



8 PAGES
INDIAN
REPUBLIC DAY
SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT
WITH TODAY'S
EDITION



P12

NADAL
DIGS DEEP
TO REACH
SEMIS



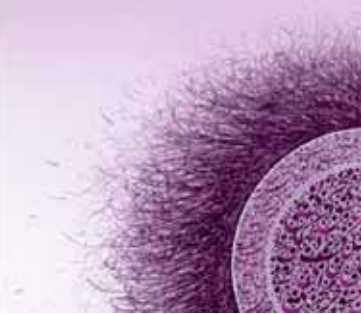
P13

GULF
ECONOMIES TO
GROW FASTER
IN 2022: POLL



P20

PERSIAN 'NASTALIQ'
WOWS MUSCAT'S
ADORING
ART LOVERS



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY GREETES
PRESIDENT OF INDIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent greetings to President Ram Nath Kovind of the Republic of India on his country's Republic Day. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Kovind. His Majesty also wished the people of India further progress and prosperity.

HM GREETES AUSTRALIA
GOVERNOR-GENERAL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent greetings to David Hurley, Governor-General of Australia on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to Governor-General Hurley. His Majesty also wished the people of Australia further progress and prosperity.

GREEN MEDIA
SEASON: 02
EPISODE: 03



RETIREMENT



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INSIDE



SNOW BRINGS TRAVEL
CHAOS IN TURKEY, GREECE

P6



RUSSIA LAUNCHES NEW
MILITARY DRILLS

P7

HM CONFERS MILITARY ORDER ON BRIGADIER AL HATMI



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq conferred Oman Military Order (Third Class) on Brigadier Said bin Abdullah bin Humaid al Hatmi at Barakah Palace on Tuesday. The order reflects His Majesty's recognition for the efforts exerted by Brigadier Said during his tour of duty at the Royal Guard of Oman. – ONA

Omani research team uses GIS
to map road accident hotspots

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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A research project has developed means to map road accident hotspots using GPS. This will help traffic police officials and motorists to reduce risks of mishaps. The project, 'Mapping road traffic crash hotspots using GIS-based methods: A case study of Muscat Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman' by principal investigator Dr Amira al Aamri, specialist of statistics at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and her team won

Accident hotspots
appeared to be more
dominant on road
segments where the
highest level of traffic
interactions exists,
especially along Sultan
Qaboos highway

the award under the PhD category of the 8th National Research Award (NRA), organised by MOHERI, which honoured some of the brightest and innovative

minds in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Amira al Aamri elaborated that the research project aimed to evaluate the spatial and temporal dimensions, identifying the high-risk areas or hotspots where accidents are more frequent using the geocoded data from the Muscat Governorate. The study focused on identifying high density crash zones in the governorate, exploring the characteristics of crash hotspots, and examining the spatio-temporal patterns of road traffic crashes (RTCs) in the study area. [TURN TO P5](#)

Covid cases
hit over 2,000;
most patients
unvaccinated

THOUGH OMICRON VARIANT IS LESS DANGEROUS,
IT CAN SPREAD FAST, WARN DOCTORS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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In an unprecedented jump in cases Covid-19, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported on Tuesday 2,079 new cases, taking the total cases in the country since the start of the pandemic to 326,164. The ministry also reported one death in 24 hours. Despite the concern over the rise in infections, Dr Zakariya al Balushi, Infectious Disease Consultant at Royal Hospital, said Omicron is less dangerous and fatal than the previous mutant. "The current scientific evidence gives an optimistic view, even though it is still fraught with caution, especially that coronavirus, which sprung surprises in the past two years. The Omicron mutant has the property of rapid spread and is considered fast compared to the Delta mutant." Dr Al Balushi added that this is an initial look and may change over time. "The world is witnessing unprecedented numbers of daily infections, yet the rate of inpatients and deaths is lower than before, and most of the hospitalised patients are unvaccinated. Deaths reached less than 1 per cent globally for the first time since the start of the pandemic", he explained. "Trials in animals from South Korea showed that the virus is multiplying a little slowly and

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past two years

DR ZAKARIYA
AL BALUSHI
Royal Hospital

very weak inside lung cells. Four similar researches in Liverpool, Belgium, Japan and Cambridge, proved the same results. So the percentage of lung infections is low. On the ground, epidemiological data from South Africa and then reports from various countries of the world such as European countries and America confirm the same conclusion". Meanwhile, the government continued its vaccination campaign for residents and citizens. According to statistics from the ministry, the number of people fully vaccinated reached 2,958,643 or 81 per cent of the population. The doses administered stood at 6,504,926.

Rustaq's ancient settlement more than 4,000 years old

AL RUSTAQ: Archaeological excavations in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, South Al Batinah Governorate, revealed a large and sophisticated settlement, dating back more than four thousand years ago, which includes a large number of huge buildings and tombs. This was revealed in a site known by the locals as Al Tekha, located on the outskirts of the Al Hajar Mountains on the western bank of Wadi Al Ghashab, near the confluence of Wadi Al Sahtan with Wadi Al Ghashab.

It was excavated by the joint archaeological mission between the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University represented by Dr Khaled Douglas and the Italian University of Pisa represented by Dr Sara Pizzimenti, under the supervision of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The archaeological mission began its excavations at the site in early January, as the first season of this mission at the site, with a plan to follow up the research and excavation work for

many years in the future. The results of the archaeological excavation showed that the site was inhabited for the first time in the third millennium BC during the Early Bronze Age, representing one of the settlements of the Umm an-Nar culture, which witnessed great and wide prosperity in the Omani Peninsula. The site spreads over a vast area of land of more than 70 hectares, which makes it one of the largest settlements of Umm an-Nar culture in the Omani Peninsula. [TURN TO P5](#)





Shura Office reviews ministerial responses

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura reviewed the Council of Ministers' message regarding the ministerial statements for the third annual session (2021-2022) and the setting of dates for the attendance of ministers at Majlis Ash'shura meetings to deliver their statements.

This was discussed at the eighth regular meeting of the third annual session of Majlis Ash'shura Office held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

The Office referred several follow-up tools submitted by the members of Majlis Ash'shura to government service authorities. These included a briefing request submitted to the chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation on the decision to raise the allocations for water connection to homes. They also include a question addressed to the minister of education regarding contracts for school guard jobs and the ministry's efforts to make it a permanent job.

At its meeting the Office of Majlis Ash'shura discussed several messages and responses received



from the government including the response of the minister of transport, communications and information technology to a question regarding the Port of Sohar Agreement with Netherlands' Port of Rotterdam. The minister's response stated that the concession agreement was signed between the government and the Port of Sohar Company for the period from 2002 to 2043 and was ratified by Royal Decree No 122/2008.

Also reviewed was the

response provided by the minister of transport, communications and information technology with regard to the lighting of roads using solar energy. The response explained that several specialised companies provided visual presentations about the Solar lighting system. However, when compared to the LED lighting technology some observations were made regarding the quality and high cost.

The response of the chairman of the Oman Investment

Authority (OIA) to the request for briefing on preventing the export of waste and residues, was also reviewed. The response explained that be'ah, under Royal Decree 46/2009, is not concerned with banning the export of any type of waste and residues. Besides, be'ah works with other parties to encourage the private sector to set up factories and carry out recycling.

The Office of Majlis Ash'shura also discussed the response of the minister of education to the

question about the weight of school bags for students. The response included a number of initiatives that would overcome the difficulties facing students with heavy school bags. The Office reviewed the minister's response to a briefing request on the establishment of the teachers' association to which the minister stated that the establishment of the association is subject to the Law of Civil Associations and the conditions for the establishment of civil associations.

Oman, Bahrain hold session of talks

MUSCAT: Foreign ministries of the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain held a session of official talks here on Tuesday.

The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Bahraini side was headed by Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Ahmed al Khalifa, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs.

The two sides reviewed aspects of cooperation between the two countries and affirmed their keenness to enhance joint action in various fields. They also exchanged views on regional and international matters of common concern. The session was attended by Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman, and other officials from the foreign ministries of the two countries.



Arab League chief gives lecture at NDC

MUSCAT: The National Defence College (NDC) on Tuesday hosted Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League to give a lecture themed "regional and international variables and their influence on the joint Arab action."

The lecture was given within the framework of the general curricula for the eighth batch of the NDC.

During the lecture, the Arab League Secretary-General highlighted the influence of the current Arab regimes on the joint Arab action and the extent of the regional and international developments on the march of the Arab League's work. He also touched on the major obstacles facing the joint Arab action.

The lecture was attended by a number of senior officials and

officers.

MEETING WITH AL ZAABI

Meanwhile, Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League.

The two sides exchanged views and discussed several matters of common interest. — ONA

Oman and Colombia sign visa waiver agreement

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Colombia signed at the Foreign Ministry here on Tuesday an agreement on mutual visa waiver for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports.

The step comes within the framework of promoting bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Colombia in various fields.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the governments of the two countries by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs and Ana Munoz de Gaviria, Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA



National Museum displays sabre, dagger of Imam Saif bin Sultan al Yarubi

MUSCAT: The National Museum is displaying in the splendors of Islam gallery the Sabre(shamshir) and the Al Haswah dagger(khanjar), which are attributed to Imam Saif bin Sultan al Yarubi I(Qaid Al-Ard') to the visitors.

The sabre and the dagger are from the collections of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

The blade of this sabre, made of Damascus steel, patterned with the most complex design, known as the "Forty steps". The signature of the swordsmith appears in the middle gold cartouche on the blade "the work of Asadullah 186", which was made by



Asadullah of Isfahan, one of the most celebrated swordsmiths of the Islamic civilisation in the 11th century AH/17th century CE, in addition to the phrase

"property of Shaikh Saif" below it, and the phrase "Shah Abbas year 5" was engraved. The handle is made of gold and ivory. The ownership inscription on the



blade proves that the sabre was not taken as a loot, instead it had been commissioned directly from the maker. From the designation, it seems likely that it was made

for presentation to the Imam, perhaps by the Safavid Court of Persia, who in 1675, saw him as a future leader of the Sultanate of Oman. The Al Haswah dagger is

made from rhinoceros' horn, steel, wood, leather and silver and dates back to reign of the Al Ya'aruba dynasty between (1104- 23/1692- 1711 CE).



US-Oman bilateral trade to exceed pre-Covid levels

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The annual US-Oman trade is expected to exceed pre-Covid levels, according to the US Embassy in Muscat.

As per the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA), bilateral trade between the two countries was \$2.9 billion as of November 2021, with a \$353 million surplus for the Sultanate of Oman, compared to \$1.9 billion for the entire 2020.

Bilateral trade between the United States and the Sultanate of Oman touched \$2.3 billion in September 2021 as both sides celebrated 12 years of signing the Free Trade Agreement.

In January 2021, the US imported over \$200 million worth of Omani products, more than twice the monthly average witnessed over the past 15 years. "The figures indicate that despite the challenges faced by

Bilateral trade between the two countries was \$2.9 billion as of November 2021, with a \$353 million surplus for the Sultanate of Oman, compared to \$1.9 billion for the entire 2020

the business and industry sector during the pandemic, Omani industries were able to achieve good results and benefit from the agreement to increase Omani exports to the United States of America," said the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

According to National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), non-oil exports from the Sultanate of Oman increased



by 38.1 per cent in the first six months of 2021, compared to the same period in 2020.

"The Free Trade Agreement is one of the pillars of the burgeoning economic partnership between, providing opportunities to ensure the success and growth of businesses large and small in the two countries," according to

the embassy.

The United States entered into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Sultanate of Oman on January 1, 2009, which helped eliminate most tariff and non-tariff barriers, expedite the movement of goods and the provision of services, strengthen protections for investors

(including allowing them to fully own a business without a local partner), safeguarding intellectual property rights, labour and environmental standards and dispute settlement procedures to improve the regulatory climate for bilateral trade and investment.

Under the FTA, 100 per cent of bilateral trade in industrial and

consumer products became duty-free immediately upon entry with the agreement.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United States also provide each other immediate duty-free access on virtually all products in their tariff schedules and will phase out tariffs on the remaining handful of products within ten years.



Oman chairs ILO meet on digitalisation in finance

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Labour, chaired the meeting of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the impact of digitisation on the financial sector.

The online event was attended by member states'

representatives of the three parties to the production process (employers, workers, labour unions).

Through its membership in the ILO Board of Directors during 2021-2024, the Sultanate of Oman is contributing to the promotion of international

action in order to achieve the objectives of the organisation.

The meeting discussed challenges and opportunities towards advancing the financial sector. It also reviewed policies and practices for addressing the impact of digitalisation on the financial sector. — ONA



Agri officials discuss soil quality, land use

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Tuesday took part in the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFAA) 2022. The online forum is hosted by Germany's Federal Ministry of Food and

Agriculture, in collaboration with the Bundesrat, from 24 to 28 January 2022. The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture.

The forum, which brings together the representatives of more than 70 countries and 10 global organisations, covers a range of topics related to international agricultural policies and food security. This year's forum is themed, "Sustainable Land Use: Food Security Starts with Soil". — ONA



ROP marks International Customs Day today

MUSCAT: The Directorate General of Customs at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) will join other departments of customs all over the world in marking the International Customs Day, which falls on January 26, every year.

The event celebrates the anniversary of the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) formed in 1953. The CCC was renamed in 1994 as the World Customs Organization (WCO).

The WCO is an intergovernmental organisation

that deals with governments instead of companies and private institutions.

It is mandated to tackle the challenges that come in the way of customs departments worldwide as they embark on enhancing systems, technologies and legislations related to customs.

The WCO works towards boosting global trade and encouraging international cooperation, notably in the field of customs. — ONA

Covid scare on cruise liners puts Muttrah vendors in a fix

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Just two weeks after international media reported a 30-fold surge in Covid-19 cases on cruise ships in a few days, the cruise liners declined to anchor at the Sultan Qaboos Port in Muttrah. This has resulted in despair among Muttrah vendors, who depend on tourists for their businesses.

Each year, several ships call ports of Muscat, Salalah and Khasab. Tourists and crew visit the adjacent markets, including souqs and purchase souvenirs, gifts and other items to take back home. Over a period of time, these vendors have built a strong rapport with the frequenters who make it a point to visit their friends year after year.

A luxury liner called *MS Europa 2*, operated by Hapag-Lloyd Cruises, a German-based cruise line with a capacity of almost 516 passengers and nearly 370 crew members, returned without calling at the Muttrah



Port for reasons associated with the Covid-19.

"This is the third year that we are losing the business of European tourists who come on cruise vessels, and this has broken our spine as expenses mounted," said Mohammed Navas, a vendor at the Muttrah Souq.

The liners which set sail weeks ago take notice of the changing rules and pandemic regulations in countries en-route so that sufficient precautions can be taken, according to agents of these liners.

"We have four vessels chartered for January alone, and I'm afraid any ship would be anchoring at Oman shores for two reasons," said Ahmed bin Hamed al Balushi, local representative of a European liner.

"Firstly, they may have a sick traveller onboard or, secondly, they don't want to take a chance with the port-of-call," he added.

A report published on January 11 says ships operating in US waters recorded about 5,000 Covid cases from December 15 to 29, in about two weeks. A representative

of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) suggested cases on cruise liners jumped 30 times high in two weeks' time.

According to statistics provided by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), a number of luxury vessels called Port Sultan Qaboos in 2018-19. It is estimated that 283,000 foreign tourists made it to the Sultanate during the aforesaid season. This is a 45 per cent increase compared to 2017-18 season when 193,000 tourists visited Oman on cruise liners. In 2019, nearly 163 vessels carrying 660,295 tourists onboard visited Port Sultan Qaboos in Muttrah.

However, in 2020, 263,587 tourists on 66 ships called on the Muttrah port while 125, 110 passengers onboard 31 luxury vessels visited Khasab port.

In Salalah, 69,060 foreign visitors visited onboard 45 cruise liners in 2019. However, only four cruise liners carrying 1,982 passengers onboard visited Salalah Port in 2020.



