

Initiative to boost wages of new private sector workers

The Ministry of Labour is pressing ahead with its initiative to boost the wages of fresh Omani workers who recently joined the private sector. The initiative encourages private sector firms to facilitate the employment of a new batch of 342 Omani workers having different specialties and qualifications, among them 122 university degree holders, 100 post-General Education Diploma (GED) holders and 120 GED holders. As many as 2,190 jobs were unveiled under the initiative since it was first announced in June 2021. — ONA



P10

VERSTAPPEN WINS FORMULA ONE WORLD TITLE



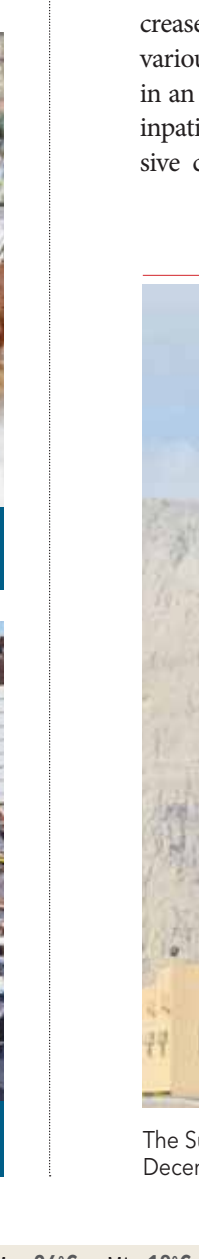
P13

BANKS TO PROVIDE BANKING ACCESS TO SPECIAL NEEDS CUSTOMERS



P20

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF INTEREST FOR SCIENCE AND DISCOVERY



■ RIYADH

HM SENDS MESSAGE TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a written message to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The message deals with the advanced relations binding the two countries and their peoples and means of promoting them in all spheres. The message was handed over by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he met here on Sunday with his Saudi counterpart HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud. **SEE P3**

■ MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO KUWAIT EMIR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on the death of Shaikha Wafiqah Mubarak Al Hamad Al Mubarak al Sabah. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience. — ONA

STUDY TO AMEND LAW TO PROTECT FUNDS

The Council of Ministers has endorsed a study on amending the Law on Protecting Public Funds and Conflict of Interests promulgated under Royal Decree No. 112/2011. The statute seeks to enhance transparency and government procedures on combating corruption, according to a statement issued by the Council. **SEE P3**

INSIDE



IRANIAN ANIMAL LOVERS DECRY PLANTO BAN PETS

P6



POWERFUL TORNADOES KILL 83 ACROSS SIX US STATES

P8

His Majesty to visit UK

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a private visit this Tuesday to the United Kingdom (UK).

This came in a statement issued on Sunday by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows:

“His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a private visit to the United Kingdom lasting several days, with effect from Tuesday, December 14, 2021.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a delegation comprising

Visit aims to upgrade the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom

the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Minister of the Royal Office, the Foreign Minister and the Ambassador of the Sultanate of

Oman to the UK.

His Majesty's visit aims to upgrade the advanced relations between Sultanate of Oman and the UK, to serve the two countries' joint interests and achieve aspirations of their peoples. The visit will also touch on regional and international topics of common concern.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him continued good health and well-being!” — ONA



Covid: Booster jabs for all above 18

VINOD NAIR
[@vinotnair](#)

The Supreme Committee entrusted with undertaking measures to tackle developments resulting from Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Sunday headed by Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, in the presence of other members of the committee.

The committee studied the epidemiological situation of the Covid-19 at the global level in light of the latest data on the virus and its variants, especially the new mutant Omicron, which has led to a significant increase in the number of cases in various countries. It has resulted in an increase in the number of inpatients in wards and intensive care units, in addition to

deaths in some countries.

The reports on the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate of Oman indicate a slight increase in positive cases, with the continuation of low rates of inpatients in hospital and intensive care units, and a high rate of immunisation with a single dose to 93 per cent of the target group.

To protect members of society from this epidemic, and to preserve the capabilities of the health system in the Sultanate of Oman to deal with this and other diseases, the committee decided the following:

Starting vaccination with the third dose and the booster dose with the anti-coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccine for those aged 18 years and over. Target groups will be announced soon by the Ministry of Health. **TURN TO P5**

■ ARMED FORCES DAY CELEBRATION



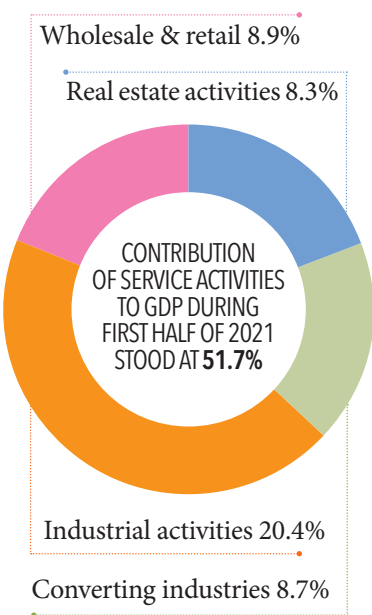
The Sultanate of Oman marked the Armed Forces Day which falls on December 11 every year, on Sunday. **SEE P2**

Budget projects 6% rise in revenues to RO 10.58 b

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zinabalnasseri](#)

MUSCAT: Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said the total general revenues of the proposed State Budget 2022 are estimated at RO 10.58 billion, 6% higher than revenues expected due to be collected by the end of this year (2021). Oil and gas returns are set to comprise 68% of total revenues, against 32% for non-oil and gas revenues. This was stated during a press conference organised by the Finance Ministry on Sunday to raise the level of transparency and outline the financial, economic, commercial and investment results, as well as the government's approaches and general goals for next year.

Following the principle of precaution habitually espoused in financial policy, oil revenues are calculated on the basis of \$50 a barrel, said al Habsi, adding that the volume of general expenditure estimated for fiscal year 2022 stands at about RO 12.1 billion, with an expected 2% increase in spending during 2022, compared to expected spending as at the end of 2021. This includes RO 1.3 billion as the cost of debt service. Al Habsi added that, “Deficit



2022 BUDGET BASES OIL PRICE OF \$50 PER BARREL

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE RO 12.1 BILLION

GROWTH RATE EXPECTED 2.5%, BEST IN GCC

in 2022, estimated on the basis of \$50 a barrel, will stand at RO 1.5 billion. It stands for 15% of total revenues and 5% of the Gross Domestic Product. It also falls

within estimated deficit of the Medium Term Fiscal Plan. The cost of repayment of government loans in 2022 is expected to stand at RO 2.7 billion.”

Over the past few years, the national economy passed through a succession of financial hurdles: The recession of international oil prices due to the decline of global demand, the rise of general debt to record levels, the pandemic of coronavirus and the hike in cost of borrowing—which all caused a collective negative impact on the Sultanate of Oman's creditworthiness.

Preliminary indicators of the budget this year point to the possibility of achieving the lowest deficit since 2014, despite oil prices fluctuation, said Al Habsi.

Budget 2022 was drafted in conformity with the 10th Five Year Plan and Oman Vision 2040 and this requires taking all current precautions into account, he explained. The budget aims to achieve a number of economic and social goals, among them maintaining safe levels of government spending, giving priority to projects of economic and social objectives and finalising digital transformation, to name a few, he added. **TURN TO P2**

Watch meteor shower tonight

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is currently witnessing the falling of Geminid meteor shower that will reach peak on Monday night and Tuesday dawn.

Astronomy observer Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Mahrrouqi, member of the Omani Astronomical Society, said that the

month of December will witness a number of astronomical events including the Geminid meteor showers which fall from a point in the constellation Gemini, hence the name Geminids.

He explained that the year 2021 is not ideal for observing the Geminid meteor due to the

presence of the humpback moon in the sky's dome coinciding with its peak activity which will cause the obliteration of most of the faint meteors. However, Geminid meteors are numerous and bright, so it is possible to have a clear view of the shower after the moon descends around 1:30 am. — ONA



RAO MARKS ARMED FORCES DAY



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) marked the Armed Forces Day which falls on December 11 every year, under the auspices of Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of Internal Security Service, on Sunday.

The celebration, held at the shooting fields of the Sultan's Armed Forces Training Regiment, began with a military salute to the chief guest and then the RAO music band played the Royal Anthem. The chief guest and the attendees watched samples of military training, shows and various field skills which displayed the efficiency and skills of the affiliates of RAO. This was followed by equestrian and tent pegging shows staged by the Sultan of Oman Armour Cavalry and a free fall show by the Free Fall Team of the Sultanate of Oman Parachutes (SOP).

The RAO music band performed military music followed by a parade of advanced military equipment used by RAO for protecting the nation and preserving its achievements.

The head of the Internal Security Service conferred medals of long and excellent services and good conduct on a number of RAO affiliates in recognition of their efforts in performing national duties.

The event was attended by commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security units, senior officers of SAF and the other military and security bodies, senior retired officers, officials at government authorities, shaikhs and dignitaries of Muscat Governorate, officers, commissioned officers and personnel of RAO.



Budget projects 6% rise in revenues

FROM PAGE 1

Maintaining spending on basic services like education, health and social welfare figure high on the agenda of Budget 2020, the minister said, noting that, in case oil prices rise higher than the endorsed rate, priority will be given to the use of financial returns to cut down deficit and repay loans.

On his turn, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the contribution of service activities to the GDP during the first half of this year stood at 51.7%, wholesale and retail 8.9%, real estate activities 8.3%, industrial activities 20.4% and converting industries 8.7%.

Al Yousuf added that a new price guide for government service fees (aimed to facilitate procedures for service beneficiaries) will begin to be implemented with effect from next year, as a first phase, on the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the municipalities sector.

For his part, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment

Authority, said that more than 110 investment projects will be implemented in 2021 and 2022.

Al Murshidi added that the volume of actual investment spending stood at RO 2.6 billion in 2021. In 2022, the volume of spending is scheduled to stand at RO 2.9 billion through the expansion of current projects and the accommodation of new projects.

Speaking in detail, Al Murshidi said that, in 2022, the volume of investment spending in the tourism sector is expected to stand at RO 193 million, RO 57 million in the mining sector, RO 116 million in the logistics sector, RO 156 million in the sectors of communications and information technology, RO 99 million in the food sector, RO 54 million in the fisheries sector, RO 1.41 billion in the energy sector, RO 803 million in the general services sector and RO 52 million in sundry sectors.

Economy Minister Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri said that the ministry is working in cooperation with other government departments to provide stimulus initiatives. "The Economic Stimulus Programme is still valid and we are working to upgrade it," said Al Saqri.

