning to leave the country to a more peaceful place where she could raise their only son without the constant fear of the Shining Path. Zambrano is teamed up with another agent, a former nurse called Gabriela Coronado (Nidia Bermejo) who's struggling with her own ethical dilemma: what's the right thing to do when your relative is a member of the Shining Path? As both share the threat of losing a loved one to the same enemy, the two agents become close — which raises suspicion about their loyalty to the cause and threaten their lives.

De Echave succeeds in engaging the viewer of what Peruvians went through during the Shining Path's reign of terror within simple scenes of total blackouts that went on for days to normal conversations about schools introducing drills for children on how to act when a bomb explodes; besides background scenes that illustrate the government's counteraction including raids and harassing innocent civilians who were caught between the hammer and the anvil.

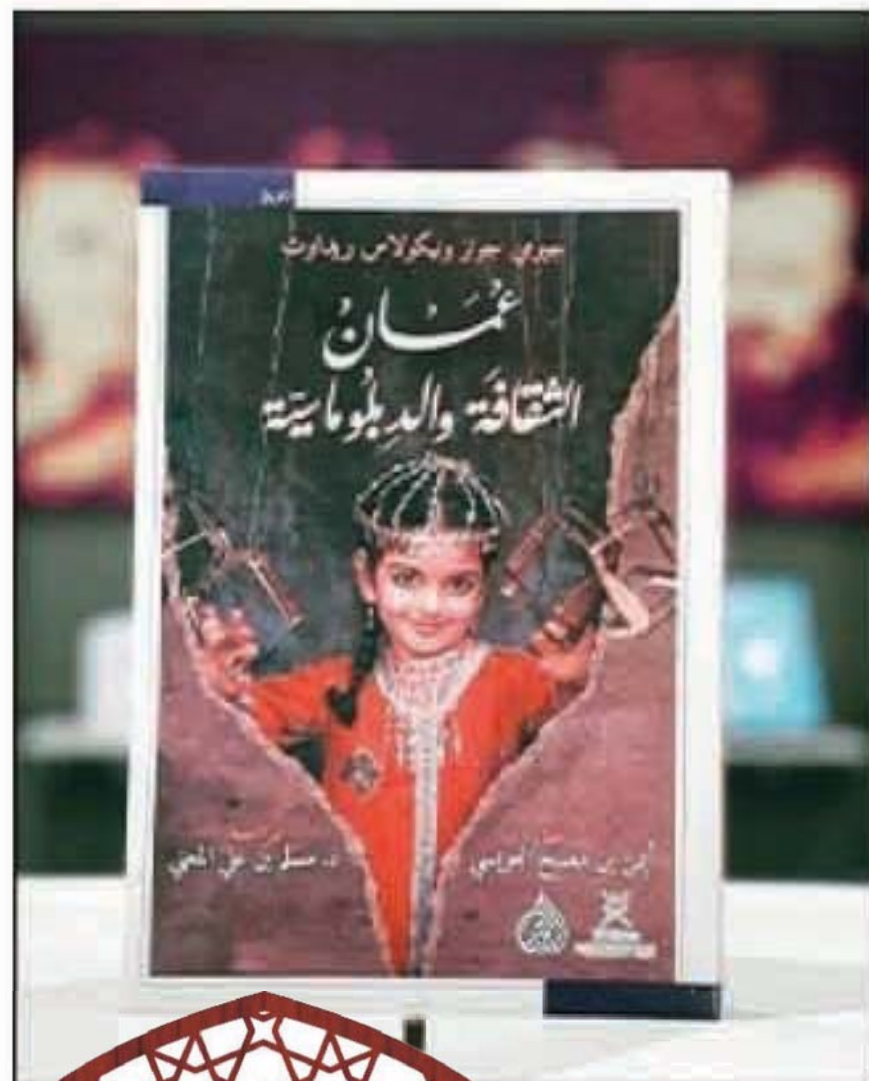
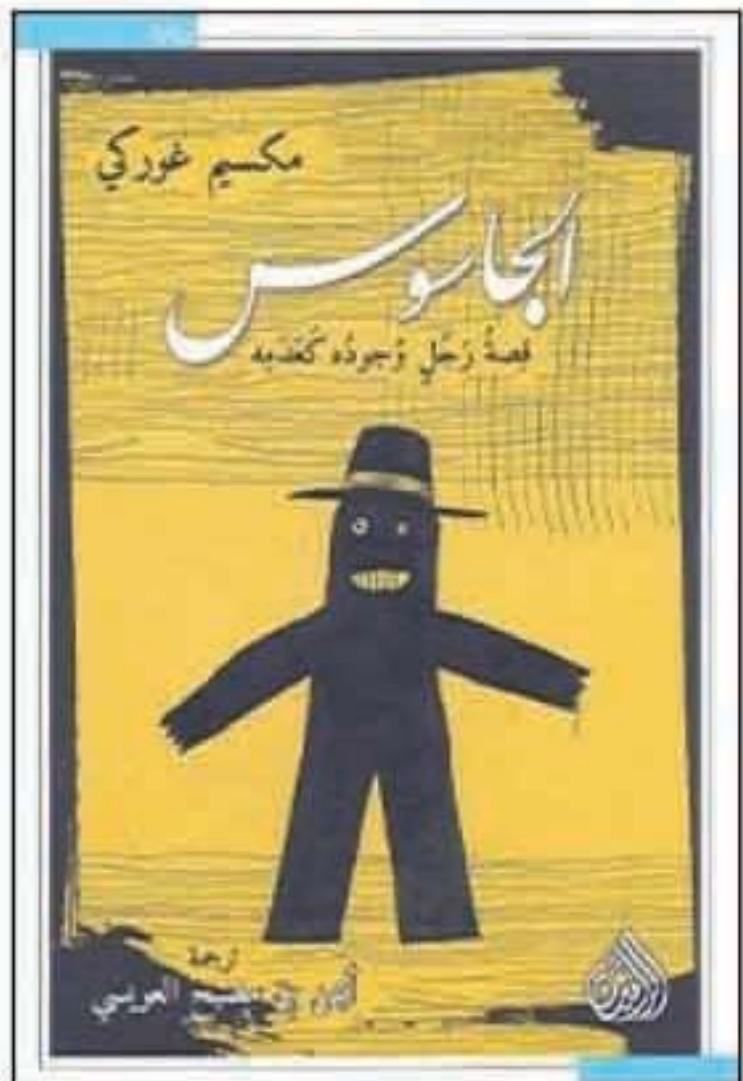
His eye for detail is phenomenal, from the set decoration to the character looks that brings back a sudden nostalgia to the uncomplex 90s, as well as the technology used at that time which looks so primitive compared to cutting-edge ones nowadays (e.g. huge walkie-talkies and VHS camcorders hidden in black bin liners).