LIVE EVENTS INDUSTRY — CAN IT BOUNCE BACK



VINOD NAIR
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Even after two years when countries started imposing restrictions to limit the spread of Covid-19, the situation remains unchanged amidst assurances reports that future variants may be less fatal or dominant.

One of the biggest victims of these restrictions has been the business of organising events and those associated with them — the small traders and vendors.

The Sultanate of Oman has not hosted its biggest social event, the Muscat Festival, since 2020 and not to forget all types of stage and public events that bring livelihood to small and medium entrepreneurs.

While some of them shifted to virtual models, they do not provide the same opportunities offered by live events.

Speaking to the *Observer*, sources names in the local event management industry said that the situation was not good even before the start of the pandemic because of the economic slowdown.

“The corporate and government spending were rationalised following the drop in oil prices and subsequent austerity measures. But one needs to understand that not just the events companies were affected and those who supplied flowers for decorations, catering, and transport for guests. Even in normal circumstances, businesses were seasonal, and Covid-19 made it a point of no return”, said Sajesh, a former executive of an event management company in Oman,

While the second half of 2021 gave some hope to event management industry, the emergence of Omicron variant has put them on the back foot

and now based in neighbouring Dubai.

“While health of the public must be given utmost importance, but with the Covid-19 not going away anytime soon, it is important to find a balance between public safety and livelihood.

THE DUBAI EXPO has been attracting tourists in large numbers and Covid-19 cases have not gone up just because of that one event”, said Salem, who used to employ Omani drivers to transport participants of big events.

“I paid my staff for some time without work because I just wanted to retain them, but later realised that it is impossible to sustain for such a long period”, he said. Several such businesses were forced to put their staff on furlough because the virtual seminars were not employment providers.

While the second half of 2021 gave hope, the emergence of Omicron variant has kept the fingers crossed.

According to the industry, very few can be expected to survive for longer than six months without any cash flow unless they manage to successfully diversify to alternative models to generate income.



EXPO
2020
DUBAI
UAE



Researchers can now utilise ‘Shuaa’



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on Tuesday signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Oman Research Repository project codenamed “Shuaa”.

The step aims to enable researchers and those interested to utilise the studies and research published by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion through this project.

The repository

contains research, historic documents, articles, periodicals and synopsis, as well as Omani specialised statistics and innovation material written or compiled in the Sultanate of Oman. Shuaa provides its content on a database where they are stored and organised based on modern systems to ease accessibility for researchers and interested people. The agreement was signed by Nasima bint Yahya al Balushiyyah, the ministry’s Director-General for Planning and Dr Nabhan bin Harith al Harrasi, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Shuaa. — ONA

Al Morooj Dairy launches milk collection network

SALALAH: Since the end of December 2021, Al Morooj Dairy Company began to receive cow milk at three centres that the firm set up and started to operate. The centres are known as Zeik Centre at Daisam Bar-al Madhi, Niyabat Ghadou Centre and Niyabat Hajeif Centre, all in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar.

On a daily average, the company collects 6,000 litres of cow milk. Next month, the company will launch a camel milk collection and distribution network averaging 12,000 litres a day under “Watani” trademark.

Al Morooj Dairy project is a venture of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Oman Holding Company. It is undertaken under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The project seeks to develop the livestock sector, enhance family income and contribute to food security in the Sultanate of Oman within the context of Oman Vision 2040 programmes.

The company will operate each centre separately. This includes signing contracts with herders, determining milk quality, setting time and place for milk collection,



specifying payment methods, conducting on-the-job training for

field workers and looking into the cons and pros of operations with

the prime aim of ensuring top efficiency. — ONA

TEACHING ARABIC TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS



The Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic Language to non-Native Speakers, received the 42nd batch comprising 31 students of various nationalities from the United Kingdom, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Czech Republic, South Korea, Japan and Sri Lanka. This is the first course to be held by actual presence after a hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — ONA

AL RUSTAQ SETTLEMENT MORE THAN 4,000 YEARS OLD

FROM PAGE 1

A large number of domestic buildings of various sizes were found in its central area, in addition to several circular tombs that spread on the western side of the settlement, whose outer walls were elaborately built of white well-cut limestones. It was also revealed that there are some huge circular towers in different areas of the settlement, some of which are more than forty meters in diameter, built of mudbricks walls based on huge stone foundations.

The presence of public buildings and huge towers indicates the importance of

the cultural role played by the inhabitants of the settlement during the Early Bronze Age, which may have represented a major and important cultural center in the north of the Sultanate of Oman in general and the Al Batinah Plain region in particular. The pottery sherds and archaeological finds uncovered by the expedition also indicate that the inhabitants of the settlement had close commercial relations with neighbouring civilisations such as the Harappa civilisation in the Indus Valley and the Mesopotamian civilisation.

The remains of copper furnaces found inside the settlement

indicate that the residents relied heavily on copper production, smelting, and trading in their subsistence economy. Copper Mines from which copper was extracted have not yet been found, but the archaeological mission is seeking to search for it in the coming seasons. In general, the site of Al Tekha is the first archaeological settlement from the Early Bronze Age to be excavated in the South Al Batinah Governorate. Therefore, the site will be added to the tourist map of the Wilayat of Al Rustaq to give it a new cultural dimension that increases the state’s richness in heritage and cultural sites. — ONA

SAI participates in Arab SDGs, GCC anti-corruption meetings



MUSCAT: The State Audit Institution (SAI) on Tuesday took part in the 6th meeting of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Committee of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI), held in Kuwait.

The 3-day online meeting covers a spectrum of topics, including the implementation of the auditing programme for the Sustainable Development Goal 4 “Education”.

It also discussed the progress made in the 2021 operation plan and preparations for the 2022 operation plan, among other topics.

The meeting also reviewed

the participation of the ARABOSAI in the activities of the environmental monetisation work team of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

The State Audit Institution also took part in the 21st specialists’ committee meeting of the GCC Anti-Corruption and Integrity Protection Agencies, hosted in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The online meeting discussed the draft guiding law for public money protection in the GCC countries, and its alignment with the general frameworks for issuing laws at the GCC level, among other topics. — ONA

Omani team uses GIS to map road accident hotspots

FROM P1

The analysis considered an adjacency network analysis integrating GIS and RTC data using robust estimation techniques, including Kernel Density Estimation (KDE) of both 1-D and 2-D space dimensions; Network-based Nearest Neighbour Distance (Net-NN); Network-based K-Function, Random Forest Algorithm (RF) and Spatio-temporal Hot-zone analysis.

As for the findings, Dr Amira stated that the study demonstrated evidence of spatial clustering of accident hot spots on long roads demarcated by intersection and roundabouts.

Accident hot spots appeared to be more dominant on road segments where the highest level of traffic interactions exists, especially along Sultan Qaboos highway. Conversely, low crash densities were observed along roads locating outward from the core market and workplace



Dr Amira al Aamri

areas, and Muscat Expressway is one example of such roads. The findings confirmed that road intersections elevate the risk of accidents more than other effects attributed to road geometry features.

The results, according to Dr Amira, also demonstrated systematic quantitative evidence of spatio-temporal patterns associated with the crash risk over different locations on the road network in Muscat. The spatio-

temporal analysis provided evidence of the consistency in the positions of crash hot spots in the study area. Comparing the mean of ranking of the same locations over five years of the study period, the results indicated that road accidents are inclined to cluster in the same locations within the study period. The inference of such a result could be attributed to the same road and traffic related features existing on these zones.

The findings clearly pinpointed the importance and influence of the road and traffic related feature in road crash spatial analysis. Therefore, Dr Amira suggested that further safety inspections and engineering studies should be carried out to investigate the possible contributing factors, and identify the potential countermeasures such as engineering improvements to reduce the crash risk at these sites. She further recommended that future research should systematically address potential

effects of the socio-economic, population, and land use factors in identifying road crash hot-zones in the Sultanate of Oman.

The research team included Dr Abdullah al Maniri (CEO of Data Academy in Muscat), Dr Graeme Hornby (University of Southampton), Prof Sabu S Padmadas (University of Southampton) and Prof Li-Chun Zhang (University of Southampton). The research project was published in *Spatial Statistics Journal* and was presented in international conferences in Thailand and Spain.

Commenting on success, Dr Amira mentioned, “Awards such as the National Research Award would improve the production process of scientific research in various fields.

This in itself gives a great motivation and encourages researchers to make more effort to conduct research of high quality and of national importance.”



Snow brings travel chaos in Turkey, Greece

ISTANBUL/ATHENS: Some Istanbul Airport flights resumed on Tuesday after nearly 24 hours of cancellations as heavy snowfall clogged roads and stranded thousands of people across Turkey and Greece.

In Athens, thousands were evacuated from a motorway overnight and took shelter at the city’s airport after Monday’s severe snowstorm. By Tuesday, dozens of cars were still covered in snow as ploughs tried to clear roads and anger grew among people trapped in freezing temperatures for hours.

“The situation is hopeless,” said Spiros Kandaras, who spent 24 hours in his car. “They should be ashamed of this mess.”

In Istanbul, the airport, among the world’s biggest, has been under a thick blanket of snow with runways and planes covered.

The snowfall began late last week and picked up over the past days in the city of 16 million people, delaying buses and ferries and prompting a ban on driving private vehicles.

“We have been here for more than 24 hours already”, said Selim Kilik, who planned to fly to Paris this week. He complained about a lack of staff and information.

An airport spokesperson said



A vendor pulls his corn cart in the Eminonu district of Istanbul after a snowstorm. – AFP

limited flights began around 1000 GMT after a 22-hour delay, and that scheduled flights would resume around midnight. Turkish Airlines earlier said it had halted all flights until 2100 GMT.

Ugurcan Guller, who was waiting for a domestic flight, said stranded passengers had problems

with baggage, tickets and food at Istanbul Airport. “We have been sleeping on the floor miserably since yesterday”, he said. “We call on the authorities to find a solution for us.”

Storms swept through the region from Greece and across Turkey, as well as into Syria, where

snow has disrupted aid deliveries to displaced families living in tented camps. In Turkey, snow carpeted the beaches of the southern resort city of Antalya for the first time in 29 years. In a rare sight, Greece’s southern Aegean islands, including Mykonos, also turned white.

A video posted on social media

showed a man skiing through Istanbul’s streets, with people waving as he passed.

Governor Ali Yerlikaya took the rare step of banning private cars until 1000 GMT, while public workers were given leave through Wednesday to keep commutes to a minimum.

Snow on Antalya beaches for first time in 29 years as flights resume slowly in Istanbul

Buses were suspended until Wednesday and vehicles arriving from west of the city were barred.

Other footage showed trucks and cars stranded along highways in and around Istanbul. Passage across the Bosphorus Strait reopened on Tuesday, while people were evacuated from stranded vehicles, said Transport Minister Adil Karaismailoglu.

Across the country, about 4,600 people were left stranded on roads and elsewhere, and thousands had been placed in temporary housing, the Disaster and Emergency Authority said. Heavy snow is rare in Athens but the city has now been hit by extreme weather for a second consecutive winter.

More than 3,500 people had been evacuated by early Tuesday, some abandoning their cars on foot, but around 1,200 cars remained stuck on the Attiki Odos, the capital’s main ring-road, government spokesperson Giannis Oikonomou said. — AFP



Protesters march during a rally against military rule following last month’s coup in Khartoum. – Reuters

Sudan frees medics held in crackdown

KHARTOUM: Sudan on Tuesday released nine medics from Doctors Without Borders, the aid group said, a day after they were arrested during a broadening crackdown on anti-coup protests.

“During the evening of 24 January, nine MSF staff members were detained by the Sudanese authorities in the capital Khartoum”, the group said in a statement, using its French acronym.

They were detained as they were making their way back to their office from a hospital, said the organisation.

“MSF’s emergency medical teams are working in Khartoum to support the health authorities with their response to injuries from ongoing protests and Covid-19”, the statement said. The team was released on Tuesday morning, it added.

Among those arrested were staff members from both Sudan and other countries, according to the pro-democracy Central Committee of Sudan Doctors.

Sudan has been rocked by protests calling for civilian rule since an October 25 military coup led by general Abdel Fattah al Burhan. — AFP

South Korea’s daily infections top 8,000

SEOUL: South Korea’s daily new coronavirus infections topped 8,000 for the first time on Tuesday, as the highly contagious Omicron variant spreads rapidly, despite the extension of tough social distancing rules.

The figure of 8,571 on Monday exceeded the previous peak of 7,848 in December, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said, as Omicron became dominant in the country last week, though it is less deadly than previous variants.

Small business owners with shaven heads held a protest urging the government to lift the curbs, which include a 9 pm curfew for diners, as they sought compensation for losses.

“I haven’t been able to pay monthly rent, so I’m facing an eviction suit and had to fire employees”, said Yang Hee-Kyoung, one of the group of 300 protesters.

“I have no life”, added Yang, who runs a bar in the southern city of Busan.

Other demonstrators were tearful as they stood before a banner that sought “realistic compensation” for Covid-19 losses.

Small business owners protest to demand compensation as Omicron spreads despite extension of tough distancing rules

South Korea’s tough regimen of vaccine passes limits unvaccinated people to dining out alone, or making use of takeout or delivery services.

It reinstated tougher distancing curbs last month as record daily infections and critically ill patients threatened to swamp the medical system before Omicron drove a rebound last week off daily tallies that almost halved to about 4,000.

The surge has fuelled worries about chances of a new wave of infections ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday that begins on Saturday, when tens of millions travel nationwide to meet families.

“It is no different from adding fuel to raging flames if many people move around the country and meet each other”, said Prime Minister Kim Boo-Kyum, who



Small business owners have their heads shaved during a protest against the government’s Covid-19 social distancing measures in Seoul. – AFP

has urged against travel and gatherings during the break.

Health officials said Omicron would probably account for more than 90% of new infections within two to three weeks, while daily numbers could reach 20,000 to 30,000 or more.

From Wednesday, mandatory isolation for the vaccinated will be cut to seven days instead of 10, in a bid to free up resources for those who are critically ill.

The extended curbs triggered a backlash from small business owners, while a court ordered

temporary exemption for teenagers and large stores from vaccine mandates in the capital, Seoul as a legal battle heats up between the government and citizens.

South Korea, with a population of 52 million, has a tally of 749,979 infections and a death toll of 6,588, in what has largely been a Covid-19 mitigation success story. More than 95 per cent of adults are fully vaccinated with nearly 58% having received a booster dose, KDCA data showed. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BISHKEK

Power back in Kyrgyzstan after C Asia blackout

Power was gradually being restored across three ex-Soviet countries Central Asian countries after one of the biggest blackouts in the grid-sharing region’s history. Electricity was restored across Kyrgyzstan after an accident triggered a massive power outage there and in Central Asian neighbours Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the ex-Soviet country’s energy ministry said.

“Electricity supplies have been restored all over Kyrgyzstan after a large-scale power failure”, a



ministry spokeswoman, Jiyde Zootbekova, said. Uzbekistan’s energy ministry said that “the supply of electricity to the regions of the country is now gradually being restored.”

SEOUL

North Korea fires cruise missiles amid tension

North Korea fired two cruise missiles into the sea off its east coast, South Korea’s military said, amid rising tension over a recent series of weapons tests. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff did not specify the missiles’ range or trajectory, but said it was conducting an analysis together with US authorities.

The launch was North Korea’s fifth of the year, following tests of a tactical guided missile two “hypersonic missiles capable of high speed and manoeuvring after lift-off, and a railway-borne missile



system. Tension has been growing, with leader Kim Jong Un vowing last week to bolster the military and warning he could lift a self-imposed moratorium on testing atomic bombs and long-range missiles.

DUBAI

Death toll from Yemen detention centre strike rises

Air strikes last week on a detention centre in Yemen killed around 90 people and wounded more than 200, the Ansar Allah administration’s health minister said, providing an updated toll after rescue efforts ended. The UN said that at least 60 people were killed in the attacks. Witnesses interviewed by Reuters described blasts hitting the centre, which was reduced to rubble, images show.

The coalition accused the Ansar Allah forces of spreading



unspecified misinformation about the attack. Fighting has escalated in recent weeks, with more air strikes on what the coalition says are Ansar Allah military targets.