Meanwhile, Abdullah bin Salim al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, said that civil ministries' spending in 2022 is estimated at RO 4.3 billion. He added that state budget 2022, which target safe and sustainable levels of spending, gives priority to productive sectors.

Al Harthi added that government investment spending during 2022 will reach RO 5 billion.

He added that the Sultanate of Oman's credit rating is expected to improve gradually during the next few years upon the implementation of the 10th Five Year Plan and fiscal policies aimed at achieving fiscal sustainability.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said that average target growth of the national economy from 2021 to 2040 will reach 5%. He affirmed that the national economy will recover at the right pace.

Al Maawali explained that the rate of expected growth in Sultanate of Oman's economy for this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, is expected to be 2.5%, the second best rate of growth in the GCC region. — ONA

MoH announces revised jab dates

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Health, represented by the General Directorate of Health Sciences, has announced the revised dates of vaccination for both Omanis and expatriates.

"All health centres would continue to provide Covid-19 vaccines for Omanis, from Sunday December 12," said Dr Nihal Afifi, Head of Primary Health and contact point for vaccination. Accordingly, citizens Wilayat of Al Seeb will be given

vaccination from 8 am to 8 pm at the University Health Centre while people of Bausher are to get it from Al Khuwair North Health Centre between 8 am and 8 pm. The citizens of Wilayat of Muttrah will receive vaccination from Ruwi Health Centre from 8 am to 2 pm while people of Wilayat of Muscat are to get their doses from Muscat Health Centre between 8 am and 2 pm.

Al Amerat Health Centre is all set to provide vaccines for people from Wilayat of Al Amerat (8 am to 2 pm) and Sahil Health Centre will provide vaccination

to Omanis of Wilayat of Qurayat from 8 am to 2 pm. Vaccine for non-Omani citizens would be at the old airport building which was the Field Hospital earlier from 8 am to 2 pm and no previous booking is needed for getting the dose.

In total, the country has administered at least 600, 000 doses of Covid vaccines to various target groups so far. This indicates that 59.6 per cent of the country's population has received 2 doses of the vaccine. However, nearly 65 per cent of the people have been vaccinated with one dose.

SQU graduation ceremony on Monday and Wednesday



MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, will preside over the graduation ceremony of the 32nd batch of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to be held on Monday and Wednesday.

The first group of the 32nd batch will graduate on Monday, while the second group will graduate on Wednesday.

The first group represents

students of the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the College of Education and the College of Engineering.

The second group represents students of the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, the College of Nursing, the College of Science, the College of Economics and Political Science and the College of Law. — ONA

More flights to encourage tourists from Saudi Arabia

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The number of flights between the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia will be increased to boost the movement of tourists and trade between the two countries, the government officials said on Sunday.

Participating in a panel discussion, Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said that citizens from 103 countries are now allowed to enter the Sultanate of Oman without securing a prior visa and can stay for up to 14 days.

At the same time, citizens from 27 out of these 103 countries can enter the Sultanate of Oman without a prior visa only if they have a Schengen visa in their passport, or have entry visas to the US, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, or Japan.

The 27 countries are India, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Costa Rica, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Armenia, Panama, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkmenistan, Honduras, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Laos, Albania, Bhutan, Peru, Salvador,



Mexico, Vietnam, Cuba, and the Maldives.

Maithaa said that Saudi Arabia is a promising tourism market for Omani companies in the sector and the 'Marhaba Oman' will help cement the close ties between the two countries.

She said that the focus is on the integration of the tourism sector between the Gulf countries, not competition. There is an agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia to attract new investments to the region's markets.

The officials admitted that there has been a lack of promotion

of Omani tourism in Saudi Arabia in the past, but a plan has been made to have more promotion programmes to enhance the tourism movement.

"We seek to open more recreational tourism projects to attract family tourists from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries," she said.

She said the Sultanate of Oman has main airports in Muscat, Salalah, Duqm, and Khasab and there are plans to increase the number of tourist flights to and from Khasab.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) opened the

'Marhaba Oman' event on Sunday under the patronage of Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah.

The two-day event at Kempinski Hotel Muscat is bringing together tourism and travel sector operators from the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

"The aim is to attract major tourism companies in the Saudi market and create channels for communication to enhance areas of cooperation in the tourism sector, besides highlighting the national tourism strategy 2040,"

The event will include panel discussions and B2B meetings between the Omani and Saudi tourism companies to exchange expertise in the tourism sector. On the sidelines of the event, visit programmes will be organised to the most prominent tourist sites and landmarks in the Sultanate of Oman to familiarise the Saudi tourism companies with the potentials and capabilities of the tourism sector.

The Omani Tourism Strategy 2040 focuses on promoting the Sultanate of Oman as a destination for adventure, relaxation, conferences, and exhibitions.



His Majesty sends written message to Saudi King

RIYADH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a written message to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The message deals with the advanced relations binding the two countries and their peoples, and means of promoting them in all spheres.

The message was handed over by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign

Minister, when he met here on Sunday with his Saudi counterpart HRH Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud.

During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings and best wishes of His Majesty the Sultan to King Salman and the Saudi people.

On his turn, Prince Faisal asked Sayyid Badr to convey greetings and best wishes of King Salman to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. — ONA

Initiative to boost wages of new private sector workers

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour is pressing ahead with its initiative to boost the wages of fresh Omani workers who recently joined the private sector. The initiative encourages private sector firms to facilitate the employment of a new batch of 342 Omani workers having different specialties and qualifications, among them 122 university degree holders,

100 post-General Education Diploma (GED) holders and 120 GED holders. As many as 2,190 jobs were unveiled under the initiative since it was first announced in June 2021. A specialised team will follow up the jobs proposed for subsidy by the companies concerned and check the commitment of the firms to the contract signed with the Labour Ministry. — ONA

Total outstanding credit extended by ODCs grows 5pc

MUSCAT: The total outstanding credit extended by the other depository corporations (ODCs) consisting of conventional and Islamic banks in the Sultanate of Oman grew by 5.0 per cent to RO 27.8 billion at the end of October 2021, while the credit to the private sector demonstrated moderate increase of 2.4 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.4 billion.

According to the data issued by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), the non-financial

corporate sector receives the highest share of the total private sector credit, over 46.6 per cent, followed by household sector accounted for 45.1 per cent at end of October 2021. The share of financial corporations was 4.7 per cent and other sectors received the remaining 3.6 per cent of the total private sector credit as at end of October 2021.

Total deposits held with the ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 5.3 per cent to reach RO 25.2



billion at the end of October 2021. Total private sector deposits increased by 4.3 per cent to RO 17.1 billion.

In terms of the sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest share goes to households' deposits at 51.6 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 32.1 per cent, financial corporations at 13.9 per cent and the other sectors at 2.4 per cent.

— ONA

Hotel guests rise 37.9pc



MUSCAT: The total number of hotel guests in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 37.9 per cent till the end of October 2021 to stand at 941,418 compared to 682,728 for the same period in 2020.

The occupancy rate grew by 36.3 per cent compared to 26.7 per cent for the same period in 2020, according to the latest statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total revenues of these hotels fell by 3.5 per cent to RO 69,529,000 till the end of October 2021, compared to RO 72,066,000 in the same period in 2020.

Among nationalities, the Omani guests constituted the highest percentage of visitors with a surge by 93.5 per cent to stand at 680,238, followed by the Asian guests with 109,764, the European guests with 44,628, the Arab guests (excluding GCC countries) with 37,259 and the GCC guests with 20,751.

The number of American guests reached 15,246, followed by the Oceanian guests with 5,548, the African with 3,376 guests and 24,609 guests from other nationalities. — ONA

40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman - 2021 Golf Tournament.



Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman in Collaboration with the Ghala Golf Club 11th December 2021

Mr Faiz Mohammed Riaz (Board Member - Ghala Golf Club, Managing Director - Mohammed riaz & Partner LLC), Mr Ahmed Al Lamki (winner), Mr Fayaz Thaha (Sir Lanka airline), H.E Omar Lebbe Ameerajwad (Ambassador of Sri Lanka), H.E Humid Al Maany, Khalil Al Wahaibi (General Manager -Ghala Golf)






2021



2040

LOADING...

4,800

ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY'S ANNOUNCEMENT, THE PLANNED COMPLEXES ARE EXPECTED TO OFFER UP TO 4,800 HOUSING UNITS TO OMANIS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE RESIDENTIAL LAND

24,000

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSING UNITS WILL BE ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE 24,000 PEOPLE

A NEW STAGE IN HOUSING

The housing plan for 2021 is in line with the national priorities of Vision 2040 and based on the National Urban Development Strategy – performance indicators, initiatives and ambitious projects

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkuttyvp

A successful and prosperous housing sector has been one of the most important features of the Sultanate of Oman's development over the last four decades. The government continues to ensure necessary land for the housing of its citizens. Significantly, a substantial amount in the state budget is allocated to provide the citizens with the necessary funding that would enable them to find places of their residence.

Hence, the housing policy reflects the importance of this sector. The country has made every effort to provide the necessary land for the housing of citizens. Simultaneously the government also builds housing units for low-income residents,

and provides housing assistance and housing loans.

The housing plan for 2021 is in line with the national priorities of Vision 2040 and based on the National Urban Development Strategy — performance indicators, initiatives and ambitious projects.

The Sultanate of Oman has reached a new stage in housing services, namely with the project “Integrated Residential Neighbourhoods”, which supports existing housing policies in the country, such as the search for suitable alternatives to provide adequate housing for citizens eligible for residential land allocations.

Described as ‘Al Souruh’, this national initiative was conceived as part of the government's vision to provide quality homes to the citizens at an affordable price. The projects under Al Souruh will be integrated communities with

infrastructure and community service facilities including mosque, commercial complexes, health centres, public parks, outdoor sports facilities etc.

And the projects are considered a first-of-its-kind as it is based on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, and are being assigned to a real estate company for development according to the best standards.

The projects aim at promoting the ownership of homes by developing quality housing in integrated neighbourhoods at reasonable prices, providing new alternatives to reduce the volume of applications of citizens entitled to residential lands under the Land Law and its annexes, and stimulating the economy through the involvement of the private sector.

Towards the end of October this year, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning rolled out the process for local and international real estate developers to compete for five new integrated residential complexes.

According to the ministry's announcement, the planned complexes are expected to offer up to 4,800 housing units to Omanis eligible to receive residential land. And will be able

to accommodate 24,000 people.

A total of five new projects with a total area of 1.9 million sq metres will be developed in the governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, and Al Batinah South.

Priority in the project, which will have all the requirements and modern lifestyle at a very attractive price, will be given to those who are “to residents of areas close” to these complexes. They will be surrounded by an integrated system of infrastructure services as well as social and services facilities available for citizens.