The action sequence that started with trying to track Guzmán to the final scenes of Operation Victoria where he was seized were intense and captivating. Pietro Sibille's depiction of Zambrano with all his contradictions is neat. However, Nidia Bermejo comes across as cold in the first few scenes yet her performance starts warming up towards the end.

The movie was to be released on September 12, 2017 to mark the 25th anniversary of Guzmán's capture in Lima.

For unknown reasons the date was shifted to the 14th instead. Initially, it was to be premiered in 25 cinemas but the number increased to 88 after growing public demand on tickets. In that month, the movie became the 3rd most watched movie — after *IT* and *Earthquake* — and a successful national hit in 20 years. It also received many positive reviews as some critics considered it de Echave's best movie to date, a movie that should be watched by both generations of Peruvians: those who lived and survived the horrors of it and those who only got to hear about it. An interesting and informative period film. Available on Netflix.

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A star amongst Omani translators

By Baraah al Mujaini

For centuries, translation has played a critical role in bonding cultures and connecting people from around the world by breaking the barriers of communication in different fields.

The same is true in Oman where translators perform a crucial role considering the country's huge expat population who don't speak Arabic. As a melting pot of different cultures, everyone understands each other and society can function effectively because of the effective role translators play.

The translation industry has also flourished in Oman. From being launched as a major at Sultan Qaboos University in the 90s, there are numerous BA Translation programmes offered throughout the country nowadays.

One of the most celebrated translators in the Sultanate of Oman today is Aiman al Owisi who was not only awarded for some of his translation works but because of his superb work has become one of the go-to persons to translate high-calibre literary works.

Aiman started his translation journey in his fourth year in college. Back then, he was the head of the English and Translation Society at SQU that was founded in 1996. The first work he attempted to translate was a literary work, which is quite harsh to translate especially for a student. Aiman expressed the intensive desire that possessed him to read Russian literature during the post-graduation period.

Surprisingly, a Russian literary work was proposed for him to translate by Dar Alrafidain publishing house. He eagerly

accepted to translate the book named "The Spy" for the great Russian Novelist Maxim Gorky. The strenuous task of translation needs accuracy and patience; therefore, Aiman visited Russia in 2017 as an attempt to dig deep into the Russian culture and lifestyle. The visit has facilitated the task of translating the book since he went to visit the novelist's home, observing his acquisition, photos, and books. While translating the book, Aiman was visualising all that he has captured from his visit to Russia, bearing in mind all the details he has to manifest in his translation to achieve accuracy in translation and loyalty to the Russian culture.

Simultaneously, Aiman was also requested to translate another work titled "A History of Modern Oman" by Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout. This book has a distinguished value to Aiman, as it was the first book published as his translation. This book codified Oman's history and events from 1749 until the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. The success of this book and the compliments he has received regarding the quality of the translation was a stimulus for him to start translating other books.

Worth mentioning, Aiman has recently won besides the Omani translator Rahma al Habsi, the Cultural Creativity Award 2021 (session 12) for the best-published translation (from foreign language to Arabic) for the book "A History of Modern Oman" and Rahma's translated work "Arabic Zanzibar State". The event was organised by The Omani Society for Writers and Literates.

Translating "A History of Modern Oman" creates a chance for Aiman to translate another book titled "Oman, Culture, and Diplomacy" also by Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout. As

the former book referred repeatedly to the latter book, Aiman was curious to read and opt to translate it. Since the book reflects Oman's culture and its role in shaping modern Omani diplomacy.

Aiman has also shed the light on the difficulties that challenge the translator in the process of translating literary works, as it requires a comprehensive understanding. Literary works are characterised by using a

considerable amount of metaphors, similes, humour, irony, and lots of implicit meanings, which complicate the task for the translator. He does believe that a literary translator must have a sense of creativity that enables him/her to translate the source text loyally, precisely, and professionally.

Aiman remarks on the significant role of machine translation, as they have paved the way for the industry of translation to

evolve. Yet, since the process of translation is not just transferring mere linguistic units from one language into another; the machines cannot replace the role of human translators, especially, if there are religious, cultural and social concepts codified within the text. The translation machine, nevertheless, facilitates the task of translating and accelerates the pace. Professional translators can assign the source text in one of

the translation machines programs, and then attempt to refine and rectify the whole text. Aiman has pointed out to the new translation techniques and tools that lately have emerged noticeably in this field which signifies the importance and development of translation around the world. One of these tools is known as CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools, which Aiman had conducted some workshops about at SQU.