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7

In brief

■ JOHANNESBURG



SOUTH AFRICA TO PUNISH 940 COVID FRAUD CASES

South African investigators have referred for prosecution and disciplinary action 940 cases of malfeasance and fraud involving more than \$900 million of Covid funds, President Cyril Ramaphosa said. The Special Investigating Unit (SIU), an independent law enforcement agency with similar powers to the FBI, probed 5,467 contracts awarded for Covid-19 services and supplies.

More than half of the contracts were found to be irregular. With more than 3.5 million diagnosed infections and over 94,000 fatalities, South Africa's pandemic toll is the highest on the continent. "It is unacceptable that so many contracts associated with saving lives and protecting livelihoods were irregular, unlawful or fraudulent," Ramaphosa said in a statement.

— AFP

■ MADRID



SPAIN BREAKS UP COVID PASSPORT FORGERY RING

Spanish police said they had detained seven suspected members of an international criminal gang that created and sold forged Covid-19 passports and negative tests. The Spanish arm of the ring, which advertised its services on 'anti-vax' instant message groups, fraudulently added at least 1,600 people to the national vaccination register with the help of health workers, the investigation found.

European Union countries agreed last year to create a standardised Covid certificate with a QR code so vaccinated and tested people could travel and attend events. That created a demand for forgeries. Police arrested six people in Madrid and one in Barcelona but did not provide further information on them. — Reuters

■ MANILA



19 DEAD AFTER CLASH, FIRE AT CLUB IN WEST PAPUA

At least 19 people have been killed in a clash at a nightclub in Indonesia's West Papua province, police said, with most dying after the venue caught fire. One victim was stabbed and 18 more died in the blaze at the Double O nightclub in the city of Sorong, officials said.

"The clash broke out last night at 11 pm. It was a prolonged conflict from a clash on Saturday," Sorong police chief Ary Nyoto Setiawan said in a statement. The fight erupted between two ethnic groups and involved machetes, arrows and Molotov cocktails, according to Ahmad Ramadhan, a spokesperson for the Indonesian national police. "The West Papua Regional Police immediately coordinated with religious and traditional leaders to avoid further clashes," he said, adding that officials were investigating who was behind the fight and what ignited the fire. — AFP



Pavlo Tkachuk, Head of the Hetman Petro Sahaydachnyi National Army Academy, holds a light anti-tank weapon supplied by Britain during a training for Ukrainian service members in Lviv, Ukraine. — Reuters

Russia launches new military drills

MOSCOW: Russia on Tuesday launched new military exercises near Ukraine and in annexed Crimea as it accused the United States of ratcheting up tensions by putting several thousand of its own troops on alert.

With the West already accusing Moscow of massing more than 100,000 soldiers on the Ukrainian border, the Russian military said it had launched drills involving 6,000 troops in the south and in the Crimean peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014.

The drills involve combat firing exercises with fighter jets, bombers, anti-aircraft systems and ships from the Black Sea and Caspian fleets, the ministry said.

The West is accusing Russia of preparing a potential invasion of pro-Western Ukraine and tensions with Moscow have reached levels not seen since the Cold War.

After a long video call with European leaders on Monday, US President Joe Biden said there was "total unanimity" on how to deal with Russia, with officials warning again of severe consequences if Moscow invades.

The Pentagon said it had put 8,500 troops on standby for deployment in support of Nato, while the alliance said it was sending ships and jets to bolster eastern Europe's defences.

The US, Nato have rejected the demands and told Russia to withdraw from Ukraine's borders

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said US moves were adding to an already tense atmosphere.

"The United States is escalating tensions," he told reporters. "We are watching these US actions with great concern."

Russia denies it has any plans to invade Ukraine, where as well as seizing Crimea it has backed separatist forces in two breakaway regions.

Moscow has instead accused the West of increasing tensions with deployments and support for Ukraine, a former Soviet republic.

Russia has put forward a list of security demands including a guarantee that Ukraine never be allowed to join Nato and that alliance forces pull back in eastern European countries that joined the bloc after the Cold War.

The US and Nato have rejected the demands and told Russia to withdraw from Ukraine's borders, warning that an attack will trigger damaging economic sanctions, as well as a beefed-up

Nato presence in eastern Europe.

A series of talks in various European cities this month have failed to ease tensions, though US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed at a meeting in Geneva on Friday to keep talking.

The US has promised to provide written answers to Moscow's demands this week, but has rejected calls for a ban on possible Nato expansion as a non-starter.

The crisis has laid bare divisions in the West, with some European Union members appearing less willing to take severe action against Russia, which supplies about 40 per cent of the bloc's natural gas supplies.

The new government in EU economic powerhouse Germany in particular has faced criticism from Kyiv over its refusal to send defensive weapons to Ukraine, as well as hesitating over one of the harshest economic sanctions under discussion — cutting Moscow from the global SWIFT payments system.

Biden held a one-hour-and-20-minute video conference with allied leaders from Europe and Nato on Monday, telling reporters afterwards: "I had a very, very, very good meeting — total unanimity with all the European leaders." — AFP

Britain PM prepared to cooperate with police party probe

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson signalled on Tuesday he is willing to speak to police investigating multiple allegations of parties breaching coronavirus regulations in Downing Street, the building that houses his office and residence.

However, he said he believes he has not broken the law, even as anger mounts across Britain at a drumbeat of reports about parties in government buildings at a time when Britons had been ordered to forgo social gatherings to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Downing Street acknowledged aspects a Cabinet Office inquiry that touch on potentially criminal acts will be paused after the Metropolitan Police announced that officers had launched an investigation.

The prime minister told lawmakers it is "right" for Scotland Yard to investigate and that he believes it will "help to draw a line under matters."

Johnson was plunged into deeper jeopardy when Metropolitan Police Commissioner Dame Cressida Dick announced officers were investigating a "number of events" in Downing Street and Whitehall, a government district in London, after being passed information from inquiry.

Updating the Commons on the inquiry, Johnson said: "That process has quite properly involved sharing information continuously with the Metropolitan Police, so I welcome the Met's decision to conduct its own investigation because I believe this will help to

The process has quite properly involved sharing information continuously with the Metropolitan Police, so I welcome the Met's decision to conduct its own investigation because I believe this will help to give the public the clarity it needs and help to draw a line under matters

BORIS JOHNSON
British Prime Minister

give the public the clarity it needs and help to draw a line under matters."

The prime minister's official spokesperson told reporters that "everyone required will fully cooperate in any way they are asked."

Pressed if Johnson is willing to be interviewed by officers, his spokesperson responded: "Anyone asked to will cooperate fully as you would expect."

Asked if the prime minister thinks he has not broken the law, the spokesperson said: "I need to be cautious about what I say, but I think that's fair to say that he does not." Downing Street said Johnson knew about the police investigation before convening his Cabinet on Tuesday, but that he did not raise it during the meeting. — dpa



Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick walks towards New Scotland Yard in central London. — AFP

Norway says to put 'tangible demands' on Taliban

OSLO: Norway said it will put "tangible demands" on the Taliban during talks in Oslo on Tuesday, the last day of the controversial first visit to Europe since returning to power in Afghanistan. A Taliban delegation led by Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has been in Norway since Saturday for talks focused on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan.

The country's humanitarian situation has rapidly deteriorated since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, when international aid came to a sudden halt and worsened the plight of millions of people suffering from hunger after several severe



Representatives of the Taliban attend a meeting between Norwegian humanitarian organisation and representatives from the Taliban in Oslo. — AFP

droughts. The Taliban delegation met members of Afghan civil society on Sunday, followed by Western diplomats on Monday.

They were to conclude their visit on Tuesday with meetings with a Norwegian political official and non-governmental organisations.

"This is not the beginning of an... open-ended process", said state secretary Henrik Thune, who was to sit down with the delegation on Tuesday.

"We are going to place tangible demands that we can follow up on and see if they have been met", he told Norwegian news agency NTB.

The demands will include the possibility of providing humanitarian aid directly to the Afghan people, according to NTB.

It will call for human rights to be respected, in particular those of women and minorities, such as access to education and health services, the right to work, and freedom of movement.

While the fighters claim to have modernised, women are still largely excluded from public-sector employment and most secondary schools for girls remain closed. Norway is also expected to raise the plight of two women activists who went missing in Kabul last week after taking part in a demonstration.

The Taliban have denied responsibility. The Taliban were toppled in 2001 but stormed back to power in August as US-led forces began withdrawing. They view this week's talks — held behind closed doors in a hotel near Oslo — as a step toward international recognition and the unblocking of financial aid. — AFP

Start-ups ‘running on fumes’ as economy crumbles



ANNIE BANERJI

The writer is the South Asia correspondent at Thomson Reuters Foundation News

Afghan tech entrepreneur Sara Wahedi tore up her staffing roster. Nowadays, her app company’s few remaining employees in Afghanistan work when they can — in the intervals between power cuts and Internet outages.

Five months since the Taliban seized power, Afghan companies like Wahedi’s are battling to stay afloat as international sanctions and curbs against the hardline movement fuel a deepening economic crisis.

“We are running on fumes at this point,” Wahedi, 26, said by e-mail from New York City, where she is remotely running Ehtesab, the mobile app she founded that provides real-time security, traffic and power outage alerts in Kabul,

the Afghan capital.

Wahedi had a group of security experts, journalists, government officials and volunteers to vet and verify reports, allowing Ehtesab to send alerts within minutes. Since most of them have left Afghanistan, it takes as long as 15 minutes now.

Unless international investment and funding resume, she said fledgling Afghan companies would be “crippled”.

“It is understandable that Afghanistan is a volatile environment, but without any market, entrepreneurs, especially social entrepreneurs like myself, are left flailing on their own,” Wahedi said.

The Taliban’s lightning takeover saw billions of dollars in Afghan

ECONOMIC MELTDOWN PUSHES COMPANIES TO THE BRINK AS REMOTE WORKING HELPS SOME ENTREPRENEURS STAY AFLOAT

assets frozen overseas. International funding, which had supported 75 per cent of government spending, also dried up overnight.

Banks ran short of cash, millions lost work or went unpaid, the local currency nosedived, while prices rocketed, plunging millions of Afghans into poverty as businesses shut and wages went unpaid. The onset of winter has worsened the conditions.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed earlier this month for a suspension of rules preventing the use of money to save lives and the economy, and for a way to release frozen Afghan foreign currency reserves to ‘avoid a meltdown’.

Without more money circulating, the few companies that are limping on will also be forced to give up, said Matiullah Rahmaty, who has watched his once-bustling Kabul-based business consulting firm BrightPoint grind to a halt since August.

“For businesses, liquidity in cash is like blood in the veins,” Rahmaty, 26, said from a refugee camp in Abu Dhabi, his home since October.

In the weeks before the Taliban

stunned the world by sweeping into Kabul, Rahmaty said his schedule was packed.

He was preparing to give a Tedx talk about entrepreneurs overcoming obstacles and planned to set a date for his wedding, but everything got put on hold.

Twenty employees were reduced to four, about a dozen projects with international clients turned to zero and cash dried up.

Security risks — and an uncertain future — have prompted more wealthy Afghans to flee, compounding a brain drain of skilled professionals, which several Afghan entrepreneurs warned would further stymie economic recovery.

— **Thomson Reuters Foundation**

Tedros in one-man race to remain at WHO helm

AGNES PEDRERO

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, one of the most recognisable figures of the global battle against Covid-19, will stand unopposed on Tuesday for the nomination to continue heading the World Health Organization.

The first African leader of the UN health agency is expected to see his candidacy validated following a secret-ballot vote in a closed-door session of the WHO’s executive board on Tuesday.

All 194 WHO member states will then have a say when they meet in May on whether to allow the former Ethiopian minister of health and foreign affairs to continue in the role he has held since 2017.

As the sole contender, there is little doubt that Tedros will be re-elected.

Since Covid-19 burst onto the global stage more than two years ago, the 56-year-old malaria specialist has received much praise for the way he has steered the WHO through the crisis.

African countries in particular have been pleased at the attention paid to the continent and at his relentless campaign for poorer nations to get their fair share of Covid vaccines.

The main source of opposition meanwhile is coming from Tedros’s own country.

Ethiopia’s government has voiced growing irritation over his comments about the humanitarian situation in his home region of Tigray, in the grip of a 14-month conflict.

After Tedros earlier this month described the conditions there as “hell” and accused the government of preventing medicines and other life-saving aid from reaching desperate locals, Addis Ababa demanded he be investigated for “misconduct and violation of his professional and legal responsibility”.

Ethiopia does not, however, appear to have much support in its criticism.

“He has indeed expressed himself forcefully, but what he is saying corresponds to facts observed by the heads of all the humanitarian agencies,” a western diplomatic source said on the condition of anonymity.

“There was no misconduct.

“Ethiopia’s government, from the start, has sought to block Dr Tedros from being reappointed WHO director-general,” the source said, pointing to how Addis Ababa had blocked the African Union from unanimously tossing his hat in the ring.

Despite Ethiopia’s opposition, 28 countries supported Tedros’s candidacy, mostly from Europe, but also a handful from Africa, including Kenya and Rwanda. — **AFP**

Apps for travellers dreaming of their next trip



STEPHANIE ROSENBLOOM

The writer is the staff columnist for the Travel section of *The New York Times*, where she has been a reporter for various desks for more than a decade

While travel is fraught amid the rise of the Omicron variant, people are still dreaming of their next getaway. There are even new apps to make trips easier to plan and enjoy.

A number of them were introduced back when travel was at a standstill. Wondering which to try?

Here is a selection with thoughtful solutions — how to turn award points into a hotel suite, join a ranger for a national park hike, hear the history of the place you’re driving through, see the latest Covid-19 travel protocols — to help you tap and swipe your way to what will hopefully be a new year of adventures.

National Park Service

From Acadia to Zion, at long last there’s a single official park service app for America’s more than 400 national parks. Created by National Park Service staff, the app puts practical information — such as fees, hours, directions, webcams, where to find food and restrooms, park news and events — at your fingertips.

According to the app, a visit to Alaska is in order if you want to go dog sledding through national parks and preserves, although if horse trekking is more your speed, there are dozens of national sites from which to choose.

HearHere:

When contemplating a road trip, any number of images might come to mind — and Kevin Costner probably isn’t one of them. That may be about to change. The actor and director is a co-founder of HearHere, an app that uses your location and interests to play audio snippets about the history, culture and natural wonders of the places you’re driving through. There are morsels about the things you see and the things you don’t, like the people who walked the land before you.

Bublup: A cloud storage service where you can save and organise all sorts of content in eye-pleasing folders and, if you like, share them with others. For example, say you’re planning a trip to Vermont. With a few taps, you can create a vacation folder and choose from the app’s templates to add a packing checklist and a note about things you want to do.

You can easily forward flight or car rental confirmation e-mails, import inspirational photos and videos, and add links to travel articles and potential bed-and-breakfasts. One of the things that makes the app delightful for visual

planners is that you can choose the colours of your folders or even use your own photos on the front of them and as background images inside.

The Points Guy

The Points Guy website, known for demystifying the ever-changing world of loyalty points and airline miles, has an eponymous app to help you earn, use and keep an eye on your hard-won travel awards.

A points wallet allows you to enter your airline and hotel loyalty programme information, receive notifications about using your miles and points before they expire, and see just how close you are to scoring a trip.

THE WELCOME APP PROVIDES RECOMMENDATIONS BASED NOT ONLY ON YOUR PREFERENCES, BUT ALSO ON REAL-TIME CONSIDERATIONS SUCH AS THE TIME OF DAY, WEATHER AND HOLIDAYS

Una Travel: Smart Trip Planner

Currently in public beta, this app asks about your travel style — like the sorts of places you prefer to stay and the cuisines that make your mouth water — before offering itineraries and recommendations of things to do.

Welcome: A Smart City Guide

Founded by creators of Cameo, a mobile video app that was acquired by Vimeo in 2014, Welcome has come out of beta and is aiming to help users swiftly discover places to go and things to do. Follow travel publications, travel experts and friends.