In the first quarter of this year, Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, said that there has been an accumulation of housing applications registered in some governorates since 2008 due to the non-availability of suitable lands in those governorates.

“As part of its efforts to achieve the main objective of granting lands to those who deserve it, the ministry continues to make necessary plans to accommodate the largest possible amount of these requests. The plan for 2021 includes the distribution of 23,066 plots of land in the various governorates”, he said.



■ FROM PAGE 1

Covid-19: Booster jabs for all above 18

In light of the Supreme Committee's previous adoption of the principle of vaccination as a condition to allow entry to all government units and private sector establishments, the Supreme Committee has adopted the unified mechanism for dealing with unvaccinated employees and students for entering the units of the state's administrative apparatus. The competent authorities will issue a circular on this to all units.

The Supreme Committee emphasized that entry to mosques, events, activities, international conferences, other events at wedding halls and other venues as well as local events and activities involving crowds, sports activities, and exhibitions, will be held with a 50 per cent capacity of the venues. Participation will be limited to those who have been given two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine approved in the Sultanate of Oman



(those aged 18 and above) and with mandatory physical distancing and wearing of masks in the correct manner. In order to avoid a rise in the incidence of the disease and the various preventive measures that may accompany it, such as preventing the establishment of some events and closing of some activities, the SC stresses the need to adhere to all decisions and not to be lenient in adhering to the precautionary measures.

University of Nizwa, Arab Open University sign agreement

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 12

The Arab Open University, in partnership with the University of Nizwa, organised its 7th forum titled 'Oman's Vision 2040 and its Implications in the Education Sector' recently. It dealt with the development of the education sector's systems, policies and outputs, and the impact of the priority of citizenship, identity, heritage and national culture on the development of education.

The conference, held under the auspices of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance, was attended by a number of members of the State Council, academics, researchers and students from both universities.

The forum witnessed signing of a joint cooperation agreement between the University of Nizwa and the Arab Open University in the fields of academic and research cooperation, community service, student affairs and learning resources. It comes within the framework of the two universities' keenness to develop relations and ensure their continuity and development in many fields.

It was signed by Prof Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan al Rawahi,



President of the University of Nizwa, and Mohammad al Hazizi, who is assigned to chair the Arab Open University.

The activities of the forum began with a speech by Mohammad al Hazizi, who is in charge of the presidency of the Arab Open University, in which he stressed that the university, in partnership with the University of Nizwa, has devoted the seventh forum to study the development of education and its systems in the Sultanate of Oman to achieve the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040.

He added: "The Arab Open University always seek to keep pace with social, economic and educational changes and developments in a way that contributes to achieving its mission on the one hand, and

enhances its scientific position among the academic community in the Sultanate of Oman on the other. Therefore, the partnership with the University of Nizwa in organising this forum comes within the practical and societal goals that the university seeks to achieve in order to serve its vision of constructive scientific cooperation, and partnership with the leading practical institutions in the Sultanate of Oman."

Dr Khalifa al Qasabi, representative of the scientific committee of the forum, stressed the importance of the forum and the valuable research papers it presented to achieve the goals of the forum. The Operational Committee had previously held several meetings in which it defined criteria for accepting

research papers. The best of them were selected in two phases. The first was to receive the proposed research summaries, whereby those summaries were evaluated.

He added: "33 working papers were received and were judged by the members of the committee based on the criteria prepared in a special evaluation form that took into account the practical foundations of the practical research in terms of its originality, the novelty of its idea, the completeness of its elements and the quality of its procedures, as well as the research affiliation to one of the forum's themes."

Dr Ayisha bint Hamad al Darmaki, assistant professor and scientific supervisor of the forum, also reviewed the main aspects of organising the forum. She also reviewed the process of selecting themes and working papers.

The second session of the activities of the first day was entitled "Legislation and Governance and its Impact on Quality Control of Education".

The forum witnessed a great interaction by the attendees and participants, who stressed the importance of the working papers contained in the forum, which need to be considered during the next stage, in line with Vision 2040.

Children feted for 6 Australian innovation patents

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

A Patent Award Ceremony was held here recently to motivate the Young Innovators of the Sultanate of Oman who have contributed towards for Australian Innovation Patents.

During this special event, over 20 children aged 8 to 16 who have contributed for 6 patents in last one year were felicitated along with their parents. The projects that are filed for a patent are as follows, "A Programmed Power Load Regulator Wirelessly Coupled With At Least One Stand Alone Console Unit", "IoT Controlled Autobot for Warehouse Management", "An IoT Controlled Tilt Indicating Device", "Artificial Intelligence Based Multipurpose Cradle System", "An Artificial Neural Network Based Umbrella For Visually Impaired", "IoT Based Student Presence Notification Device For School And School Buses". Three of the above 6 projects have already been granted a Patent and remaining three are awaiting the grant. One of the children granted with the Patent, Jyoshita Datta Juluru said, "Everything we learnt with Arcomm was new and their practical sessions every week were so interesting, which encouraged us to innovate and excel with Patents."

The event was graced by the presence of Zahir bin Khalid bin Sulaiman al Sulaimani, Chairman of ARCOMM Oman, Mazin bin Zahir bin Khalid al Sulaimani, CEO of ARCOMM Oman, and Dr Arun Raaza, Founder CEO & Innovations Head of ARCOMM. Zahir addressed the gathering and said "we are on a mission to enable lots of young innovators from the Sultanate of Oman with world-class training and make the country as one of the best innovation hubs in the world. I heartily congratulate all the children whose patents have been granted."

During the event the children presented their patent innovations and explained how they developed those ideas into prototypes and working models. They also explained the importance of the training they underwent in ARCOMM which had kindled and sharpened their innovation skills. One of the parents who attended the event, Dr Yogeeswari, Mother of Nithin Senthilnathan said, "We are extremely happy to be part of the event. Arcomm offers state of the art hands on training in emerging technologies and apart from the Power Load Regulator Innovation Patent, they guided my child to get first prize in Muscat Science Fest 2020".

Gulf German Film Festival on Dec 15, 16

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The German Embassy Muscat, Swiss Embassy Muscat, and the Goethe-Institut Gulf Region have announced the second edition of the Gulf German Film Festival which will take place at the Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Muscat.

The festival will be held on December 15 and 16. Four films will be presented at the Bustan lawn, Khiran side of the Al Bustan Palace.

The opening night will begin with the screening of 'When Hitler stole pink rabbit' by Caroline Link. This Swiss-German production based on Judith Kerr's autobiographic novel of the same title, relates to the story of a young girl and her family who flee Nazi Germany to find refuge in Switzerland, then Paris and finally in London.

The second film, 'Undine'

directed by Christian Petzold, was nominated for the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) 2020. In a modern interpretation, it alludes to the mythical figure of a water nymph. Undine, who works in Berlin as a historian and guide for the municipality, is left by her lover Johannes.

According to the old myth, if a man whom Undine loves betrays her, she has to kill him and return to the water she once came from. Undine tries to resist this curse, although she thinks she has no choice. She meets the industrial diver Christoph and falls for him. However, he can sense that Undine is hiding something...

The second evening, on Thursday, opens with the film 'Too far away' by Sarah Winkensette. It tells the touching story of a 12-year-old country boy who has to start over again, after his family had

to move to the city. In his new school, he befriends Tariq, a boy from Syria, over a joint love for football.

The festival concludes on the same evening with the German production 'Gundermann' (2018) starring Alexander Scheer, Anna Unterberger and Axel Prahl among others.

Gerhard Gundermann, an excavator operator at a coal mine in former East Germany in the 1980s, moonlights a musician at night. He enjoys a growing fanbase in East Germany and becomes even more successful after reunification. This biographical narrative is only one example of Andreas Dresen's films that are subtle chronicles of the German Democratic Republic.

Director of Goethe-Institut Muscat, Theresa Lunardon-Monteiro says: "The Goethe-Institut is truly delighted

to present this selection of excellent German films and different genres in the Sultanate of Oman. We are very happy to welcome the audience in person again and to bring together people who love good cinema."

German Ambassador Thomas Schneider commented, "We are very proud to propose this wonderful event in the Sultanate of Oman. Despite the pandemic, a number of wonderful new movies have been produced and released. It is a great pleasure to welcome a distinguished audience to enjoy contemporary German cinema, which is particularly exciting in an open-air setting under the stars."

The Gulf German film festival in Muscat is represented jointly by the German Embassy, the Swiss Embassy and the Goethe-Institut Muscat.



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority



التميز للسيارات
Premium Motors

Campaign Vehicles Audi

Date of the campaign : 13/12/2021
Campaign type : (Electrical)
Campaign section : (Airbags)
Product description : Cars



The number of affected vehicles	VIN Numbers	The year of production	Vehicle model
36	From WAUBE24B6YN102397 To WAUBE24B61N153503	2000-2001	Audi A4, A4 Cabrio, A6, A8, TT

Description of defect:
Because the airbag manufactured by the company, Takata, especially from the gas generator in these vehicles, has been affected for the life span of this. The device deactivates the driver's airbag protection function when the airbag is sensed.

Procedure:
Gas generator replacement.

For more information:
Kindly contact Premium Motors L.L.C.

Contact data:
22845111 - 98909971

Sharp fall in Turkish lira piles misery on northern Syria

AL-BAB: Mohammed al Debek, a schoolteacher in northern Syria, is on strike: the currency devaluation in neighbouring Turkey has slashed the value of his salary by two-thirds.

His town of Al-Bab lies in a northern area of war-torn Syria that in recent years has turned into a de facto Turkish protectorate.

Because the Turkish lira is now the main currency in the area, its recent nose-dive has heaped further pain on the people living there.

“My salary in 2017 was worth \$160, but today it is worth \$50, a fraction of its value,” the 33-year-old said outside the washed-out yellow walls of his school. “It’s barely enough to pay the rent.”

Ankara does not only have military control of the border region, but most of the products available on the markets and even the mobile phone operator are also Turkish.

Areas of northern Syria run by rebel groups switched to the lira as the main currency last year, replacing the massively devalued Syrian pound.

The lira has lost 45 per cent of its value against the dollar this year alone and Debek’s purchasing power has plummeted, as has everybody else’s in the region.

“After the collapse of the lira, I was forced to look for a second



A Syrian boy shows Turkish coins while shopping in the city of Al-Bab. — AFP

job after school,” he said.

His new afternoon job in a bookshop earns him another \$40 but that still leaves him short of the \$200 he says he needs to make ends meet.

Turkey directly administers several districts of northern Syria and, to seal its presence in the area, has invested heavily in education, health and other sectors.

The region’s economic fate is inextricably tied to Turkey’s and

the lira’s sharp fall in recent weeks piled more misery on an enclave whose inhabitants are already scarred by war.