Elude App: Some nascent travel apps don’t have many reviews on Apple’s App Store and Google Play, but since they are free to download, you can give them a try before deciding whether they deserve a place on your smartphone.

Wandry: Travel Planner aims to help by gathering details from different government portals and putting them in one place. Find out where you are and aren’t allowed to roam, and see requirements for Covid-19 tests, vaccinations and quarantines. Cost: free.

You may also want to revisit familiar apps like Hopper, Skyscanner, Triplt, and Tripadvisor, which have updates, including Covid-19-related requirements and health information.

App in the Air, where users book and keep track of their trips and loyalty programs, introduced a digital “health passport,” which was recently updated so you can add both a PCR test and a vaccination certificate before travelling. Meanwhile, on the ground, an update to the free Google Maps app may be useful for getting around outdoors. Its bike and scooter share information has been expanded to more than 300 cities worldwide. Consult the app to find stations around you and, in places like New York and Barcelona, see how many bikes are currently available.

— *The New York Times*



Johnson may not survive next rebellion

ELIZABETH PIPER

A rebellion against Prime Minister Boris Johnson by some of his Conservative Party’s newest members of parliament (MPs) quickly collapsed this week — but might just be a foretaste of the trouble ahead.

If nothing else, the revolt showed that lawmakers’ loyalty to Johnson is heavily conditional on his reputation as a vote-winner, and that reputation is in severe jeopardy.

Next week, a civil service report is expected to be published on a series of gatherings that appeared to fly in the face of coronavirus lockdowns and have already battered Johnson’s standing among voters — and that could be the cue for more seasoned and formidable rivals to move against him.

Many of the rebels were elected as first-time MPs in 2019 by constituencies that had not voted for the Conservatives for decades, and felt they owed those surprise victories to Johnson.

But dissent had been growing for months before the rebels met twice early in the week to gauge the appetite for trying to force Johnson out, according to lawmakers, some of whom attended the meetings. All asked to remain anonymous.

They agreed to start the process of forcing a parliamentary no-confidence vote against Johnson, who is under huge personal pressure over revelations about gatherings at his official Downing Street premises, and has urged

critics to await the outcome of civil servant Sue Gray’s investigation.

One of the new MPs said they had been struggling with the direction of the party and Johnson’s government since November. With the steady drip-feed of reports of lockdown-breaking parties in Downing Street, they became bolder.

Some were frustrated at having to vote for policies they disagreed with, some felt Johnson’s administration was failing to engage with Conservative MPs, and many were angry at how missteps, scandals and policy were being dealt with.

Johnson has repeatedly said no Covid-19 rules were broken at Downing Street, but did apologise for attending a gathering on May 20, 2020, for which staff had invited by one of his aides to “bring your own booze”.

“OVEREXCITED”

One disgruntled lawmaker described Johnson’s responses to the allegations, including his argument that he was not aware the event was anything other than a work meeting, as “bullshit”.

By Tuesday, some thought they might have collected enough support to pass the 54 written expressions of discontent needed to trigger a vote of no-confidence in Johnson in the parliamentary party.

But their plot was flawed. They failed to agree on a successor, did not work out a game plan to gather the numbers they lacked, and were confronted by a party machine that undermined their attack, the sources said.

Within a day, it became clear that the threshold of 54 letters had not been met. A few hours later one of their colleagues, Christian Wakeford, quit the Conservatives to join the opposition Labour Party.

Several older Conservatives were less than surprised when the plot failed.

One veteran Conservative MP who has been involved in training potential candidates said the new intake had not been hardened by the experience of previous unsuccessful campaigns to get elected.

In addition, the fact that much of their parliamentary work has been conducted virtually, because of coronavirus restrictions, means they have missed out on a more usual initiation into their parliamentary party and the work of an MP. — Reuters



SLIDING IN SNOW

Children slide on the snow at the Kucukcekmece district in Istanbul on Monday. — AFP

NASA’s new space telescope reaches destination in orbit

STEVE GORMAN

NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope, designed to give the world an unprecedented glimpse of infant galaxies in the early stages of the universe, arrived at its gravitational parking spot in orbit around the sun on Monday, nearly a million miles from Earth.

With a final five-minute, course-correcting thrust of its onboard rocket, Webb reached its destination at a position of gravitational equilibrium known as the second Sun-Earth Lagrange point, or L2, arriving one month after launch, NASA officials said.

The thruster was activated by mission control engineers at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, with radio signals confirming Webb was successfully “inserted” into its desired orbital loop around L2.

From there, Webb will follow a special “halo” path that keeps it in constant alignment with Earth but out of its shadow, as the planet and telescope circle the sun in tandem. The prescribed L2 orbit within the larger solar orbit thus enables uninterrupted radio contact, while bathing Webb’s solar-power array in non-stop sunlight.

By comparison, Webb’s 30-year-old predecessor, the Hubble Space Telescope, orbits the Earth from 340 miles (547 km) away, passing in and out of the planet’s shadow every 90 minutes.

The combined pull of the sun and Earth at L2 - a point of near gravitational stability first deduced by 18-century mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange - will minimize the telescope’s drift in space.

But ground teams will need to fire Webb’s thruster briefly again about once every three weeks to keep it on track, Keith Parrish, the observatory’s commissioning manager from NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, told reporters on Monday.

Mission engineers are preparing next to fine-tune the telescope’s primary mirror - an array of 18 hexagonal segments of gold-coated beryllium metal measuring 21 feet, 4 inches (6.5 meters) across, far larger than Hubble’s main mirror.

Its size and design - operating mainly in the infrared spectrum - will allow Webb to peer through clouds of gas and dust and observe objects at greater distances, thus farther back in time, than Hubble or any other telescope.

These features are expected to usher in a revolution in astronomy, giving a first view of infant galaxies dating to just 100 million years after the Big Bang, the theoretical flashpoint that set

the expansion of the known universe in motion an estimated 13.8 billion years ago.

Webb’s instruments also make it ideal to search for signs of potentially life-supporting atmospheres around scores of newly documented exoplanets - celestial bodies orbiting distant stars - and to observe worlds much closer to home, such as Mars and Saturn’s icy moon Titan.

NEXT STEPS

It will take several more months of work to ready the telescope for its astronomical debut.

The 18 segments of its principal mirror, which had been folded together to fit inside the cargo bay of the rocket that carried the telescope to space, were unfurled with the rest of its structural components during a two-week period following Webb’s launch on Dec. 25.

Those segments were recently detached from fasteners and edged away from their original launch position. They now must be precisely aligned - to within one-ten-thousandth the thickness of a human hair - to form a single, unbroken light-collecting surface.

Ground teams will also start activating Webb’s various imaging and spectrographic instruments to be used in the three-month mirror alignment. This will be followed by two months spent calibrating the instruments themselves.

Mirror alignment will begin by aiming the telescope at a rather ordinary,

isolated star, dubbed HD-84406, located in the Ursa Major, or “Big Dipper,” constellation but too faint to be seen from Earth with the naked eye.

Engineers will then gradually tune Webb’s mirror segments to “stack” 18 separate reflections of the star into a single, focused image, Lee Feinberg, Webb’s optical telescope element manager at Goddard, said during Monday’s NASA teleconference.

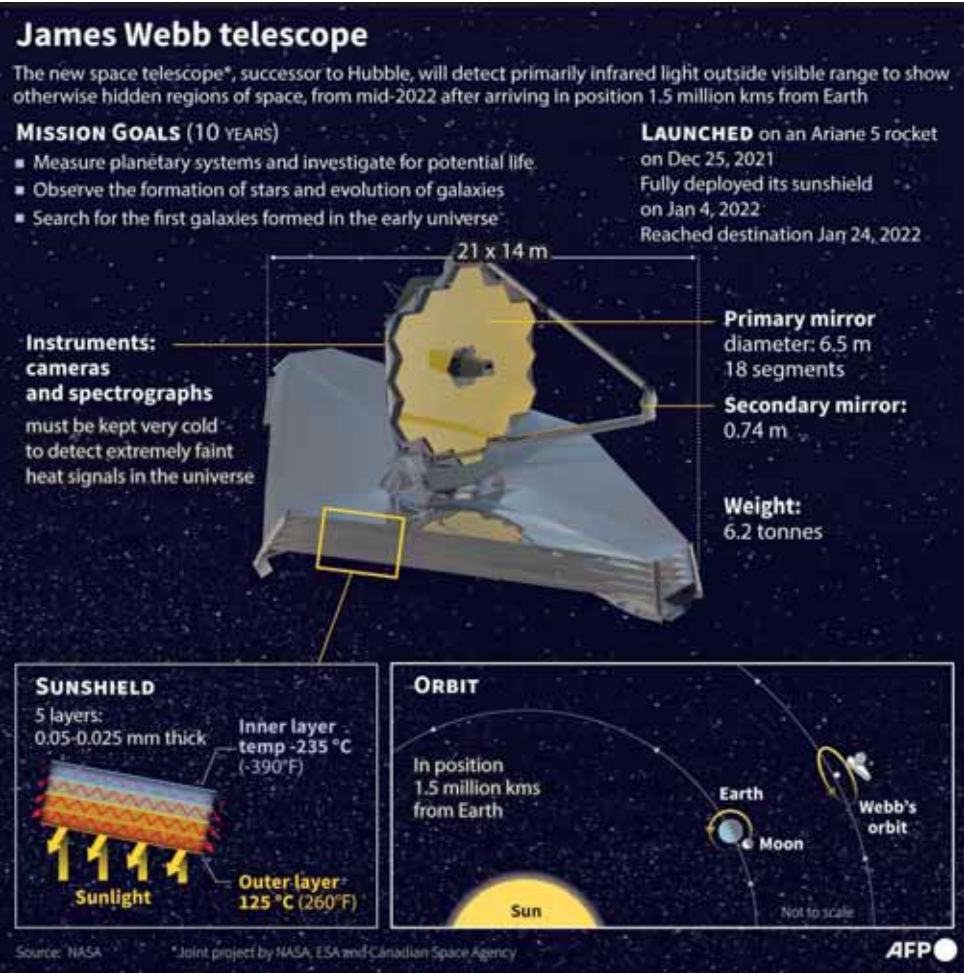
Alignment is expected to start next week when the telescope, whose infrared design makes it super-sensitive to heat, has cooled down enough in space to work properly - a temperature of about 400 degrees below zero Fahrenheit (-240 Celsius).

If all goes smoothly, Webb should be ready to begin making scientific observations by summer.

Sometime in June, NASA expects to make public its “early release observations,” a ‘greatest hits’ collection of initial images used to demonstrate proper functioning of Webb’s instruments during its commissioning phase.

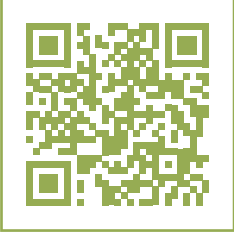
Webb’s most ambitious work, including plans to train its mirror on objects farthest from Earth, will take a bit longer to conduct.

The telescope is an international collaboration led by NASA in partnership with the European and Canadian space agencies. Northrop Grumman Corp was the primary contractor. — Reuters



sport

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India meet S Korea in high-voltage clash

J A P A N T A K E O N C H I N A I N S E M I S O F W O M E N ' S A S I A C U P

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

The Women's Asia Cup 2022 semifinals will kick off on Wednesday with title-holders India facing South Korea while Japan will take on China in the later fixture. The first semifinal will begin at 16:30 while the second encounter will start at 19:00 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Wednesday's matches will decide the two top teams for the final showdown which is scheduled on Friday.

Other two matches will be played on Wednesday between Thailand and Singapore for the 5th-8th playoff while Malaysia will take on Indonesia. The first match will start at 11:30 while the following match will begin at 14:00.

KEEN CONTEST

Defending champions India will aim to move into final to defend the coveted title. The assignment of Indian women will be tough as they will meet tough South Korean women. India were placed second in Pool A behind Japan as they won two matches against Malaysia and Singapore. The only loss came against Japan 2-0.

Opponents South Korean will eye triumph as they showed top performance in the group matches. The experienced and young Korean players along with head coach Kim Jiyun are looking for a new accomplishment in this Asian event before the FIH World Cup in 2022.

JAPAN IN TOP FORM

Japan, who won all their matches in group stage, will aim nothing

less than lifting the title.

The Japanese women were in great form in the tournament and managed to defeat defending champions India 2-0.

Coach Jude Menezes' women began the campaign with a 6-0 win over Singapore and also drubbed Malaysia 8-0. The team topped Pool A with nine points. On the other hand, China will be not be an easy opponent, who are capable of overcoming Japan. China began the Asian tourney with a 6-1 win over Thailand and then suffered a 4-0 loss against South Korea.

Chinese women confirmed semifinals after thrashing Indonesia 7-0 in their last Pool B match.

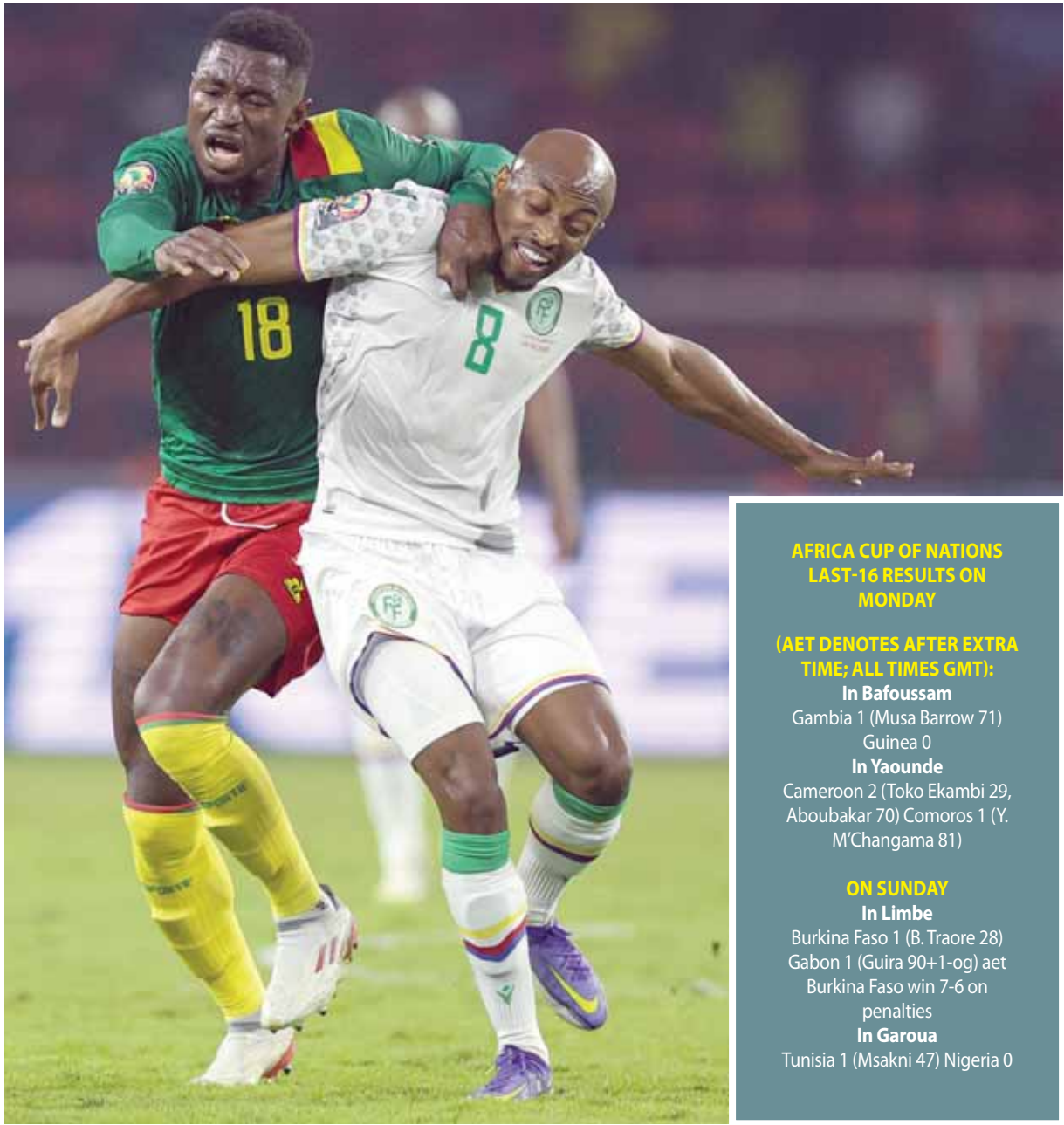
SIGNIFICANT VICTORY

The Ambassador of Japan in the Sultanate of Oman, Jota Yamamoto, said Japan's victory against Malaysia and topping the group in Pool A is a great achievement.