A recent UN report on the humanitarian situation cited estimates that “97 per cent of the population, even those that are in employment, are living in extreme poverty”.

Inflation is soaring just as fast as it is in neighbouring Turkey, with basic food items such as

bread selling at record prices and purchasing power at its lowest ever.

And when the price of a bag of flatbread stops rising, locals say, the amount of bread inside goes down.

Ahmed Abu Obeida, an official with the region’s chamber of commerce who also owns a company importing food products from Turkey, acknowledged that consumption had slumped.

“The demand for basic materials has decreased, and the citizens in general cannot afford basic things such as their daily needs in food, medicine and heating,” he said.

Hanaa al-Yasbu, a 36-year-old woman who was widowed in an air strike five years ago and has since been living in a camp for war-displaced people, is one of them.

She usually earns around 20 Turkish lira a day by harvesting wheat and potatoes, enough to keep her five children warm and fed.

With her daily income now worth just a dollar and a half, Hanaa has to venture into the countryside to find firewood.

“I dream that I have about 50 lira a day to buy food for my children to feed them, so they do not sleep hungry,” she said.

— AFP



An onlooker poses for a photo during the annual harbour swimming race in Hong Kong. — AFP

Hong Kong’s harbour swim resumes after three years

HONG KONG: An annual swim across Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbour was held on Sunday for the first time in three years, after being cancelled due to the pro-democracy protests and then the pandemic.

The one-kilometre race is among the few major sporting events permitted to resume this year in the financial hub.

However, under the government’s strict anti-virus restrictions only half of the usual 3,000 swimmers were allowed to compete, and all were required to have received two vaccinations and tested Covid negative prior to the event.

Double Olympic silver medal winner Siobhan Haughey was among a number of professional athletes leading cheers for the swimmers when they plunged into the cool sea-

water as Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam’s airhorn blared.

Leung Yuen-ying, 79, the oldest swimmer this year, joined the race with her daughter.

“My father used to race this so I have a special feeling for it,” Leung told reporters.

“I hope that one generation after another can continue to have this meaningful event in Hong Kong,” she said.

The Harbour Race was scrapped last year thanks to the pandemic, with the massive pro-democracy demonstrations rocking the city causing its cancellation in 2019.

First held in 1906, it has been suspended for two periods in history — for five years in the 1940s around the Japanese occupation, and for three decades thanks to pollution before being reinstated in 2011. — AFP

Iranian animal lovers decry plan to ban pets

TEHRAN: “No, my cat is not dangerous,” says Iranian animal lover Mostafa, outraged by a proposal from ultraconservative lawmakers to ban pets.

The 25-year-old, who runs a pet supplies shop on busy Eskandari Street in downtown Tehran, is stunned.

“Crocodiles can be called dangerous, but how can rabbits, dogs and cats be dangerous?” he asked incredulously about the bill introduced a month ago.

The proposed law pits growing numbers of people with pets are unclear.

According to media reports, 75 MPs, or one quarter of parliamentarians, recently signed a text entitled “Support for the rights of the population in relation to harmful and dangerous animals”.

In their introduction, the authors condemn the practice of humans living under one roof with

domesticated animals as a “destructive social problem”.

The phenomenon, they explain, could “gradually change the way of life” by “replacing human and family relationships with feelings and emotional relationships towards animals”.

The proposed law would prohibit “importing, raising, assisting in the breeding of, breeding, buying or selling, transporting, driving or walking, and keeping in the home wild, exotic, harmful and dangerous animals”.

It lists the animals to be banned as “crocodiles, turtles, snakes, lizards, cats, mice, rabbits, dogs and other unclean animals as well as monkeys”.

CHAOS, CORRUPTION
Offenders would risk a fine equivalent to 10 to 30 times the “minimum monthly working wage” of about \$98 or 87 euros and



An Iranian woman plays with her dog in a yard near her house in northern Tehran. — AFP

the “confiscation” of the animal.

In addition, vehicles used to transport the animal would be confiscated for three months.

While Iran is engaged in difficult negotiations on its nuclear programme and enduring a painful economic downturn because of US sanctions, the bill has sparked criticism in the press, mockery on social networks and anger among residents of the capital.

“These projects will certainly cause chaos, corruption and collective disobedience to this law because... living with animals is now a cultural phenomenon,” warned the reformist daily Shargh.

Some Internet users reacted with irony and sarcasm.

“How many times have cats sought to devour you so that you consider them wild, harmful and dangerous?” journalist Yeganeh Khodami asked on Twitter.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

DHAKA

Surgeons to separate conjoined twin girls

Bangladeshi surgeons will on Monday separate conjoined twin toddlers in a marathon procedure long-delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. The two-and-a-half year old girls, Labiba and Lamisa, were born joined at the back and share a spine, genitalia and part of their intestinal tract.

Doctors partially separated their rectums nine days after birth, but follow-up surgery was postponed last year after the country recorded its first



Covid-19 cases.

“My babies cannot sit or properly lie down together,” said Monufa Begum, the 20-year-old mother of the twins.

“It is very difficult to keep them quiet.

NEW DELHI

@narendramodi hacked again by crypto scammers

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Twitter account was hacked on Sunday with a message declaring his country had adopted bitcoin as legal tender and was distributing the cryptocurrency to citizens.

Modi is a prolific tweeter and is the world’s most popular incumbent politician on the platform, with more than 73 million followers on his main account. A swiftly deleted tweet from his main @narendramodi handle said the Indian government had officially



bought 500 bitcoin and was “and distributing them to all residents of the country”, along with a scam link. His office tweeted that the account was “very briefly compromised” and that Twitter had since restored control.

COLOMBO

This is the world’s giant blue sapphire

Sri Lankan authorities on Sunday put on show what they said was the world’s largest natural corundum blue sapphire, weighing 310 kilograms, which was found in a gem pit about three months ago.

Local gemologists, who have examined the sapphire, said it was one of the rarest gems in the world as it weighed more than 300 kilograms. International organisations are yet to certify the precious stone. The sapphire was put on display at the home of one of the gem pit owners in Horana,



65 kilometres south of Colombo. The stone was found in the gem-rich Ratnapura area where local people had previously found the world’s largest star sapphire cluster in a backyard by accident.

Thank you for your condolences

with hearts that are satisfied
with God's judgment and destiny,

Mustahail bin Ahmed Al Mashani

and

**Salim bin Mustahail Al Mashani
and family**

would like to thank all those who shared their
noble feelings and sincere condolences on the sad
demise of our precious and forgiven deceased

Sheikha Salma bint Mohammed Al Mashani

Whether in attendance, through calls
or various social media channels

especially their highnesses the members of
the royal family, their excellences, the honourables,
the Sheikhs, the notables, the citizens, the residents
and all those who shared their sincere condolences
from Oman and abroad, hoping Allah will bless her
with mercy and grant good health to everyone.

Powerful tornadoes kill 83 across six US states

MAYFIELD: Rescuers were desperately searching for survivors early on Sunday after dozens of devastating tornadoes tore through six US states, leaving at least 83 people dead, dozens missing and towns in ruin.

President Joe Biden called the wave of tornadoes, including one that travelled more than 200 miles, “one of the largest” storm outbreaks in American history.

“It’s a tragedy,” a shaken Biden, who pledged support for the affected states, said in televised comments. “And we still don’t know how many lives are lost and the full extent of the damage.”

Scores of search and rescue officials were helping stunned citizens across the US heartland sift through the rubble of their homes and businesses overnight.

More than 70 people are believed to have been killed in Kentucky alone, many of them workers at a candle factory, while at least six died in an Amazon warehouse in Illinois where they were on the night shift processing orders ahead of Christmas.

“This event is the worst, most devastating, most deadly tornado event in Kentucky’s history,” said state governor Andy Beshear, adding he fears “we will have lost more than 100 people.”

“The devastation is unlike



Janet Kimp, 66, and her son Michael Kimp, 25 stand outside their home after collecting belongings after a devastating outbreak of tornadoes ripped through several US states, in Mayfield, on Saturday. – Reuters

anything I have seen in my life, and I have trouble putting it into words,” he told reporters.

Beshear has declared a state of emergency.

The tornado that smashed through Kentucky had rumbled along the ground for over 320 kilometres, Beshear said, one of the longest on record.

The longest a US tornado has ever tracked along the ground was

a 219-mile storm in Missouri in 1925. It claimed 695 lives.

‘LIKE A BOMB’

The western Kentucky town of Mayfield was reduced to “matchsticks,” its mayor Kathy O’Nan told CNN.

The small town of 10,000 people was described as “ground zero” by officials, and appeared post-apocalyptic: city blocks levelled; historic homes and buildings

beaten down to their slabs; tree trunks stripped of their branches; cars overturned in fields.

Some Christmas decorations could still be seen by the side of the road.

Beshear said there were 110 people working at the candle factory when the storm hit, causing the roof to collapse.

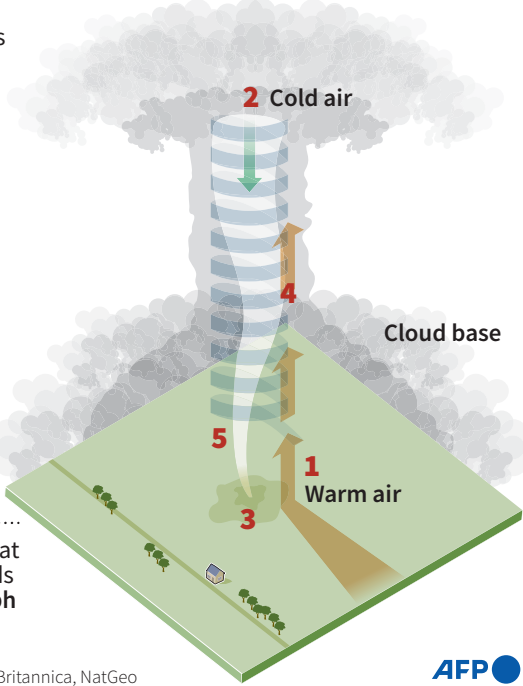
Forty people have been rescued, but it would be “a miracle

Tornado formation

Twisters develop in thunderstorms on hot days

- 1 Warm, moist air rises from the ground
- 2 Warm air meets cold dry air, creating a vortex which descends from the storm cloud
- 3 Vortex makes contact with the ground
- 4 Updraft draws in more air, rises while rotating
- 5 Tornado spins at speed, creating a destructive force in its path

Most tornadoes travel at 16-32 kph, wind speeds can reach up to 400 kph



Sources: NOAA, Encyclopaedia Britannica, NatGeo



if anybody else is found alive,” he said.

CNN played a heart-rending plea posted on Facebook by a factory employee.

“We are trapped, please, y’all, get us some help,” a woman says, her voice quavering as a co-worker can be heard moaning in the background.

“We are at the candle factory in Mayfield... Please, y’all. Pray for us.”

The woman, Kyanna Parsons-Perez, was rescued after being pinned under a water fountain.

“It looks like a bomb has exploded,” 31-year-old Mayfield resident Alex Goodman said.

David Norseworthy, a 69-year-old builder in Mayfield, said the storm blew off his roof and front porch while the family hid in a shelter.

“We never had anything like that here,” he said. — AFP

Assange ‘had stroke’ in prison due to uncertainty

LONDON: Julian Assange has had a stroke in prison due to the “constant chess game” over his future, his fiancée has claimed.

The Wikileaks founder, 50, is said to have suffered a stroke at the time of a High Court battle over whether or not he should be extradited to the US.

He is being held at HMP Belmarsh, a high-security men’s prison in south-east London.

Stella Moris, 38, who is the mother of his two children, tweeted: “Julian Assange suffered a stroke on the first day of the High Court appeal hearing on October 27th. He needs to be freed. Now.”

In an interview with the Mail On Sunday, she said: “Julian is struggling and I fear this mini-stroke could be the precursor to a more major attack. It compounds our fears about his ability to survive, the longer this long legal battle goes on.

“It urgently needs to be resolved. Look at animals trapped

in cages in a zoo. It cuts their life short. That’s what’s happening to Julian. The never-ending court cases are extremely stressful mentally.”

She added: “I believe this constant chess game, battle after battle, the extreme stress, is what caused Julian’s stroke on October 27... he was in a truly terrible state. His eyes were out of sync, his right eyelid would not close, his memory was blurry.”

Assange is wanted in America over an alleged conspiracy to obtain and disclose national defence information following WikiLeaks’ publication of hundreds of thousands of leaked documents relating to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

US authorities brought a High Court challenge against a January ruling by then-district judge Vanessa Baraitser that Assange should not be sent to the US, in which she cited a real and “oppressive” risk of suicide. — dpa



G7 warns Russia of ‘massive consequences’ if Ukraine attacked

LIVERPOOL, England: Russia faces massive consequences and severe costs if President Vladimir Putin attacks Ukraine, the Group of Seven warned in a draft statement seen by Reuters on Sunday.

US intelligence assesses that Russia could be planning a multi-front offensive on Ukraine as early as next year, involving up to 175,000 troops.

The Kremlin denies it plans to invade and says the West is gripped by Russophobia. Moscow says the expansion of Nato threatens Russia and has contravened assurances given to it as the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

At a meeting in the northern English city of Liverpool, the G7 delegates said they were united in their condemnation of Russia’s military build-up near Ukraine and they called on Moscow to de-escalate.

“Russia should be in no doubt



Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Italy’s Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, Britain’s Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly remove their face coverings after posing for a family photograph during the G7 summit of foreign and development ministers. – AFP

that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe cost,” the draft statement said, confirmed by G7 sources.

“We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial

integrity, as well as the right of any sovereign state to determine its own future,” the draft said.

A statement released by the Russian Embassy in London on Saturday evening, before the joint G7 document was reported, said that Britain’s frequent use of

the phrase “Russian aggression” during the Liverpool meeting was misleading and designed to create a cause for the G7 to rally round.

“Russia has made numerous offers to NATO on ways to decrease tensions. The G7 forum could be an opportunity to discuss them, but so far we hear nothing but aggressive slogans,” the embassy statement said.

‘RED LINE’

For Moscow, the growing Nato embrace of a neighbouring former Soviet republic - and what it sees as the nightmare possibility of alliance missiles in Ukraine targeted against Russia - is a “red line” it will not allow to be crossed.

Putin has demanded legally binding security guarantees that Nato will not expand further east or place its weapons close to Russian territory; Washington has repeatedly said no country can veto Ukraine’s Nato hopes.

— Reuters

VIENNA

Mass protest in Vienna against Austria’s Covid curbs

Tens of thousands of people rallied in Vienna on Saturday in protest against restrictions introduced to halt the spread of coronavirus in Austria, including mandatory Covid-19 vaccines and home confinement orders for the unvaccinated.

Around 1,400 police officers were on duty to oversee the protest, which attracted an estimated 44,000 people, and followed a similar demonstration in the Austrian capital last week.

Police said three people were



arrested for offences including the use of fireworks and disregarding the requirement to wear masks. Journalists covering the event, which began in Heldenplatz square, were attacked with snow balls and ice.

MOSCOW

Russia’s Covid-19 cases surpass 10 million

The number of registered Covid-19 cases in Russia now exceeds 10 million, data from the government’s coronavirus task showed on Sunday, but the latest wave of the pandemic has lost its momentum and the number of deaths is declining.

The number of daily infections and the death toll have both been on the decline recently after Russia recorded its deadliest month of the pandemic so far in October, according to Reuters calculations.



On Sunday, Russia reported 29,929 new Covid-19 infections, its lowest single-day tally since October 13, taking the headline official number of infections since the start of the pandemic to 10,016,896.

LONDON

Johnson accused of breaching own Covid rules

Boris Johnson on Sunday faced fresh questions about alleged government breaches of coronavirus restrictions after a photo emerged of him at a Christmas event last year.

The British prime minister has faced a barrage of criticism and calls to quit over claims of an illegal Downing Street party on December 18, 2020.

He has repeatedly said he was assured the gathering complied with social distancing restrictions in place at the time



and has ordered an internal investigation.

But the *Sunday Mirror* published a photograph of Johnson said to have been taken three days before that party, at a “virtual quiz” for his staff.

Tornadoes — Still not well understood

ROBIN LEGRAND

Tornadoes are a frequent and often devastating weather phenomenon most commonly seen in the United States, but meteorologists are still unable to say exactly how they originate.

“The US typically has more tornadoes than anywhere else in the world, though they can occur almost anywhere,” according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

Hardest hit are Great Plains states like Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, though they are also common in many other states, all east of the Rocky Mountains.

ORIGINS
Scientists still struggle to pinpoint the precise way in which these powerful storms form.

“Much about tornadoes remains a mystery,” according to the National Severe Storm Laboratory, part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). “They are rare, deadly and difficult to predict, and they can deal out millions or even billions of dollars in property damage per year.”

What is known is that they generally result from so-called “supercell” thunderstorms characterised by extremely powerful updrafts, according to NOAA.

“Within the storm, a strong vertical wind shear causes a horizontally rotating cylinder of air. The updraft lifts the rotating cylinder within the supercell. The rotating cylinder of air narrows, becoming stretched, and spins faster and faster, forming a tornado.”

The NWS notes: “Tornadoes develop extremely rapidly, and may dissipate just as quickly. Most tornadoes are on the ground for less than 15 minutes.”

DEVASTATION
“Tornadoes are nature’s most violent storms,” according to the NWS, with winds that can reach nearly 300 miles per hour (500 kmph). They can wreak devastation on a path more than one mile wide and 50 miles long — or longer.

The devastating tornado that killed dozens in Kentucky on December 11, 2021 stayed on the ground for 227 miles, said Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear. That would be a record, if confirmed.

On average, tornadoes claim 50 lives in the US each year, NOAA said. — AFP

“They are rare, deadly and difficult to predict, and they can deal out millions or even billions of dollars in property damage per year

SCIENTISTS



DAUGHTER OF FIRST US ASTRONAUT FLIES TO SPACE

A Blue Origin New Shepard rocket launches on Sunday night in West Texas near Van Horn. The NS-19 mission will take Laura Shepard Churchley, eldest daughter of famed Nasa astronaut Alan Shepard, Television talk show host Michael Strahan and paying passengers Dylan Taylor, Evan Dick, Lane Bess and Cameron Bess into space. — AFP

People with disabilities deserve respect



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

When you first hear the word “disability”, what would be the first thing that comes to your mind? What would your imagination spot on that moment? One has to ask himself and find an answer! Such issue is really frustrating in terms of how people, society and the world is perceiving this matter. Probably, the stereotype perceived about the people with disability is wrongly comprehended by many worldwide. Just wondering why some people consider a disabled person as an abnormal or strange human being!

As a matter of fact, some people negatively associate the word “disability”, with the people who cannot walk, talk, see or do everything that people take for granted. Yes, they physically look different, but in a way that their ability to do things is limited unlike healthy people. However, just because a man lacks the use of his eyes does not mean he lacks vision. Actually, the worst thing about disability is that people see it before they see the person. One has to think of why the world is worried about disability more than the people with disability are?!

Nevertheless, people with disabilities are human beings like everyone else; they share similar feelings, attitudes, interests and needs that we all have. All that they have is different preferences when referring to their disability. Some people see their disability as an essential

part of who they are and prefer to be identified with their disability first. This is called Identity-First Language, while others prefer the Person-First Language. Relevant examples of Identity-First Language include identifying someone as a deaf person instead of a person who is deaf, or an autistic person instead of a person with autism.

Therefore, using Identity-First Language when communicating with a person with disability is somehow inferior. Hence, when talking to them, one has to acknowledge their differences as you would acknowledge the uniqueness of anyone else and treat them as normal. One has never to talk down to them literally or figuratively; if one is on a wheelchair, use a chair to be on their same eye level, especially if you are having a long conversation.

Further, one has to be careful when addressing them or talking with them for they could be very sensitive. In a conversation, put the person first to say “a person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person” and address them as “people with disabilities” instead of “the disabled”. Also, one should speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion or a sign language interpreter. A lack of immediate response does not indicate that the person cannot or will not respond.

On the other hand, adults with disabilities deserve to be treated and spoken to as adults. They need to make their decisions instead of being told what to do or using baby talk with them. Providing them with options or an advice, for instance, shall be done the same way when provided to those without disabilities. If the option they choose presents a difficulty concerning their disability, discuss ways you could modify or adapt their choice.

Accordingly, everyone has to keep in mind the different disabilities and challenges that some people have in their life. There are visible disabilities as well as invisible disabilities, so one has to be careful when treating people with disabilities. Regardless of their challenges, they are blessed with capabilities and opportunities that make some more successful than others. The world is full of celebrities who are with disabilities or others who had overcome disabilities.

People with disability shall never be stereotyped, no matter how they look or act. As Albert Einstein said, “Everybody is genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid”.

Therefore, like everyone else, they cannot change the wind’s direction, but they adjust their sails to reach their destinations.

Who will be the judge of countries’ climate plans?

AMELIE BOTTOLLIER-DEPOIS

Countries have until the end of next year to ensure their climate commitments meet the Paris agreement’s cap on global warming. But who will check that their promises really do stack up?

The question is so sensitive that, for now, the answer is: the countries themselves.

While nations have agreed to a global target aimed at avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, fossil fuel and other greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise when they should be falling.