"The triumphs in the previous fixtures against Singapore and India helped us for a spot in the semis and to advance to the FIH Hockey World Cup in 2022. We hope to see top show from Japan team in the semifinal and move to the final match to compete for the title", the Ambassador said.

The Japanese diplomatic and staff of Japan Embassy were keen to attend all the team matches in the Women's Asia Cup Muscat 2022. "A special thanks to the Sultanate of Oman government, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Hockey Association for hosting this prestigious Asian championship. A dedicated thanks for the organisers for their kind treatment and hospitality," he concluded.





AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS
LAST-16 RESULTS ON
MONDAY

(AET DENOTES AFTER EXTRA
TIME; ALL TIMES GMT):

In Bafoussam

Gambia 1 (Musa Barrow 71)

Guinea 0

In Yaounde

Cameroon 2 (Toko Ekambi 29,

Aboubakar 70) Comoros 1 (Y.

M'Changama 81)

ON SUNDAY

In Limbe

Burkina Faso 1 (B. Traore 28)

Gabon 1 (Guira 90+1-og) aet

Burkina Faso win 7-6 on

penalties

In Garoua

Tunisia 1 (Msakni 47) Nigeria 0

GAMBIA UPSET THE ODDS TO BEAT GUINEA

CAMEROON SURVIVE COMOROS HEROICS

YAOUNDE: Hosts Cameroon set up an Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinal against Gambia but only after labouring to a 2-1 win over a Comoros side who were forced to start an outfield player in goal and played most of Monday's game with 10 men.

Left-back Chaker Alhadhur started between the posts for the Comoros in Yaounde after two of their three goalkeepers were ruled out due to Covid-19 while the

other was missing due to injury.

They then had captain Nadjim Abdou sent off after just seven minutes, and Karl Toko-Ekambi put Cameroon in front before skipper Vincent Aboubakar netted his sixth goal of the tournament.

Despite that it was a heroic performance from the Comoros, who kept the last-16 tie alive until the end thanks to Youssouf M'Changama's stunning late free-

kick. "I don't think I am the only hero. I did what I could. I think I gave hope to the team and they all tried to help me," Alhadhur, usually a back-up left-back for French Ligue 2 side Ajaccio, told broadcaster Canal Plus.

He had to use tape to mark out his number three on the back of his goalkeeper's jersey.

Of being chosen to go in goal he added: "It was something that at first we spoke a bit about and

laughed about, but then it became serious.

"I was chosen but I didn't believe it until I put on the gloves and the top. Then I realised it was serious. There were lots of emotions going through my head but then I just got on with it."

The tiny Indian Ocean island nation qualified for the last 16 in their first ever appearance at the Cup of Nations after finishing as one of the best third-placed teams in the group stage.

However, their dream turned to a nightmare as a total of 12 players and staff tested positive for Covid-19 two days before the tie, including goalkeepers Ali Ahamada and Moyadh Ousseini.

Their other goalkeeper, Salim Ben Boina, was injured but they had hoped Ahamada would be able to start after he tested negative on the day of the game.

The 30-year-old Ahamada flew from Garoua, where he had been isolating, to Yaounde on Monday afternoon in the hope of being able to play, only for the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to decide otherwise as his positive result had come just two days earlier.

The islanders, whose coach Amir Abdou was among those missing after testing positive, had their skipper harshly sent off following a VAR review for a foul on Moumi Ngamaleu but they never gave up.

Sickness bug doesn't stop Gambians

Nevertheless it is the Indomitable Lions who keep their dream of winning the Cup of Nations on home soil alive as they advance to a last-eight tie in Douala against Gambia on Saturday.

Like the Comoros, a Gambia side ranked 150th in the world are appearing at their first ever AFCON but they upset the odds to beat Guinea 1-0 in the western city of Bafoussam earlier on Monday thanks to a terrific second-half strike by Bologna's Musa Barrow.

Gambia then held on with 10 men at the end after Yusupha Njie was sent off. — AFP

Afcon match moved to another stadium after deadly crush



Barriers are seen at the scene of the stampede at the entrance of Olembe stadium in Yaounde. Eight people were killed and several injured. — AFP

YAOUNDE: The next Africa Cup of Nations match scheduled for Yaounde's Olembe Stadium, where eight people were killed in a stampede on Monday, will be moved to another venue, the Confederation of African Football president Patrice Motsepe said on Tuesday.

The stadium was next scheduled to host a quarterfinal tie on Sunday but it will now be played at Yaounde's Ahmadou Ahidjo stadium. It is the match between the winners of Tuesday's last-16 tie between Malawi and Morocco and victors of Wednesday's clash between Egypt and the Ivory Coast.

The newly-completed Olembe Stadium is still scheduled to host a semifinal on February 3 and the final on February 6 but Motsepe suggested that unless local authorities in Cameroon guaranteed improved security, they too could be moved.

Motsepe said CAF were asking for an explanation from Cameroon's organising committee and government as to the cause of the stampede and why gates at the stadium, that should have been opened, were

closed. "We want urgent steps to make sure it doesn't happen again and a report by Friday to explain what went wrong," Motsepe told a news conference.

"Clearly there were deficiencies, failures at weaknesses. There were problems that should have been foreseen.

"The safety and security of spectators has to be our primary duty and obligation."

Motsepe said there were thousands of additional spectators who had gone to the stadium to "take in the atmosphere". "There was a gate closed for inexplicable reasons," he said after visiting the site of the stampede, suggesting had it been opened the stamped could have been avoided.

Motsepe said a postponement of Tuesday's matches at the tournament had been discussed but it was decided they would go ahead. A total of 38 were also injured when fans stormed the stadium hosting the Cup of Nations match between Cameroon and Comoros. Motsepe said he had visited the injured and that only seven remain hospitalised. — Reuters

Afghanistan sweep Netherlands series

DOHA: Afghanistan sealed a series whitewash of the Netherlands on Tuesday in the third one-day international in Doha, boosting their 2023 World Cup qualifying bid.

Najibullah Zadran smashed a 59-ball 71 as the Afghans posted 254-5 from their 50 overs, before their spinners induced a Dutch collapse from 103-0 to 179 all out.

The 75-run victory was Afghanistan's sixth win from as many matches and moves them up to fifth in the 13-team 2023 World Cup Super League table.

The top eight nations will earn automatic qualification for next year's global showpiece in India. Afghanistan have played in each of the last two ODI World Cups.

Batting first for the third successive game in the series, Hashmatullah Shahidi's men made a solid start, with Riaz Hussan and Rahmat Shah making 50 and 48 respectively.

Najibullah provided the impetus to set a challenging total, smashing eight fours and three sixes in his innings.

The Netherlands made a brilliant start to their chase with a 103-run opening stand between Scott Edwards and Colin Ackermann.



But leg-spinner Qais Ahmad, making his ODI debut, trapped Tonga-born wicket-keeper Edwards lbw for 54 to start a procession of wickets.

Rashid Khan dismissed Ackermann for 81 and the Netherlands offered very little other resistance.

The 21-year-old Qais, who has starred in T20 franchise cricket around the world, took the last two wickets to finish with figures of 3-32. — AFP
BRIEF SCORES: Afghanistan 254-5 from 50 overs (Najibullah 71, Hussan 50) v Netherlands 179 all out from 42.4 overs (Ackermann 81, Edwards 54; Qais 3-32)
Result: Afghanistan win by 75 runs
Series: Afghanistan win 3-0

Al Muthla, Earn Trust book easy wins

MUSCAT: Al Muthla Golden got the better of Y Horizon in an E Division T20 Cricket League game at OAC 3 ground in Seeb on Friday.

Y Horizon posted 154 for 2 on the board thanks to superb 51 by Naresh Sudhakar and 47 by Jatin Patel. Sajith Chenganassery bowled well, taking 2 for 10.

Al Muthla raced to the target in only 16.4 overs, scoring 160 for 6 thanks to major contributions from Ruwan Rupa (35), Jeason Jacob (34) and Shyam Lekshman (27).

ARIF HELPS EARN TRUST WIN

Arif Hussain's brilliant 43 off 33 balls helped Earn Trust CT to an exciting 5-wicket win over KCA Deutag in an F Division T20 match at Muscat Municipality ground 3 on Friday.

Chasing 118 to win, Earn Trust surpassed the total in 16 overs thanks to brilliant batting by Arif and Fizan Tufail (26).

KARNIK TON STEERS MCCC RED TO VICTORY

Young Karnik Samir's excellent 103 was the highlight of MCCC Red's thrilling win over MCCC Blue in a Junior League Under-13 match at Muscat Municipality ground 3.



Sivabalaji Siddeshwaran and Karnik Samir of MCCC Red U13.

Oman Cricket to conduct digital scoring course

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) has a good news for all new scorers tired of using pen and paper to record their matches. A digital scoring course will be held on Monday, January 31 to put them on their way to becoming online scoring experts soon.

The one and half hour course will be held at Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat, starting at 6.30 pm.

According to an OC official, only 25 participants will be allowed to attend the course on a first come, first served basis.

"All they have to do is register and pay a fee of RO 10 for the course directly at the link t.ly/Lsch. All applications must be submitted by Sunday, January 30," he added.

Further information can be had by calling Oman Cricket office at 24970018 and 24970331.

Oman Cricket has an excellent pool of match officials including qualified umpires, match referees and scorers who are regularly called to officiate in ACC and ICC international tournaments.

SUJAY BATS ISAS TO BIG WIN

Sujay struck a magnificent 109 not out to pave the way for Indian School Al Seeb's (ISAS) impressive 104-run victory against Indian School Wadi Kabir.

ISAS openers Sujay and Jitendranath (95 not out) powered their side to 228 without loss in 20 overs. ISAS then bowled superbly to restrict ISWK to just 124 for 6 in 20 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

E Division

Y Horizon 154 for 2 in 20 overs (Naresh Sudhakar 51 - 4x4, Jatin Patel 47 - 6x4. Sajith Chenganassery 2-10, Aravinthan Raja 2-35) lost to Al Muthla Golden CT 160 for 6 in 16.4 overs (Ruwan Rupa 35 - 3x4, Jeason Jacob 34 - 5x4, Shyam Lekshman 27 - 4x4, 1x6, Sanjay Makwana 2-27) by 4 wickets.

F Division

KCA Deutag 118 for 9 in 20 overs (Mubeen Ullah 31 - 3x4, Shameer Mohamed 2-15, Zaheer Abbas 2-25) lost to Earn Trust CT 119 for 5 in 16 overs (Arif Hussain 43 - 7x4, Fizan Tufail 26 - 3x4, Husnain Ali 2-28) by 5 wickets.

Junior Division U13

MCCC Blue U13 216 for 4 in 20 overs (Pranav Nivash 65 - 5x4, Abdul Muqsih 52 - 8x4) lost to MCCC Red U13 217 for 3 in 20 overs (Karnik Samir 103 - 10x4, Sivabalaji Siddeshwaran 65 - 9x4, Chintala Satish 3-33) by 7 wickets.

Junior Division U13

ISAS 228 for 0 in 20 overs (Sujay 109 - 12x4, Jitendranath 95 - 8x4) beat ISWK-U13B 124 for 6 in 20 overs (Vivikta Dande 23 - 2x4) by 104 runs.

Nadal digs deep to reach semis

No stopping Barty, Keys ousts Krejčíková to book last 4 spot

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal dug deep into his immense reserves of resilience for the second match running to keep his dream of a 21st Grand Slam title alive at the Australian Open on Tuesday, as women's top seed Ashleigh Barty powered into a semifinal against Madison Keys.

The ruthless world number one Barty dismantled Jessica Pegula 6-2, 6-0 in 63 minutes to reach the last four at Melbourne Park for only the second time. "That was solid tonight. I had a lot of fun out here," said Barty, who is edging closer to becoming the first Australian woman to win her home Grand Slam since Chris O'Neill in 1978.

She will face the unseeded Keys for a place in Saturday's final after the American, ranked 51, upset French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková 6-3, 6-2. Wimbledon champion Barty is yet to drop a set and has only given up 17 games in her five matches at Melbourne Park.

Nadal, 35, raced to a two-set quarterfinal lead against Denis Shapovalov but then began to feel unwell, needing medical attention for a stomach complaint before surviving a four-hour thriller 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-3. He will face Matteo Berrettini in the semifinal after the Italian seventh seed endured a rollercoaster five-setter of his own to overcome Gael Monfils of France 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-2.

The Spanish sixth seed previously had to show all his experience and tenacity just to reach the quarterfinal in an epic fourth-round 28-minute tie-break against Adrian Mannarino, and he somehow found the willpower again to cross the finish line, despite being badly hampered.

"I started to feel not very well in my stomach so I just asked if they could do something," said Nadal.

"They just checked everything was all right and then I took some tablets to try to improve the situation. It was lucky that I was serving great in the fifth."

'A PRESENT OF LIFE'

Nadal won a warm-up tournament and continues to amaze even himself after being out for most of 2021 with a chronic foot injury. He then caught Covid-19 in December.

"I'm not 21 anymore!" he said. "The real truth is that two months ago we didn't know if we will be able to be back on tour at all," Nadal admitted.

"It's just a present of life that I am here playing tennis again."

A frustrated Shapovalov smashed his racquet after losing and had a running battle with the chair umpire over the time Nadal was taking to serve, at one point calling the official "corrupt".

Berrettini later grabbed a slice of tennis history by becoming the first Italian man to reach the last four at the Australian Open.

The seventh seed took the first two sets before the never-say-die 35-year-old Monfils roared back using all his guile and experience to take the match to a decider.

Berrettini found new reserves of energy at the start of the fifth set, powering to a double break that enabled last year's Wimbledon finalist to surge clear and seal the match in 3hr 49min. "I was really happy with myself, it was a great fight with Gael, a great match, a lot of emotions," said the 25-year-old.

Earlier, Keys continued her impeccable start to the 2022 season with a straight-set destruction of fourth seed Krejčíková, who needed medical attention after being affected by the heat as the mercury topped 30 Celsius during the first set.

Keys was a semifinalist in 2015 but endured a terrible 2021 where she tumbled down the rankings.

"It means a lot," she said. "Last year was really hard."

Keys said she had to reset completely for the new campaign — and it clearly worked.

She won an Adelaide warm-up event this month and has now amassed 11 straight match wins in Australia — equalling her tally for the whole of 2021. — **AFP**



Australia's Ashleigh Barty celebrates winning her quarterfinal against Jessica Pegula of the US. — **Reuters**



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates winning his quarterfinal against Canada's Denis Shapovalov. — **Reuters**

AUSTRALIAN OPEN RESULTS

MEN (QUARTERFINALS)

Matteo Berrettini (ITA x7) bt Gael Monfils (FRA x17) 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-2

Rafael Nadal (ESP x6) bt Denis Shapovalov (CAN x14) 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-3

WOMEN (QUARTERFINALS)

Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Jessica Pegula (USA x21) 6-2, 6-0

Madison Keys (USA) bt Barbora Krejčíková (CZE x4) 6-3, 6-2

Asghar, Tharanga power Giants past Maharajas

HARIDEV PUSHARAJ
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Asghar Afghan and Upul Tharanga played stellar knocks as Asia Lions overwhelmed India Maharajas by 36 runs in their Legends League Cricket encounter at the Al Amerat Stadium, on Tuesday. Batting first, the Lions were in trouble when they lost the wickets of Tillekeratne Dilshan and Romesh Kaluwitharana quickly.