And there is no formal organisation tasked with making sure individual nations are on track.

“There are no ‘police’ to check; this is a weakness of the process,” climatologist Corinne Le Quere said.

Nearly 200 countries signed up to the landmark Paris deal in 2015, committing to halt warming “well below” two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, preferably limiting it to 1.5C.

And in November at the COP 26 climate summit in Glasgow, nations called for all governments to ensure their emissions plans for this decade align with the Paris temperature goals, strengthening them if necessary, by the end of 2022.

But each country will effectively mark its own climate homework.



There is no formal organisation tasked with making sure individual nations’ climate plans are on track. — AFP

The process means countries can move forward “at the pace suited to their political system”, said Le Quere.

So far, it has not pulled down

emissions nearly fast enough. ‘PEER PRESSURE WORKS’

At a global level, the United Nations’ climate change body estimates that countries’ 2030

emissions reduction plans will lead to warming of a devastating 2.7C.

A separate annual analysis by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which looks at the gap between climate commitments and actual reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, drills down into slightly more detail.

It includes a particular focus on richer nations from the G20, responsible for around 80 per cent of emissions.

“We don’t name and shame but we do point to the G20 members that are definitely not on track” like Australia and Mexico, said Anne Olhoff, one of the authors of the UNEP report.

But going further would be “so

political, I don’t see it happening in a UN context to be quite honest”, she said. In fact, experts doubt that nations would agree to any formal external scrutiny.

“We heard very clearly in Glasgow, countries like the US say that they — and they alone — will determine what is a 1.5C pathway for their country,” said Bill Hare, of the research group Climate Analytics.

And the United States are by no means the only ones.

“I don’t think the onus in this case is on the EU because we are on track to stay well within Paris,” European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans said during the COP conference in Glasgow. — AFP



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen celebrates winning the race and the world championship with the Netherlands flag on the podium. – Reuters

Verstappen wins Formula One world title

ABU DHABI: Max Verstappen became the first Dutchman ever to win the Formula One world championship title when he won a dramatic season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Sunday.

The Red Bull driver notched up a 10th victory of the season when he took advantage of a second safety car to overtake seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton on the final lap after Nicholas Latifi crashed.

Verstappen and Hamilton, who went into the race level on points, went wheel to wheel to the chequered flag with the Dutchman edging the race.

Hamilton, who had won the three previous races, made the perfect start when he overtook Verstappen before by the first corner. The two then tangled on the first lap with Verstappen overtaking and forcing Hamilton wide off the track but the Mercedes driver cut across and rejoined the race in the lead. He slowed to give back time but the stewards decided not to investigate the incident.

Hamilton built up a lead which was then threatened when Red Bull took advantage of a virtual safety car on lap 36 of 58 to switch to a new set of hard tyres.

Hamilton stayed out and saw the Dutchman erode his lead with every lap. Another safety car on lap 54 enabled Verstappen to pit again and switch to soft tyres. When the safety car came off, just one dramatic lap remained and the two began it neck and neck.

But the fresh tyres paid off for the 24-year-old Verstappen who surged through to win the race and the title to roars from the stands at the Yas Marina stands. — AFP



The Red Bull driver notched up a 10th victory of the season when he took advantage of a second safety car to overtake seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton on the final lap after Nicholas Latifi crashed

Red Bull’s Max Verstappen crosses the finish line at the Yas Marina Circuit during the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. – AFP



Al Moutaism, Salma clinch Sultanate of Oman Fencing titles

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Fencer Al Moutaism al Maskari representing Qurayat Club clinched the title of Men's junior Foil category competition while Salma al Dughaishi representing Salalah club emerged ladies Junior Epee category winner at Sultanate of Oman Fencing Championship which concluded recently at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Many fencers took part in the Championship including eight clubs: Muscat, Oman, Al Nahdha, Qurayat, Ahli Sidab, Salalah, Al Bashaer and Masirah.

Al Maskari's triumph was registered after he defeated Ali al Busaidy (Sultanate of Oman Club) 10/5 in the concluding game. Ammar al Azizi from Ahli Sidab claimed the third place as he edged Ali al Hinai (Sultanate of Oman Club) in the third and fourth place play off. Al Maskari secured spot in the final after he won Ammar al Azizi 10/5 while in the quarterfinal he registered the victory over Omar al Rajhi (Al Bashaer).

Salalah Club's fencer Salma al Dughaishi managed to lift the ladies Junior Epee category title. Salma al Dughaishi was positioned in second place at the ladies Junior Epee category in the first edition of the championship in November.

Al Dughaishi defeated Jana

al Sharji (Al Bashaer) 10-5 in a thriller in the concluding match. In the semifinals, she won Retal al Balushi (Masirah club) 9-10 before edging Reham al Shuaili (Sultanate of Oman Club) 6-10 in the quarterfinal fixture.

The third edition of Oman Fencing championship was organised by the Sultanate of Oman Fencing Committee (OFC). HH Sayyida Hujaija bint Jaifar al Said, was the chief guest of the event in presence of officials. She awarded the trophies and medals to the top winners during the final ceremony.

Khalid bin Said al Shuaibi, OFC chairman, thanked all the domestic clubs for their cooperation with OFA during all the previous fencing championships. "A special thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and all the related government and private sectors for their continuous support to the committee. Also, a dedicated recognition for the fencer's parents with OFC," he said.

OFC chief affirmed that the local event assisted on enhancing the technical performance of the national fencers. "The championship helped in boosting the sports in the Sultanate of Oman.

Also, the event strengthen technical experience of the fencers and kept them in good shape for the forthcoming external participation," he ended.

MELBOURNE: A revitalised Australia head to Adelaide brimful of confidence after dominating England in Brisbane and will feel confident a number of gnawing questions over selections have been put to bed.

Australia came into the Gabba match with queries over their middle order after Travis Head was dropped during the 2-1 series defeat against India during the last home summer and all-rounder Cameron Green failed to take a wicket.

Head's recall for the Ashes ahead of the more experienced Usman Khawaja proved polarising but the South Australian's sparkling 152 in the nine-wicket win at the Gabba has silenced debate over his place at number five in the batting order.

Number six Green was bowled for a duck failing to play a shot but his breakthrough, three-wicket haul in Brisbane was a thrill for a team which has searched in vain for a genuine all-rounder since the 2015 retirement of Shane Watson.

Alex Carey, who replaced former skipper Tim Paine behind the stumps, slotted in with aplomb, taking a record eight catches for a debutant wicketkeeper.

A number of other jigsaw pieces fell into place for the Australians, with spinner Nathan Lyon and paceman Mitchell Starc returning to form after their tough series against India.

"I was really happy that just about everyone fired," said new captain Pat Cummins.

"I thought the bowling unit together bowled really well and just about all the batters got going in the game."

Paceman Cummins had



Marnus Labuschagne and Marcus Harris of Australia celebrate winning the first Test. – Reuters

a stellar debut as captain, his match-high seven-wicket haul allaying fears he might struggle to juggle leadership with his bowling duties.

His willingness to defer some tactical decisions to vice captain Steve Smith paid dividends, and resulted in the key wicket of Ben Stokes on day four when Smith urged Cummins to insert himself into the attack to break a budding partnership with Jos Buttler.

Australia may need to shake things up a little in Adelaide, with paceman Josh Hazlewood nursing a side strain and opener David Warner struggling with

Head's recall for the Ashes ahead of the more experienced Usman Khawaja proved polarising but the South Australian's sparkling 152 in the nine-wicket win at the Gabba has silenced debate over his place at number five in the batting order

bruised ribs.

Head coach and selector Justin Langer is generally loath to break up a winning team but Jhye Richardson is likely to play his third test in the pink ball clash at Adelaide Oval if Hazlewood is sidelined.

Australia have won every day-night test they have played, including the last Ashes clash in Adelaide during the 2017/18 series.

"It's a format we enjoy," said Cummins.

"History is great, but it doesn't count too much."

— Reuters

Karnik, Yohan star as MCCC Red brush aside Purple

MUSCAT: In a high-scoring encounter of the U-13 Group of the Sultanate of Oman Cricket League, MCCC Red brushed aside MCCC Purple by 52 runs.

Electing to bat after winning the toss, MCCC Red had a great start with opener Yohan Sriram blazing his way to 52 off 44 balls, with four hits to the fence. Captain Karnik Mehta continued the team's momentum with the bat, scoring a blistering 58 off 48 balls with five hits to the fence, helping MCCC Red to score a massive 194 for the loss of four wickets in their allotted 20 overs. Shah Kevin Sujal was the most successful bowler for MCCC Purple, chipping in with two wickets for 23 runs.

In reply, MCCC Purple could muster only 142 in their allotted 20 overs, with none of the batsmen able to make a mark. Sivabalaji Siddeshwaran was the pick of the bowlers, knocking off two wickets for 12 runs.

BRIEF SCORES: MCCC Red 194/4 in 20 overs (Karnik Mehta 58 (48) 5x4; Yohan Sriram 52 (44)

4x4; Shah Kevin Sujal – 23/2) beat MCCC Purple 142/6 in 20 Overs (Mohammed Zain 20 (35) 2x4; Sivabalaji Siddeshwaran 12/2) by 52 runs

In another U13 match, MCCC Blue was too hot to handle for BSC B, winning their match by a whopping 130 runs. Batting first after winning the toss, Abdul Muqsih Mohammed laid the foundation for MCCC Blue with a brilliant knock of 120 runs off just 69 balls, studded with 20 boundaries.

Thanks to this, the team ended up scoring a giant score of 221 for the loss of three wickets in the allotted 20 overs.

In reply, BSC B could never get going, mustering only 91 runs in their allotted 20 Overs

BRIEF SCORES: MCCC Blue 221/3 in 20 overs (Abdul Muqsih Mohammed 120 (69) 20x4, Achukatla Arham – 29/1) beat BSC B 91/8 in 20 Overs (Achukatla Arham 18 (27) 1x4; Padmanaban Sanjeev 7/1) by 130 runs

In another match of the same league, MCCC Yellow thrashed won against BSC A by



a mammoth 127 runs. Electing to bat first, MCCC Yellow were at their blistering best, with openers Anirudh Ramaswamy and Kriv Patel setting the perfect foundation for a massive score. Both the openers scored centuries to pile on the agony for BSC A. Anirudh retired out at 102 off 46 balls with 12 hits to the fence, while Kriv also retired out at 100 off 47 balls with 13 boundaries.

The team ended up with a gigantic 274 for the loss of

three wickets in their allotted 20 overs. None of the BSC A bowlers could make any impact on the MCCC Yellow innings.

In reply, BSC A made a steady start with opening batsman Dhuri Nimish scoring 54 in 33 balls studded with six boundaries. But the target was too much of an ask for BSC A, which ended with 117 for the loss of nine wickets in their 20 overs.

Kriv Patel again shined with the ball, picking up two

wickets for 13, Santosh Vishnu was impressive with 2 for 3, while Yasin Sayed picked 2 for 31.

BRIEF SCORES: MCCC Yellow 274/3 in 20 Overs (Anirudh Para Ramaswamy 102 (46) 12x4, Kriv Rajesh Patel 100 (47) 13x4) won against BSC A 117/9 in 20 overs (Dhuri Nimish 54 (33) 6x4; Kriv Rajesh Patel 13/2, Santosh Vishnu 3/2) by 157 runs

In another U-13 match ISWK A swept aside ISWK B by 127 runs. Choosing to bat first, ISWK A scored a respectable 198 runs with loss of only one wicket in their allotted 20 overs.

Yuvraj Rai was the hero of the innings all the way, scoring a majestic 116 not out in just 64 balls, with 18 hits to the fence. Vaibhav Lingarkar scored 50 off 50 balls. Neeraj Mukkatira took the only wicket to fall.

In reply, ISWK B were nowhere in the chase, and could only muster 71 in 16.3 overs. Opener Vivikta Dande was the sole contributor with 38 balls. Mohamed Akeel and Arsh Javed Tanashah took 2 wickets apiece.

BRIEF SCORES: ISWK A 198/1 in 20 overs (Yuvraj Rai 116 (64) 18x4; Vaibhav Lingarkar 50 (50); Neeraj Mukkatira 10/1) beat ISWK B 71/10 in 16.3 overs (Vivikta Dande 35 (38) 5x4; Mohamed Akeel 7/2) by 127 runs

In the Under 16 division match of the Sultanate of Oman Cricket League, OCA thrashed BSC by 10 wickets, led by a brilliant bowling display by Tredoux Christo Adriaan. Electing to bat first BSC could only muster 97 in 22.5 overs. Tredoux ripped through the BSC innings picking up 5 for 17 in four overs.

Rahman Abdul was the highest scorer for BSC with 22.

In reply, OCA raced to the target in nine over without losing a wicket. Rahildaniyal Habib took on the bulk of the scoring with 59 n.o. off 34 balls with nine boundaries, while Joshi Aryan contributed 24 not out.

BRIEF SCORES: BSC 97/10 in 22.5 overs (Rahman Abdul 22 (35) 1x4; Tredoux Christo Adriaan – 17/5) lost to OCA 101/0 in 9 overs (Rahildaniyal Habib 59 (34) 9x4, Joshi Aryan 24 (24) 4x4) by 10 wickets

CHELSEA EDGE LEEDS IN THRILLING ENCOUNTER

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, DEC 11

The historic rivalry and grudge reached a boiling point in this intense game which saw Chelsea edge Leeds in a 3-2 win.

The brutal match of hard tackling produced three penalties, the last of which was decisive with the final kick of the match as the two sides squared-up at a corner flag with the referee and officials intervening.

Chelsea manager, Thomas Tuchel, speaking about defender Antonio Rudigar, who was involved in two of the penalties awarded to Chelsea, said: “Toni is an emotional leader and an aggressive leader on the pitch and he cannot not get involved if there are team-mates to protect or are in an argument. This is 100 per cent Rudigar. I can understand their frustration because we have all been in this situation where you think you have a point or you have equalised and then it slips away. You get angry and frustrated.”

He added: “Leeds are a strong team and they hate to lose like we do and they get heated up.” About Chelsea scoring in added time, Tuchel said: “I was confident we would get one more chance to turn things around. You need a bit of luck to get such a late goal. We needed this win desperately for the mood, for the belief, for the atmosphere and I’m very happy how we got it.”

Leeds took the lead after 28 minutes with Marcos Alonso’s sliding tackle fouling Dan James and Raphinha, after converting the penalty, goaded Chelsea supporters with performing a

samba.

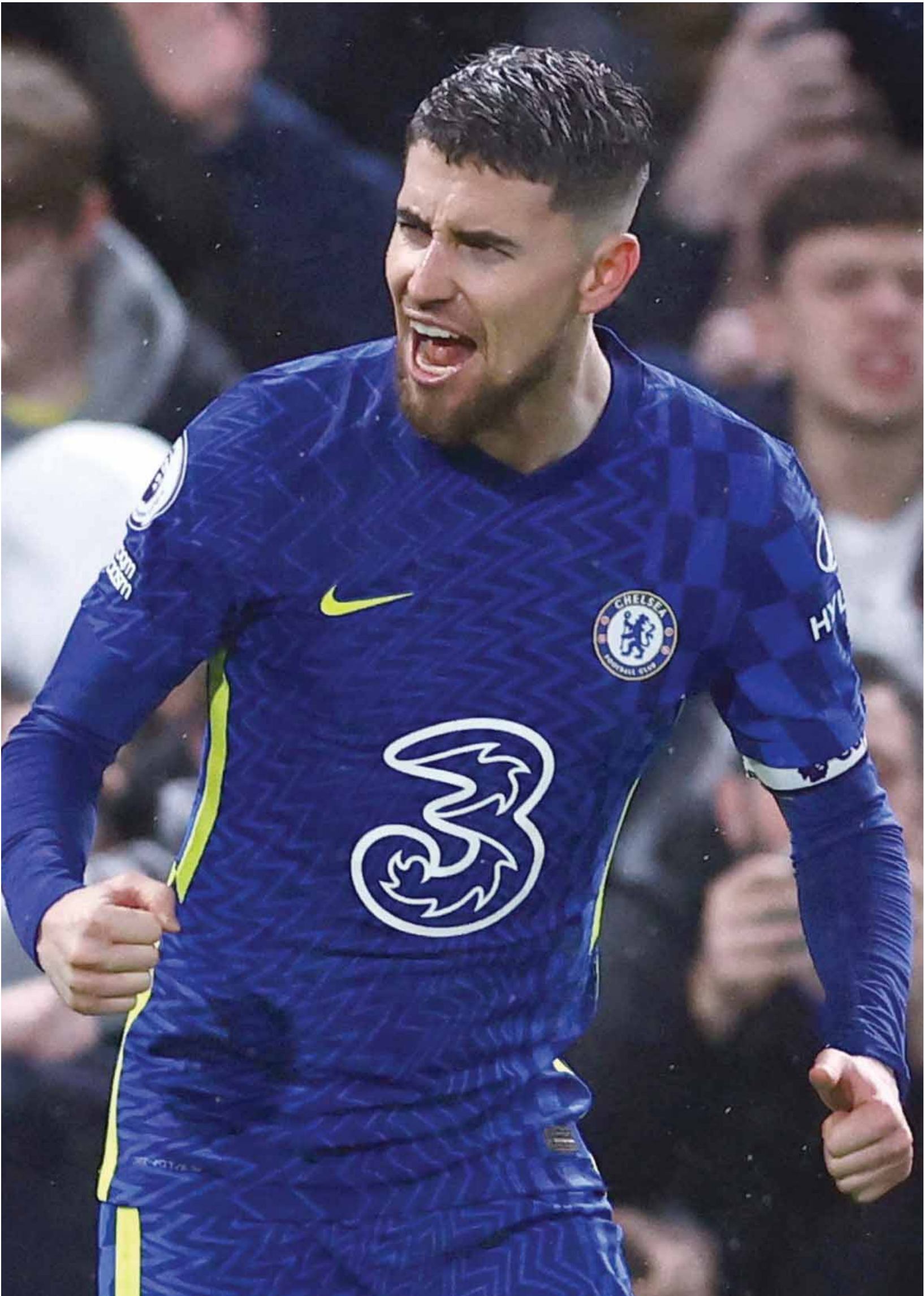
But three minutes before half-time the London side equalised as Stuart Dallas lost possession to Alonso who raced to the byline and crossed for Mason Mount to sweep the ball in with a first-time shot.

Chelsea went in front thirteen minutes after the break when Raphinha rashly wiped out Rudigar in the penalty area. The resultant spot kick taken by Jorginho sent the goalkeeper the wrong way.

Then came a bit of a fairy tale for Leed’s teenager, Joe Gelhardt who came on as substitute in the 82nd minute and only a minute later, with his first touch, guided the ball in from a cross by Tyler Roberts. It was his first goal for the club.

The final twist in this gruelling encounter was left for the last minute of added time and, not surprisingly, it triggered the eruption. Rudigar received a pass in the box and in tackling him, Mateusz Klich tamely kicked the back of his leg. VAR confirmed the penalty and Jorginho converted again. Then as Chelsea kept possession, waiting for the final whistle, a full-on confrontation followed between the players.

Leeds manager, Marcelo Bielsa, said: “We deserved a draw, our performance merited it. The performance helped us think we can recover the version that allows us to compete with the best.” He added: “Errors are part of the game, unless they are unjustified or impudent. I wouldn’t class either of those penalties as that. The incident at the end was within the margin of what is tolerable.”



Chelsea's Jorginho celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

De Gea reveals fears over Lindelof’s breathing scare



Manchester United's Victor Lindelof in action. – Reuters

LONDON: Manchester United goalkeeper David De Gea said Victor Lindelof’s breathing scare during the 1-0 win over Norwich provoked unsettling memories of incidents involving Christian Eriksen and Sergio Aguero.

Lindelof had to be replaced in the second half at Carrow Road on Saturday after the United defender received treatment on the pitch when he suddenly clutched his chest.

United interim manager Ralf Rangnick revealed the Swedish international centre-back was fine after the match, but De Gea conceded seeing his team-mate having difficulties reminded him of Eriksen’s shocking cardiac arrest while playing for Denmark in the European championships in June.

Like Eriksen, Barcelona striker Aguero is also currently sidelined after collapsing with heart issues in October.

“As soon as it was like difficult breathing and feeling strange, the game doesn’t matter or football. First of all is life,” De

Gea told Sky Sports.

“We saw some players who are feeling a bit, I don’t know what was going on, but Victor was feeling his breathing. “We saw already Eriksen, Aguero... so it is sometimes a bit difficult to see your player acting like this so it was better to change. I hope he is completely fine.”

Despite the anxiety over Lindelof’s health, Rangnick raised the prospect of the 27-year-old being fit to face Brentford on Tuesday.

“Victor can’t even remember himself how it happened. I think he had a collision with another player and had problems to breathe,” Lindelof said.

“For more than 10 mins his heart rate was higher than normal and he was a little shocked by this, so we had to replace him.