However, a 78-run partnership between Tharanga and Mohammad Yousuf steadied the ship for them.

Tharanga was the chief architect of their rebuilding effort as he slammed some handy boundaries

and sixes in the crucial middle overs.

Yousuf was an able ally although not overly aggressive as he let Tharanga smash the ball to all parts of the ground. Yousuf's 26-run innings came to an end in the 14th over when he was caught by Manpreet Gony off Amit Bhandari.

The wicket brought Asghar Afghan to the middle, who went absolutely berserk till the very end.

The Afghan clobbered seven massive sixes and four boundaries in his 69 off 28 balls that came at a stupendous strike rate of 246.

Although, Tharanga was bowled by Bhandari for a thoroughly well-played 72, it made no difference to



Asghar Afghan of Asia Lions plays a shot against the India Maharajs during the Legends League 2022 at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Al Amerat. — **LLC**

the Lions' eventual score as Afghan kept the momentum very high.

The Afghan blitzkrieg towards the end ensured the Lions finished with a very healthy total of 193.

MAHARAJAS STRUGGLE IN CHASE

The Maharajas tried their very best but 194 proved a bit too stiff a target as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals. Wasim Jaffer (35), Yusuf Pathan (21) and Stuart Binny (25) all threw away starts as they looked to up the ante against the perpetually climbing asking rate. The Lions kept pegging away with wickets as Shoaib Akhtar, Nuwan Kulasekara and

Asghar Afghan chipped in. Manpreet Gony played an entertaining innings of 35 in the lower order but it just wasn't enough as the Maharajas folded up for 157/8 in 20 overs.

It was a richly deserved victory for the Asia Lions riding on their all-round effort.

BRIEF SCORES: Asia Lions 193-4 in 20 overs (Tharanga 75 (45b, 7x4, 4x6), Asghar Afghan 69 (28b, 4x4, 7x6); Amit Bhandari 2-41) beat India Maharajas 157-8 in 20 overs (Wasim Jaffer 35, Manpreet Gony 35 not out; Nuwan Kulasekara 2-14, Asghar Afghan 2-23, Mohammed Rafique 2-32)

business

MUSCAT
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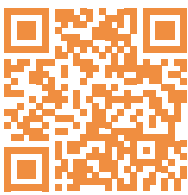


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Gulf economies to grow faster in 2022: Poll

LONDON: The economies in the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council will grow at their fastest paces in several years, according to a Reuters poll of economists who cautioned the risk to that outlook was skewed to the downside.

Crude oil prices, a major driver for Gulf economies, climbed to their highest since 2014 on Wednesday, driven by escalating global political tensions involving major producers. That is bullish news for the six wealthy oil-exporting countries in the region.

The January 11-19 poll of 25 economists forecast all six economies in the Gulf Cooperation Council would grow faster this year than was expected three months ago.

Saudi Arabia was predicted to top the list with growth of 5.7 per cent, followed by Kuwait and UAE with 5.3 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. Economic growth in Qatar, Sultanate of Oman and Bahrain was expected to average between 3-4 per cent for 2022. If realised, that would be the best these countries have witnessed in several years.

“Despite relatively tight fiscal policy, and some external headwinds, we expect the GCC economies to see faster growth in 2022 as they continue to build on the progress made last year,” said Khatija Haque, head of research and chief economist at Emirates NBD.

“While the outlook for 2022 remains broadly constructive, there is still a high degree of uncertainty especially with regards to the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic”

Saudi Arabia, the world’s largest crude oil exporter and the region’s economic and political heavyweight, will see 5.7 per cent economic growth this year. If realised, it would be the fastest growth since 2012 when oil averaged around \$111 per barrel.

Apart from an upgrade to the median forecast from the October Reuters poll, the range of forecasts also showed higher highs and higher lows. The UAE, a global trade hub and the GCC’s second-biggest economy, was forecast to grow 4.8 per cent this year, the fastest since 2015. Dependency on energy prices has the attendant risk that any disruption in prices due to geopolitical tensions and a slowdown in the global economy could hurt the recovery.

Nine of 10 economists who answered an additional question said a decline in oil prices and new coronavirus variants were the biggest threats to GCC economic growth this year.

— Reuters

ACWA Power eyes further investment in Omani green energy projects

VALUE PROPOSITION:
Renewable resources,
geographical location
underscore Sultanate of
Oman’s investment appeal

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Leading Saudi-based international energy developer ACWA Power says it will continue to explore avenues to invest in the Sultanate of Oman’s diversifying power generation sector, notably the country’s nascent green hydrogen space.

On Monday, a consortium led by ACWA Power celebrated the official launch of the Sultanate of Oman’s biggest utility-scale solar power project at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The 500 MW capacity solar photovoltaic-based scheme, set up with an investment of around \$417 million (approx. RO 155 million), represents a highpoint in the Saudi firm’s longstanding investment in the Omani energy sector, aggregating \$2.6 billion over the past decade.

Speaking to journalists on the sidelines of Monday’s

launch of the Ibri-2 Solar PV Project in Ibri, ACWA Power Chairman Mohammad Abunayyan (pictured) said the Sultanate of Oman, with its abundant renewable natural resources, makes it a promising investment destination for renewable energy projects.

He cited in this regard last month’s signing of a Memorandum of Understanding by ACWA Power with OQ, the integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman and US-based Air Products, to explore the feasibility of establishing a green hydrogen project in

Dhofar Governorate in the south of the country.

The MoU was signed against the backdrop of the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the Sultanate of Oman. It covers the study of a potential hydrogen project with a capacity to produce 1 million tonnes per annum of green ammonia.

“We are now working diligently to go through the economics, the technical (aspects) etc, to be sure we will be ready when the time comes to announce it,” Abunayyan said. “It’s very promising! The Sultanate of Oman has great

renewable sources and a great location. As it has been doing with gas exports, the Sultanate of Oman will also export green hydrogen and will lead the whole world after Saudi Arabia, which is also blessed with resources.”

He further added: “We have great connectivity at the leadership level and we have a clear mandate to put more investment and to make it more economical for both countries and to benefit the peoples of two countries.”

As one of the biggest international investors in the Sultanate of Oman’s power generation and water

desalination sectors, ACWA Power also has stakes in the following projects (in alphabetical order): Barka 1 Independent Water Project (IWP) Expansion; Barka 1 IWP (Expansion Phase II; Barka Independent Water and Power Project (IWPP); Ibri Independent Power Project (IPP); Salalah – 2 IPP; Salalah IWP; and Sohar – 3 IPP.

Asked about ACWA Power’s plans to bid for the mega 1,000 MW capacity solar scheme planned at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the Chairman stated: “We will compete in every project coming up in the Sultanate of Oman.”

marafiq

شركة المرافق المركزية
Centralized Utilities Company

Tender Announcement

Introduction

Centralized Utilities Company LLC (herein the “Company” or “Marafiq”) inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake the project based on a Design and Build of Water Supply Network extension to the Southern Industrial Area (Phase 1), Duqm. The Company invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Clarification Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
CUC-WSP-00-000 -LE-TND-006	Design and Build of Water Supply Network extension to the Southern Industrial Area (Phase 1)	The Contractor's scope of works will be to Design and Build Water Supply Network Extension Industrial Area, Duqm that shall include the following main components: • DI400 transmission pipeline to the Fishery Industrial Zone (FIZ) • FIZ Reservoir Compound (storage reservoir, pumping station building, TFS) • FIZ pipeline distribution network – HDPE 355 and 180 • SCADA upgrade	1,250 OMR	28-Feb-2022	13-March-2022

Request for proposal

The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 1st February 2022 Oman time.

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with Government Tender Board for works of this nature and have necessary experience in Oman for similar projects as a Design and Build Contractor. We particularly encourage Contractors currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Contractors shall contact Marafiq via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading “Design & Build of Water Supply Network Extensions to the Southern Industrial Area of Duqm (Phase 1).” to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

Learn financial planning with Bank Muscat’s Maliyat programme

MUSCAT: Financial literacy is the ability to understand and apply financial skills effectively and includes personal financial management, budgeting and saving. Financial literacy is important because it equips us with the knowledge and skills we need to manage our money effectively.

Global economic research has shown that financial literacy and awareness greatly help in reducing income inequality and facilitating equitable growth and development.

Hence, in line with its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, Bank Muscat launched its free Maliyat financial literacy programme in 2019 to enable people improve their financial literacy, knowledge, manage their income, and also save and invest wisely.

The programme has seen a steady growth in the number of participants and in 2021, the bank launched an upgraded website (<https://maliyatbankmuscat.com>).

With well-structured



programme content that caters to different age-groups, the key aspects of the programme include defining personal financial goals and financial planning to achieve one’s goals.

Speaking about the importance of improving financial literacy and awareness in the Sultanate of Oman, Talib al Makhmari, Manager, Community and Media Relations, Bank Muscat, said: “Financial awareness helps individuals manage income, save and invest wisely. Today, it is ever more important to be financially aware as financial products and

services get increasingly diverse and complex.

“Since its launch in 2019, Bank Muscat’s groundbreaking Maliyat financial-literacy programme is helping equip participants with the skills needed to better manage their finances and take fiscally prudent decisions, thereby helping everyone, particularly the youth, become financially independent.

“By empowering people in the Sultanate of Oman, the Maliyat programme will contribute to the socio-economic development and progress of the Sultanate of

Oman in the future.”

When people are financially literate, they are better able to understand financial concepts like budgets, interest payments and plan for their future so as to be able to respond effectively to life-changing events such as economic downturns or a job loss.

They are also able to choose various products like insurance and loans, based on their actual needs and financial abilities rather than be influenced solely by an advertisement or someone else who may not necessarily have their best interests in mind.

The Maliyat curriculum comprises three main parts including: the Sultanate of Oman’s economy, financial awareness and successful financial planning.

To encourage completion of the course and to help participants apply the learnings in their personal lives, certification is provided upon successful completion of each module. The programme is also available in both Arabic and English to encourage maximum participation by everyone.



Own a Toyota Avalon with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own a Toyota Avalon and benefit with service 2 years/20,000 kms, (Whichever is earlier). 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.

The Toyota Avalon with its design, comfort and luxury is a popular choice for customers.

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 engine is paired to an eight-speed automatic transmission that merges smooth, precise gear selection throughout the RPM range with alacrity for fuel efficiency and on-demand power.

In the Sultanate of Oman, the nationwide parts and service network of Saud Bahwan Automotive supports Toyota’s outstanding product quality. No wonder that today, Toyota is one of the most trusted and well-known brands.

For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman or www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.

Alizz Islamic Bank announces restructuring of Bushra Account

MUSCAT: Adding a new set of monthly profits on customer deposits, Alizz Islamic Bank recently announced the restructuring of its Bushra Savings Account. This move comes in compliance with Central Bank of Oman’s decision to withdraw the ‘prize scheme linked saving deposit schemes’ with effect from January 2022 in all banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

Currently, Alizz Islamic Bank offers Bushra Savings Account based on the Sharia principle of unrestricted ‘Mudarabah’, where the customer is the owner of the money, and the bank manages the ‘Mudarabah’ by investing the pool of customer funds in joint ‘Mudarabah’ transactions.

All profits are divided between the customer and the bank, based on a profit-sharing ratio determined by the bank. Profit



rates based on each category will be applied to the deposit balances kept in the Bushra Account.

For 2022, Bushra has been restructured to keep up with the changes in customer lifestyles, making the account bigger to secure the best possible profits for the customer. Alizz Islamic Bank continues to tailor-make products and services to suit the expectations and requirements of customers.

Bushra customers, whether Omanis or expats, will enjoy many advantages and benefits including monthly profit payment, same-day debit card issuance and collection, and free online and mobile banking, and SMS alerts, to name a few.

Mohammed al Ghassani, Acting Chief Consumer Banking Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, said, “The benefits and incentives offered by the restructured Bushra Account comes in line with our plans to provide customers with tailor-made products and services to meet all their needs and requirements in today’s ever-changing world.”

“The new Bushra Account gives customers the opportunity to grow their funds as we help them to save and invest and eventually get to their desired financial goals.”

NBO offers 20 per cent discount for credit card purchases at Sharaf DG

MUSCAT: Continuing to find new and unique ways to reward its customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering 20 per cent off at Sharaf DG in the Mall of Oman for those paying using their NBO credit card.

Valid between January 27-28, 2022, cardholders can choose from a range of branded electronics and household appliances. As well as receiving Nuqati points for every purchase, they also have the option to convert to the Easy Payment Plan which offers 6–12-month instalments at 0 per cent interest.

Maha al Raisi, AGM Retail Products at NBO, said, “NBO continues to make everyday banking more rewarding, while keeping our customers’ needs and lifestyles in mind. Our collaboration with Sharaf DG is one of a growing number of exclusive partnerships on our portfolio, ensuring



our cards offer greater value, convenience and flexibility.”

Offering cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of its customers, NBO’s suite of credit cards have no annual fee as long as the spending threshold is reached. Providing a smarter, safer alternative to cash, cardholders are rewarded with Nuqati points for every transaction they make in addition to other benefits like movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel

insurance, and airport lounge access. It’s a great way for customers to increase their savings while enjoying the freedom of the lifestyle they choose.

More details about NBO’s range of products and services are available at any of the 60 branches located across the Sultanate of Oman, online at www.nbo.om or by contacting the call centre on 24770000.

Lexus unveils exclusive benefits across the range

MUSCAT: Here’s some fantastic news for Lexus enthusiasts looking forward to owning their favourite Lexus model. Lexus is offering exclusive benefits like 3 years/30,000 kms (Whichever is earlier), and 1 year free registration. The campaign is valid up to March 23, 2022 (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

In the Sultanate of Oman, Lexus has a distinctive range that include luxury SUVs, sedans and coupes too. The new NX is designed to meet the diverse lifestyles of customers around the world.

Lexus has introduced two new petrol engines in the NX range, new NX 350 is introduced with 2.4

L turbocharged gasoline engine with 275 HP/6000 Rpm - 8 Speed AT and 2.5 L HEV with 240 HP (Combined power) CVT. The NX’s luxurious interiors include the latest 14” NAV with touch screen / 10 premium speakers and with digital inner view mirror for uninterrupted rear views.

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0-litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row 7-seater



option.

Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version

featuring a 3.5-litre Atkinson-cycle engine.

The Lexus GX460 is perfect

for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week. The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance.

In sedans, the range includes the IS350. This sleek and stylish powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that’s paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission. The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp.

The flagship LS which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid

System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

In the Sultanate of Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as manufacturer’s warranty of 4 years/100,000 kms (Whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA. For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel “Lexus Oman”, or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Oman. Lexus on Instagram.



OAB announces redemption of perpetual subordinated bonds

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) announced the redemption of the Perpetual Subordinated Bonds (OAB PERPET. SUB OAB1) on December 27, 2021, in Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The bonds for RO 30 million were issued by the Bank on December 29, 2016, at an interest rate of 7.75 per cent p.a. and listed on the MSX bonds market.

Commenting on the notice, Sulaiman bin Ali al Hinai (pictured), General Manager — Treasury, Investment and Government/FI Banking Group, said, “In order to attract foreign direct investment in the country as well as diversify funding sources, the bank had successfully completed first international issuance of AT1 Perpetual bonds of \$250 million in June 2021, which are listed in the International Securities Market of London Stock Exchange.

“Upon the completion of this issuance, the capital position of the bank has strengthened significantly. We are also happy to redeem the bonds issued in 2016, at the first call option, which will enhance the investor confidence and prove the bank’s permanent ability to service its obligations.”

As per the terms and conditions of the OAB PERPET. SUB OAB1 bonds, the bank has issued an irrevocable notice to the holders of these bonds on December 27, 2021, that it will fully redeem all the bonds on the redemption date, January 29, 2022, by paying the principal amount together with the interest accrued for the period.

The Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCDC) will carry out the process of transferring the amounts to bondholders, based on their investor records. The bonds will be delisted from the MSX bonds market post redemption.

OAB has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the Sultanate of Oman. The OAB Group operates a nationwide network of 51 conventional branches, 15 Islamic branches, 150 conventional ATMs and 15 Islamic ATMs across the Sultanate of Oman.



SOHAR Port – FICCI webinar explores metal industry partnerships

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 25

SOHAR Port and Freezone hosted on Tuesday the third webinar in its series with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) with a focus on the growing metals industry.

The webinars have increased visibility in the Indian market and highlighted the potential avenues for further trade between SOHAR and Indian businesses by highlighting SOHAR Port and Freezone’s strategic advantages, the opportunities in downstream metal operations and sharing success stories from Indian companies based in and already trading with SOHAR.

The webinar featured presentations from Robert Bartstra, Commercial Manager at SOHAR Freezone, Mohammed al Kindi, Commercial Officer at SOHAR Freezone, and representatives from leading worldwide freight and logistics operator C Steinweg Oman LLC, located within the port.

There was also a panel discussion on the topic of ‘Metals in SOHAR – Industrial Solutions’ with speakers from Al Tamman Indsil Ferrochrome LLC Jindal Shadeed Iron and Steel LLC and Sohar Aluminium, all based at SOHAR.

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of SOHAR Freezone, said, “SOHAR has access to an abundance of raw materials and reliable, affordable energy to facilitate primary, secondary and downstream metals projects.

“Over 50 per cent of the industrial tenants within SOHAR are involved in the metals industry, including iron and copper among others, and the production of pellets, billets and liquid metal, and we are always looking to



The vast market reach has the power to transform the metals industries by providing world-leading logistics, warehousing, raw materials and downstream opportunities in a single location and bring the Sultanate of Oman and India even closer together as trade partners

expand the possibilities to grow the cluster.

“Companies basing themselves here can take advantage of the free trade agreement with the United States of

America, prominent anchor businesses and a steady flow of high-quality raw materials imported through the adjacent port.

“Our series of webinars have already been successful in generating leads between clients and potential new tenants for the freezone, and we look forward to following up on the new ways SOHAR can benefit businesses in India’s metals sector by providing a thriving gateway to new markets.”

Arnab Hazra, Deputy Secretary-General, Indian Steel Association, who represented FICCI, added, “The success of the webinars so far has had a profound impact on the way companies in India view doing business with SOHAR.

“The vast market reach has the power to transform the metals industries by providing world-leading

logistics, warehousing, raw materials and downstream opportunities in a single location and bring the Sultanate of Oman and India even closer together as trade partners.

“The chance to expand the fast-growing metals industries using SOHAR Port and Freezone as a regional transit point to connect Indian businesses to 550 ports around the world, which makes it a base for companies looking to expand into the growing markets across the Gulf Cooperation Council, East Africa and into Europe and North America.

“The webinar series offers valuable insight into the possibilities for companies to invest in SOHAR and the mutual benefits available to metals producers and suppliers from those who have already found success in the market.”

Omani-Italian Friendship Association names new Board

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 25

The Omani-Italian Friendship Association, formed under the auspices of the Embassy of Italy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman to enhance ties between the two countries, has unveiled a new Board along with plans for a series of dynamic initiatives in 2022.

The Omani-Italian Friendship Association is led by Chairwoman Her Highness Sayyida Aliya bint Thuwaini al Said, a founding member of the Association, and Vice-Chairmen Dr Amer

al Rawas. New Board members include Salma al Hashmi, Beatrice Franceschi, Dr Hani al Qadhi, Flavio Fazzouli and Antonio Chiantore.

They bring a significant depth of experience in business and leadership roles.

Now in its fifth year of successfully building bilateral relations between the two nations, the Association aims to maintain and develop cooperation through business networking, information exchange and ongoing interactions between individuals and organisations.

Plans for 2022 include a focus



on innovation in business by establishing a business forum

that will enhance collaboration and facilitate companies seeking

to launch enterprises in either country.

The Sultanate of Oman and Italy enjoy a longstanding history of cooperation and investment, with 40 Italian companies operating in the country.

Further initiatives will champion sport and culture, with opportunities for students to enjoy academic and sports exchange programmes. A highlight of the year will be an Omani-Italian fashion show, an event that will showcase talent and promote industry links.

“We are hugely excited about the potential that the Omani-

Italian Friendship Association represents,” commented HH Sayyida Aliya bint Thuwaini al Said during a launching event hosted by the Ambassador of Italy, Federica Favi, at her residence with representatives of the local business and cultural circles to introduce the new board members.

“Our two countries have a long and mutually beneficial history together, and we believe that a creative collaboration between our nations will generate ever more opportunities for youth, for commerce, the arts and for trade,” HH Sayyida Aliya added.

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

Oil prices rebound on growing tensions

Oil prices bounced back on Tuesday, recovering some of the previous day’s losses, as growing tension in Eastern Europe and the Middle East fuelled concerns over possible supply disruptions in an already tight market.

Brent crude futures price rose \$1.21, or 1.5 per cent, to \$87.52 a barrel at 0946 GMT, reversing a 1.8-per cent fall in the previous session.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures climbed \$1.11, or 1.3 per cent, to



\$85.42 a barrel, having slid 2.2 per cent on Monday. World equities, which often move in tandem with oil, are set for their biggest monthly drop since the pandemic hit markets in March 2020. — Reuters

LAGOS

Nigeria suspends plan to end fuel subsidies

Nigeria’s government has suspended a plan to end its costly fuel subsidy programme, saying the timing was not right, a year before the presidential election.

Under pressure over its budget, Nigeria had proposed removing the so-called Premium Motor Spirit or PMS subsidy that costs the government billions of dollars each year to keep gasoline costs artificially lower than the market price.

Finance Minister Zainab Ahmed had said the

“unsustainable” programme could end in June in line with priorities set out by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. But ministers have rolled back that schedule.

“It become clear that the timing is problematic, that practically there is still heightened inflation and also the removal of subsidies would further worsen the situation and thereby imposing more difficulties on the citizens,” the finance minister told senators on Monday. — AFP

LONDON

Unilever cuts jobs after failed takeover

British consumer goods giant Unilever on Tuesday announced plans to cut around 1,500 management jobs worldwide in a major restructure for the company, which recently saw a major acquisition bid fail.

The maker of Magnum ice cream and Dove soap said its “proposed new organisation model will result in a reduction in senior management roles of around 15 per cent.”

It added in a statement that junior management roles



would be cut by five per cent. Together the cuts totalled “around 1,500 roles globally”. Chief Executive Alan Jop added: “Growth remains our top priority and these changes will underpin our pursuit of this.” — AFP

China gives property market a break

China's stance on deleveraging the real estate industry is softening, however reluctantly. The government will let property developers access much-needed funds from escrowed prepayments, building on surprise cuts to interest rates. It's a partial, and imperfect, solution, but options are running out. The decisions represent an attempt to stabilise a wobbling sector that contributes up to a third of gross domestic output. Beijing's leverage crackdown using its so-called three red lines have led to a series of defaults, and the construction sector has now contracted for two consecutive quarters, putting it officially in recession.

Accompanied by renewed Covid-19 lockdowns, it jeopardises the country's economic recovery. There were some expectations that cash-rich state-owned entities such as China Resources Land might pad the fall by snapping up assets and helping complete paused, pre-sold projects. Such rescues haven't materialised, however. Property M&A contracted 75 per cent in 2021, per state media.

In early January, Beijing tried to revive enthusiasm by exempting credit used for distressed acquisitions from regulatory debt caps, but deals can only do so much. A Refinitiv analysis suggests a whopping 3 billion square metres of projects were on pause as of June. Against that reality, regulators are extending a lifeline by unfreezing down-payments. That could free up as much as 3.6 trillion yuan (\$570 billion) to complete projects and pay suppliers, according to Breakingviews estimates. Local regulators may resist, worrying that companies will use the funds to meet obligations in other jurisdictions, but it will ease liquidity crunches at healthier developers, including Shanghai-based Shimao, which reported 22 billion yuan in escrow in June. Another sign of support came from the central bank, which on Thursday slightly lowered the benchmark five-year loan prime rate used to set mortgages for the first time in nearly two years. The People's Bank of China generally worries that easier money will fuel speculation instead of growth. — Reuters

Beijing tried to revive enthusiasm by exempting credit used for distressed acquisitions from regulatory debt caps



PRICES GONE UP

Buyers choose vegetables at a retail market in Kolkata. India's households are grappling with rising living costs at a time when jobs and incomes have taken a hit amid the pandemic, but economists are not hopeful the government's annual budget due next week will provide much relief. Tea, edible oil, pulses, meat, cooking gas and services have gone up by 20-40 per cent since the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020 – hurting consumers while their incomes have fallen below levels seen before the health crisis.

– Reuters

Covid-19 restrictions ease in the UK



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

THE ECONOMY LARGELY SHRUGGED OFF THE IMPACT OF OMICRON AND IS SET TO POWER AHEAD AFTER A MILD BLIP AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR

Top economists, business groups and hospitality sector bosses toasted the government's decision to scrap further plans for Covid-19 curbs, acknowledging the move as a sign that Britain's economy is getting back to being fully functional.

It raised hope among experts that the hold that the Covid-19 and accompanying restrictions on daily life has had on the state of the economy is coming to an end. Director of policy at the Institute of Directors, Roger Barker, said: "This is an economy that wants to grow and the lifting of these restrictions is a welcome step to helping that to happen." Further to that came comments from the chief executive of pub group Greene King: "It's great news that we're on the road to recovery as the Prime Minister has decided to roll back plans (for restrictions) and we hope that this gives the public a confidence boost to get back out and socialise." Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that restricting measures, including guidance to work from home will be scrapped in England immediately while mandatory mask wearing in public indoor spaces and Covid-19 certificates for attending large events will be axed from this week.

The easing of working from home advice will be a boon for central London retail and hospitality businesses, after they suffered from lower footfall over the usual Christmas period. The easing of restrictions was warmly welcomed by business groups with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) saying "businesses will be hopeful that we are finally starting to turn the corner on Covid-19. However, Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan said he would still require people to wear face masks on public transport. It comes as Covid-19 numbers continue to fall in the UK, while there is also evidence that hospitalisations are beginning to drop. There are fewer patients in intensive care now than there were before the Omicron wave. GDP figures for November published last week by the Office for National Statistics showed the UK economy is now larger than it was before the pandemic struck, underlining the upward trajectory the recovery was on before the imposition of curbs in early December. Research by Lloyds also shows the economy largely shrugged off the impact of Omicron and is set to power ahead after a mild blip at the beginning of the year. Although experts in the financial

district of London expect December and January's official GDP figures to dip due to a pull back in consumer confidence and tighter pandemic measures in December in particular, most economists are feeling confident on the economy recovering to pre-Omicron levels by March. Pantheon Macroeconomics, a consultancy, have increased their forecast for first quarter GDP growth to 0.2 per cent up from zero. However, experts cautioned that future policy decisions on how to deal with Covid-19 need to be guided by consistent principles to allow businesses to plan with firm beliefs. National Chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, Mike Cherry, said: "After two years of chopping and changing, small businesses right across England will be hoping that this marks the beginning of a final winding down of trading restrictions." Barker added: "After almost two years of restrictions associated with the pandemic, businesses are desperate to get back to some degree of normality as soon as is feasible." Chief Executive of the British Beer and Pub Association, Emma McClarkin, called on the government to urgently set out its plans "for living with Covid as an endemic disease" to help get the country's drinking holes back on their feet."

The case for strategic price policies



JAMES K GALBRAITH
The author, Chair in Government/Business Relations at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, is a former executive director of the congressional Joint Economic Committee

As America's post-war record of growth, job creation, and productivity shows, price policies were highly effective, which is why mainstream economists considered them indispensable. The case for eliminating price policies was advanced largely by business lobbies that opposed controls because they interfered with profits and the exercise of market power. Right-wing economists — chiefly Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek — gave the lobbyists an academic imprimatur, conjuring visions of "perfectly competitive" firms whose prices adjusted freely to keep the economy in perpetual equilibrium at full employment. Economists with such fantasies held no positions of public power before 1981. But in the 1970s, the practical conditions for maintaining a successful price

policy started to erode. Problems multiplied with the breakdown of international exchange-rate management in 1971, the loss of control over oil prices in 1973, and the rise of foreign industrial competitors (first Germany and Japan, then Mexico and South Korea). Reagan succeeded against inflation where Carter had failed, because they were willing to pay an enormous price: unemployment above 10 per cent in 1982, a global debt crisis that nearly brought down the largest US banks, and widespread deindustrialisation, particularly in the Midwest. A new economic mainstream defended all this by falsely proclaiming that price policies had always failed. The era of TINA ("there is no alternative") had begun. The Reagan-era policies also paved the way for China's rise. As Weber's scholarly work shows, China's economic strategy in the 1980s

relied on price controls with slow adjustments, similar to the US policies of the 1940s. Then, in the 1990s, as Russia's economy collapsed following "Big Bang" price liberalisation, China continued on its gradual path, allowing its industry to mature as America's declined. We now inhabit the world that Reagan, Volcker, and China made. For many years, inflation remained low because wages were stagnant and goods imported from China were cheap (as were energy and commodities, owing to a strong dollar and the shale-energy boom much later). But the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted this world, giving us an oil-price shock and shortages in autos and some other goods. That is where current US "inflation" comes from. Today's strategic prices include oil. While oil prices are already being knocked back by sales from the US Strategic Petroleum

Reserve, this measure is temporary. Energy policy and pricing will be a huge challenge in the future, because the entire system must be transformed to mitigate climate change. Then there is healthcare, and sky-high drug prices specifically. A public purchasing agency would help here; but Medicare for All, with explicit price controls, would be even better. A public agency with discretionary authority could rein in rising supply-chain prices as well, by stopping opportunistic price gouging, which can make a bad situation worse. Finally, there is the services sector. Wages here must rise as a matter of justice, and though such increases may show up in the inflation measures, the effect will be modest. The loudest complaints will come from those who like their services cheap at the expense of decent wages for the people who provide them. If supply-chain issues can be sorted out, the current inflation tizzy will probably subside early this summer, when last year's oil and used-car price spikes finally drop out of the 12-month numbers. But if inflation persists, the government should step in to manage strategic prices. Failing that, the next best option is to do nothing, declaring firmly that policy levers will be used to defend full employment over price stability, as US law specifies. The worst option is to punt the issue over to the Fed, which will raise interest rates and fight inflation by letting Americans be gouged on their student loans, rents, mortgages, and healthcare debts, and ultimately by kicking them out of work. That is what today's mainstream economists are advocating, stuck, as they are, in the reactionary mindset that has prevailed for 40 years. © Project Syndicate, 2022

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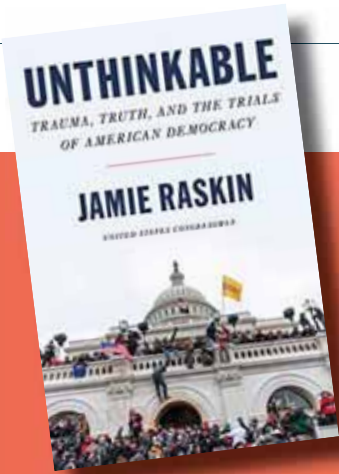
features

Persian ‘Nastaliq’ WOWS Muscat’s adoring art lovers

In the last nine days, the Persian calligraphic style of ‘Nastaliq’ has been at the centre of an exhibit at the Art and Soul Gallery in Qurum. Iranian artist Ali Pasandedih travelled to the Sultanate of Oman to showcase the beauty of what can be done when words and Arabic scripts are transformed into unique works of art... **P20**



READ



UNTHINKABLE
BY JAMIE RASKIN

The Maryland congressman describes leading the impeachment effort against the former president shortly after his son's death by suicide and the insurrection at the Capitol.

ART

British artist Henry Hudson embraces new horizons in London exhibit

BRITISH ARTIST HENRY Hudson says he took inspiration from flying in empty planes during the Covid-19 pandemic for his latest exhibition, presenting a collection of paintings depicting horizon lines in the sky. With titles such as “Horizon Line Somewhere Over the Atlantic Ocean” and

“Horizon Line Somewhere Over China”, the works refer to locations around the world. The “Scapes” series comes in various colours — blue, red, orange and green — that gradually become lighter from top to bottom and each with a contrasting cut. “I got onto an aeroplane,



completely empty, and flew to Los Angeles... and these ‘scapes’... had their origins from that, from being up in the sky essentially and thinking about where we are now culturally,” Hudson, who is known for his use of melted plasticine in his works, said.

“A lot of people now are posting their first experience of being up in the aeroplane and I think there's a reason people are doing that because not only is it very beautiful... we do look at horizons and we start to think about things that are per-

haps bigger than ourselves.” The paintings, currently on show at the Unit London gallery, are a departure from Hudson's past vivid works of jungles as well as a modern re-imagining of the narrative of William Hogarth's “The Rake's Progress”. “For me it was a big leap in the sense that people know of me for making these sort of jungles that are kind of very traumatic..., things fighting for survival,” he said. “The criticism I might have had of myself was ‘This is super minimalistic work compared to what you do and was I ready to do it’... But actually when I made the first one..., there was something more than just a line.” “Scapes” is on show until February 12.

— Reuters



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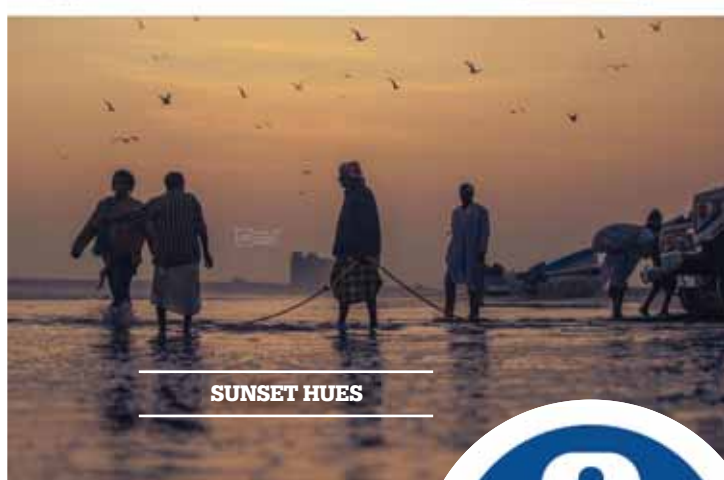
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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Sony Music says it acquires Bob Dylan's catalog of recorded music



SONY MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT (SME) announced it has fully acquired Bob Dylan's entire back catalog of recorded music, as well as the rights to multiple future new releases, in a major expansion of SME's six-decade relationship with the artist.

This landmark agreement, concluded in July 2021, comprises the entirety of Bob Dylan's recorded body of work since 1962, beginning with the artist's self-titled debut album and continuing through 2020's highly acclaimed and successful *Rough and Rowdy Ways*.

Bob Dylan and SME will continue to collaborate on a range of future catalog reissues in the artist's renowned and top-selling Bootleg Series, which began in 1991 and includes 14 releases through last year's lauded *Springtime in New York: The Bootleg Series Vol. 16* (1980-1985). The agreement also provides the opportunity for SME to partner with Dylan on additional projects.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Bob Dylan's singular recording career. He was signed to SME's Columbia Records in October 1961 by the label's John Hammond and recorded his debut album that same year. His Bob Dylan album marked the start of an unparalleled musical journey by a master of music who continues to have a profound and global impact on culture.

Bob Dylan said, "Columbia Records and Rob Stringer have been nothing but good to me for many, many years and a whole lot of records. I'm glad that all my recordings can stay where they belong."

In making the announcement, Rob Stringer, Chairman, Sony Music Group, said, "Columbia Records has had a special relationship with Bob Dylan from the beginning of his career and we are tremendously proud and excited to be continuing to grow and evolve our ongoing 60-year partnership. Bob is one of music's greatest icons and an artist of unrivaled genius. The essential impact he and his recordings continue to have on popular culture is second to none and we're thrilled he will now be a permanent member of the Sony Music family. We are excited to work with Bob and his team to find new ways to make his music available to his many fans today and to future generations."

Bob Dylan is one of our culture's most influential and groundbreaking artists. In the decades since he first burst into the public's consciousness via New York City's Greenwich Village folk music scene in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan has sold more than 125 million records around the world and amassed a singular body of work that includes some of the greatest and most popular songs the world has ever known. He continues to traverse the globe each year, performing nearly 100 concerts annually in front of audiences who embrace his new music with the same fervor as they do his classics. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 — the first songwriter to receive such a distinction — cited by the Swedish Academy "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition." — **Reuters**

TRAVEL TALES

Travel as healing



BEFORE THE pandemic, when Mary Calliste, 32, travelled, she would try to hit as many tourist attractions as she could. But in early December, Calliste, who works in the financial services industry out of Plainfield, New Jersey, went to Guatemala and stayed at an eco-friendly hotel called Lush Atitlán. There, she ate vegan meals, walked around the natural reserve and listened to music.

And loved it. From now on, she said, "I see myself incorporating a lot more of my needs into my travel instead of what I can see."

As the pandemic lingers

Peloton exercise bikes to adding programmes that address mental health. Hilton has created a program called Five Feet to Fitness, which includes an interactive kiosk with fitness tutorials and a gym's worth of equipment in some rooms.

At Miraval Resorts & Spas locations, guests over the past year have come in "having experienced symptoms of stress that they, quite frankly, were unfamiliar with," said Simon Marxer, the hotel group's associate vice-president for wellness offerings.

In April, Miraval partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness to create Journeys With Intention, a

services like massages and facials, were hit hard last year. Hotel and resort spas experienced a 42-per cent dip in revenues, while destination spas, which offer an immersive experience, were down 37 per cent, according to a report by the Global Wellness Institute published this month. But the wellness industry has since begun a rapid recovery, the report said, projecting that the spa sector will grow 17 per cent annually through 2025.

Still, the downturn forced hotels and resorts — and their guests — to expand their notions of wellness and what activities fall under that umbrella. Before the



into its third calendar year, it's probably not surprising that travellers are increasingly looking to their vacations to work on their mental and physical wellness. In a recent American Express survey, 76 per cent of respondents said they wanted to spend more on travel that improves their well-being, and 55 per cent said they would be willing to pay extra for these services or activities.

That has hotels ramping up their wellness offerings, from outfitting rooms with

customisable wellness programme that allows guests to choose from a selection of "journeys" according to their health goals. Among the offerings: self-connection, grief and loss, and mental well-being, as well as more standard spa, adventure and fitness programmes.

"What we're seeing, certainly in hospitality, is the need to serve really the whole person," Marxer said.

Spas Took a Hit Spas, with their focus on high-touch, one-on-one

pandemic, a wellness trip was probably centred on a spa's traditional services, said Caroline Klein, chief communications officer of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, a luxury hotel group. Now, hotels may offer nature walks, meditation, yoga or any number of creative offerings.

In some ways, hotels are responding to the lifestyles that many people adopted at the height of lockdowns, including making home-cooked meals and taking virtual fitness classes.

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Will Omicron leave and we have immunity!

WE HAVE ALL followed the arrival of the latest coronavirus variant (Omicron) and its rapid spread in most countries of the world. Is the reality of this arrival so comprehensive that, this wave ends up being the last of the pandemic (Covid-19)? Who knows, maybe this won't be the last wave either! There are not many things I would like to be super confident about but this is one of them! A new variant that avoids antibodies, for instance, can emerge to hit us. Not to mention that by the time any country emerges from this wave, each individual and their body will be in radically different immune zones — some stronger, some weaker, some new and some possibly more stable! So without a doubt, herd immunity is the key to ending such pandemic and its basic building blocks start with every individual in society.

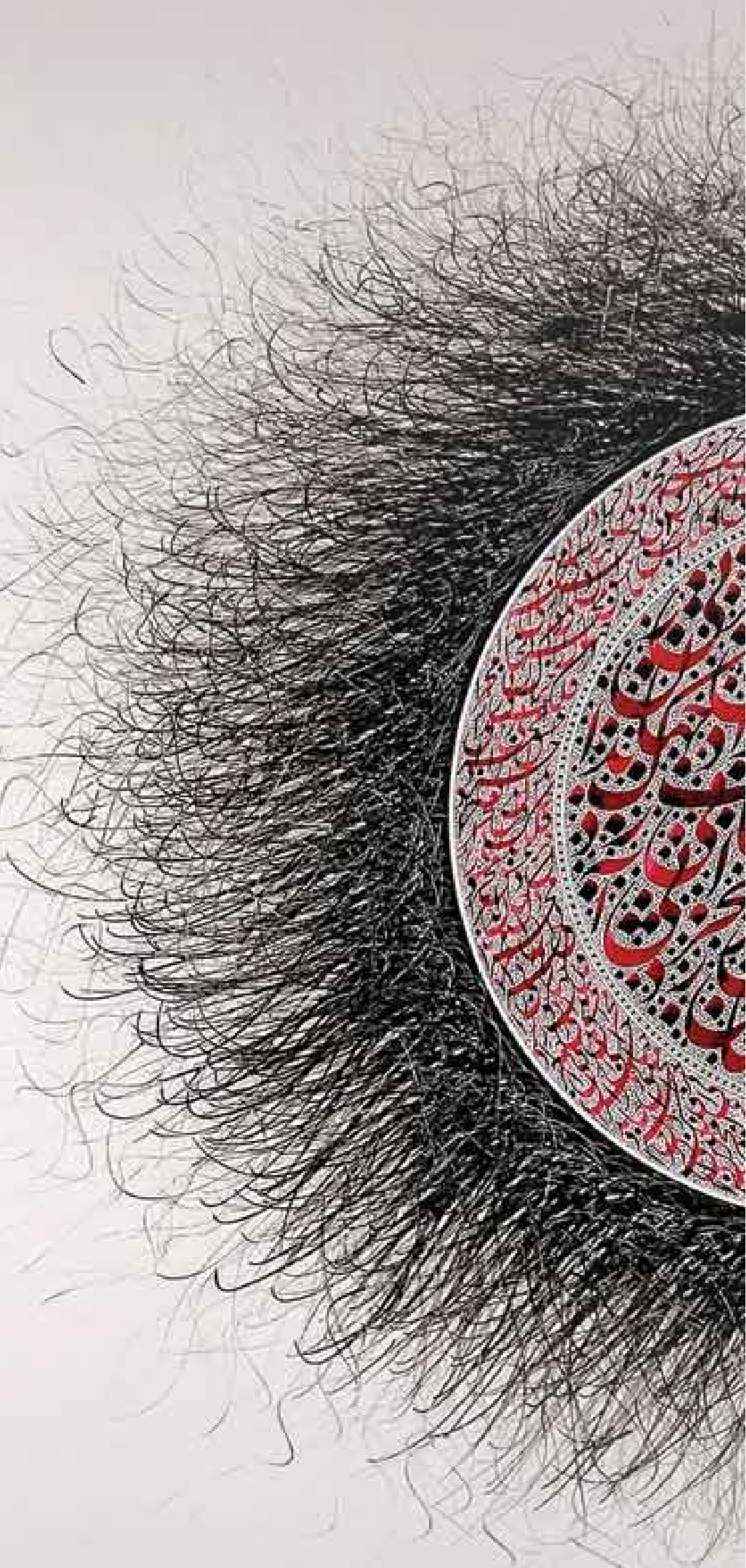
However, neither the immunity caused by the virus nor the immunity we gain from the vaccine against infection seems to last very long. Whatever the experts hope, additional doses or infection may keep our defences against mild cases continuous. You will probably agree with me here that it is not always clear why people respond differently to the same viruses or immunisations. You may notice that some people generate strong reactions and others never do. Thus when new variants emerge, they will again expose cracks that lack protection, in the same way, that individuals with different exposure histories are not

expected to achieve the same levels of immune protection. I might say here, some people will be left with sheltered houses of thatch, others of wood and others of bricks, because the virus is not neutral and the fact that it has never been.

Whatever the case, with an increase in the rate of immunisation and booster doses, for example, immunity will be raised on average, while we can still expect an increase in infection with whatever future path the virus takes. Perhaps this will be the last wave of the coronavirus, spreading so quickly and we will get a period of delay...maybe! And even if a new antibody-avoiding variant appears on the scene, there are somehow limitations to how this virus develops, especially since by this point, many immune systems have seen enough to predict what the virus will infect us next.

In the end, future waves of infection will continue to have their own problems. So, tracking them may be more complex, because they are not synchronous and also those epidemics may start and end at different times. Not to mention that as immunity ebbs and flows, our fates will continue to be divided, at the level of individuals and societies alike. Indeed, when the threat is contagious, it is not our immune differences that define us, but the common ground we provide to the virus when we allow it to spread!

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



Persian ‘Nastaliq’ WOWS Muscat’s adoring art lovers

By Yeru Ebuon

Whether he is in Europe or Oman, the unimposing Iranian artist Ali Pasandedih always turn heads with his art. A master in calligraphy, his work not only is a testament to the beauty of Iranian and Arabic calligraphy but shows the potential of what can be done with words and abstract art on a canvas or a piece of paper.

"I'm very interested in poetry, and poetry is my driving force. I get excited when I hear a beautiful poem and I try to use it in my work", he shared.

His interest in calligraphy started when he was 12 years old growing up in a small town in Iran with very few facilities or opportunities for a budding artist. Regardless of the challenges, he practised on his own for years without a teacher. By the time he was 21 years old with enough experience and mastery of his craft, he pursued calligraphy art-making as a career.

"The works of the ancient old masters inspired me. My only favourite field is calligraphy and especially the style of Nastaliq", he said.

"Nastaliq is known as the most famous style of calligraphy in Iran", he said. Developed in Persia (modern-day Iran) between the 14th and 15th centuries, a lot of calligraphers in Iran including Afghanistan and Pakistan are attracted by the style because out of the many different styles, it is the most fluid to work with that fits very well with Arabic Script.

"I usually use the poems of great poets like Rumi, which are full of meaning and concept. These poems, lead mankind to the right path of life. The reason for choosing calligraphy for me is the same interest in finding the true meaning of life. And I would love to share this experience with others", Ali shared.

Invited for a solo exhibition by the Art and Soul Gallery at the Waterfront in Qurum, his travel

to Oman was his 16th solo exhibition. Running from January 16 to 25, the exhibition came to a close with lots of appreciation among the Oman art enthusiasts.

But unlike other exhibits, Ali also conducted a "by reservation only" workshop on January 22, showing to other artists some of the techniques he used and giving an in-depth look at the beauty of his style of calligraphy.

"The biggest misconception

calligraphy and the traditional ink has more quality than other inks," he said.

"I had many exhibitions over the years, each of them was memorable. But I love foreign exhibitions because they allow me to meet new people and cultures. There's no telling but I hope to be back in Muscat again soon for another exhibition," he said.

"For those with interest in cal-



about calligraphy art is that people had this impression that it must only be read. More than the text as well, the overall experience, the beauty of the work of art is preceded by reading", he said.

Ali brought with him 37 of his works displayed for the adoring public of Oman to inspect and take a closer look.

"Creating a piece can take time and they vary just like other art. Sometimes it takes two or three hours but there are times that it can take a few months", he said.

"For instance, in this exhibition, there are two works named 'Asma al-Hassani' and 'tumult' that took the most time, due to the size and number of words used in it.

The choice is difficult, each work has its place in my heart", he said.

A close inspection of his works on display showed that Ali preferred to use paper and ink as a medium.

"Using glassy paper is ideal for

ligraphy, my advice is that always look for something you are interested in and try to be the best version of yourself.

Once you decided you want to take the path of a calligrapher, start this art with an experienced master. Calligraphy, like many arts, takes time and students have to work hard.

They also have to be very patient", he said.

"Importantly, make sure to find a space where you can have peace. My studio is at home because I have peace there and the space is ready to do the art-work. Having a calm environment is essential.

If you want inspiration, look into nature as it provides an inexhaustible resource. Nature acts both as an inspiration and as a powerful and energising stimulus", he said.

Ali will be crossing over to the United Arab Emirates next for another exhibition after Oman. For workshops or other updates, he can be reached through his Instagram @alipasandideh.

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