“The doctor has checked him after the match and it seems everything is OK now, but we still have to see how he is doing tomorrow. Hopefully he will fit for the Brentford game.” — AFP

Platinum Credit card with exclusive features and offers including maximum value with Master Card Buy-1 Get-1 offers across merchants

Access to Airport lounges across the world

Transfer your salary and get a chance to enter "Double your salary" scheme draws

Housing loans with a quick processing time

Attractive rates on Long Term Deposit for Retirement

For more information:
<https://bit.ly/BankdhofarEng>

Al Rifa Banking Services

Your Special Banking World

Al Rifa

الرفعة

Banking Services

the best bank for you

24/7 11 11

www.bankdhofar.com

CBO mandates banks to provide banking access to special needs customers

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Given the importance of enabling persons with disabilities to benefit from banking services, and given the Central Bank’s continuous endeavour to achieve financial inclusion and to deliver banking services to all segments of society equally without any discrimination, the Central Bank of Oman has issued a set of special directives targeted at providing convenient banking services to persons with disabilities.

The directives have been issued in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development, concerned NGOs, and the Oman Banks Association.

The new set of instructions mandate all local banks to upgrade their banking infrastructure across their network of branches so that customised banking services can be provided to the people with disabilities with much ease and in a friendly and amicable manner.

The directives also require the banks to open and operate at least one dedicated branch for the people with disabilities

The directives also require the banks to open and operate at least one dedicated branch for the people with disabilities in each of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Emphasising the need to take advantage of the modern and secure financial technologies, the new directives call upon the banks to develop latest and customised banking applications for this segment of people, enabling them to avail banking and associated services with much ease and convenience.

Provision of appropriate and targeted training opportunities to bank employees has also been emphasised as part of the new directives so that the trained bank staff can effectively deliver banking services to the persons with disabilities.

Commissioning of Liwa Plastics Industries Complex on Dec 20

MEGA VENTURE: Designed and built with the latest technologies, Liwa Plastics’ strategic location enables quick access to global markets

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

As part of celebrations marking the 51st National Day of the Renaissance, Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a transformational project of OQ — the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman — will witness the official commissioning ceremony at its site in Sohar Industrial Port on December 20, 2021.

The successful implementation of the petrochemicals project, with an investment of RO 2.7 billion (approx. \$7 billion), exemplifies the Omani government’s efforts to diversify revenue sources, support local manufacturing opportunities, and most importantly, to add value to the country’s natural resources by opening up avenues for investments in downstream petrochemical industries.

Significantly, Liwa Plastics achieved an In-Country Value (ICV) contribution amounting to approximately RO 578 million (approx. \$1.5 billion) during the construction phase through the localisation of various goods and services procured from Omani companies, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

LPIC consists of four EPCs, of which the second, third and fourth EPCs have been launched, while the first EPC (Steam Cracker) is at the commercial commissioning stage.

This phased launch is in line with the delivery programme

When fully operational, Liwa Plastics will contribute to a significant increase in OQ’s portfolio of petrochemicals and associated chemical commodities

KAMEL AL SHANFARI

Acting CEO, OQ Downstream

prepared by project management teams to enable the overall complex to reach the full production capacity by the first quarter of 2022.

Kamel bin Bakheet al Shanfari, Acting CEO, OQ Downstream, commented: “Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC) is the biggest of OQ Group’s current investments with the potential to position OQ as a major global

petrochemicals producer. When fully operational, Liwa Plastics will contribute to a significant increase in OQ’s portfolio of petrochemicals and associated chemical commodities. This includes a momentous increase in its polymer output, which will be targeted at local and global markets.”

The project, he further noted, will boost the industrial sector through the annual production of 838,000 tonnes of polyethylene — a raw material used in nearly 40 per cent of plastics-based products and commodities produced globally, and about 215,000 tonnes of polypropylene.

Output of these two polymers will eventually rise to 1.4 million tonnes annually. Since the start of soft operations earlier this year, Liwa Plastics achieved a total output of roughly 474 thousand tonnes of petrochemicals as of October-end 2021, he stated.

The Complex, he further explained, consists of a number of key components, including a gas extraction plant located in Fahud

which is linked to the main plant within Sohar Industrial Port by a 300km-long, 14-inch pipeline.

At the heart of the main plant is a steam cracker that processes the light hydrocarbon gases produced by OQ’s other plants in Suhar, as well as rich gas coming from Fahud. Integrated into the complex are polymer plants designed to produce High Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Linear Low Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), and polypropylene.

The overall project has been designed and constructed in line with international best practices and standards, and comparable with petrochemical projects in its class anywhere in the world.

Incorporating the latest technologies, the complex also meets the most stringent international benchmarks for environmental safety — standards certified by an environmental consultancy firm accredited by the Environmental Authority. The certification has also been endorsed by various experts and the project’s financiers, he added.

PDO-S signs maiden commercial contract with Tethys Oil

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

Petroleum Development Oman Services (PDO-S) signed its first commercial contract with Tethys Oil Oman Onshore Limited for Seismic Acquisition in Block 56.

The deal was signed on Sunday, December 12, by PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister and Tethys Oil Oman Onshore Limited Managing Director Dr Fredrik Robelius.

Valued at over \$14 million, the agreement involves 3D seismic acquisition of an area covering approximately 2,018 sq km. The pri-

mary objective of this acquisition is to produce high-quality 3D seismic images for the eastern flank of

South Oman and tertiary basins in Block 56 which is operated by Tethys Oil Oman Onshore.

Phimister said: “Signing this contract with Tethys Oil Oman Onshore is a great milestone for

PDO-S achieved in a relatively short time after its establishment. It is a true demonstration of how PDO-S is delivering its key value drivers by filling supply chain gaps in the oil and gas market in Oman.”

Dr Robelius commented: “We are delighted to have this opportunity to work with PDO-S that offers state of the art technology to help us unlock the great potential in block 56.”

The signed contract reflects the value and capability of resources and expertise available in-country. It will also pave the way for further collaboration opportuni-

ties between PDO-S and other oil and gas operators in the Sultanate of Oman in different applications.

PDO New Business Development Manager Dawood al Qassabi: “We thank Tethys Oil Oman Onshore for their trust in PDO-S and for the collaborative approach they showed in finalising this contract.

It is an invite to other oil and gas operators in the Sultanate of Oman and beyond to tap into PDO’s decades of experience in geosolutions, EOR, learning and development, project management, ICV, technology and others.”

Sohar International wins Debt Deal and Equity Deal of the Year awards

MUSCAT: Sohar International has been successful in maintaining a pioneering position in the banking sector within the Sultanate.

Adding to its list of accolades, the bank won the ‘Debt Deal of the Year - Oman’ and ‘Equity Deal of the Year – Oman’ award at the recently concluded Corporate and Investment Banking Awards presented by *Asian Banking and Finance* (ABF) Magazine, based in Singapore.

The annual award ceremony, which was conducted virtually, recognises the very best of players in the banking and finance industry.

The award was presented to the Investment Banking division at Sohar International for its advisory and placement services to clients, even under challenging macro environment conditions.

Speaking on the occasion, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer, Sohar International, said, “At Sohar International, we are driven by



a vision to become a world-class Omani services company that helps customers, community and people to prosper and grow. These awards place us at par with international organisations and are a testament to the effectiveness of our growth strategy.

It also gives us the assurance that our well-conceived plans are geared in the right direction having instilled the required capabilities both on the people and technological fronts, whilst continuously contributing meaningfully to the economy. Like every win at Sohar International, these accolades will serve as an impetus for us to achieve greater milestones, set new benchmarks and lead the way in the banking sector.”

Bank Muscat wins Bank of the Year award from The Banker

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has won the Bank of the Year (Oman) award from *The Banker*. The award was presented to the bank after a thorough evaluation by the judges based on a number of different criteria including the product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction, and digital offerings.

The prestigious award adds to the list of accolades and achievements by the bank and is the result of the bank’s adoption of global best practices and its customer-centric approach in banking.

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

The bank has a good presence even in remote areas and is greatly enhancing financial inclusion in the Sultanate of Oman.



In keeping with technological developments, the bank’s digital channels including Mobile and Internet banking have been witnessing tremendous growth over the recent past.

With about 2 million customers, Bank Muscat is a clear leader in the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman and has the largest portfolio in the country across the retail, corporate, wholesale and Islamic banking space.

Bank Muscat, which has the largest network of e-channels in the country, continues to demonstrate its leadership traits and continuously contributes to the growth and development of the Sultanate’s economy not only through banking, but also through pioneering initiatives that promote sustainable development. Bank Muscat has won multiple awards in the recent past including being chosen as the Best Bank in the Sultanate of

Oman by the editors of a number of prestigious international journals and publications. Award winners were chosen by financial editors after extensive consultations with corporate financial executives and bankers, banking consultants and analysts across the world. The award criteria included growth in assets, profitability, geographic reach, strategic relationships, new business development and innovation in products.

NBO’s wealth management products honoured at Global Private Bankers Awards 2021

MUSCAT: In recognition of its achievements in pioneering best-in-class banking services, National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Sadara Wealth Management has been awarded Highly Acclaimed status at the Global Private Banker Innovation Awards 2021.

The awards also celebrated NBO’s Relationship Manager — Private Banking, Jamila Rangaswamy, who was named Female Private Banker of the Year — Middle East.

Impressing judges in the Outstanding Wealth Management Offering for Affluent Clients category, the bank’s personalised products and



services available through Sadara Wealth Management meet the sophisticated needs of high net worth clients.

The suite of unique products, including the Systematic Investment Plan and Yield Enhancement Structured Products, provide customers with



better ways to build and manage their wealth. The bank’s clients also benefit from personalised advice from dedicated wealth managers like Jamila.

As an Omani and seasoned Private Banker, Jamila joined the bank 5 years ago, after working in several leading European financial

institutions where she held senior relationship management roles and has won multiple awards across her private banking career for beating stretch targets on AUM and Revenues.

“We are delighted to have our impressive drive to better serve high net worth clients recognised by the private banking industry. Jamila is well deserving of this award, having cemented herself as a valuable member of our Wealth Management team and ensuring that our clients receive outstanding service and sound financial direction year after year,” said Wessam al Asfoor, Head of Premier Banking at NBO.

Manar Alizz hosts postgraduate students



MUSCAT: As part of Manar Alizz initiative, Alizz Islamic Bank, represented by the Shari’a Compliance and Audit Department and the learning and Development Department, welcomed a group of postgraduate students from the College of Shari’a Sciences to learn about the bank’s Islamic banking activities.

This is part of a larger programme to spread awareness about Islamic finance and its developmental role, while highlighting the role of Islamic banks in driving sustainable economy and providing researchers and scholars with important knowledge on Islamic economy in general and the Omani experience in this sector.

During the visit, Issa al Riyami, Head of Shari’a Audit and Compliance at Alizz Islamic Bank delivered a presentation to highlight key differentiators between conventional and Islamic banking.

Al Riyami further elaborated on the strategic objectives of Manar Alizz initiative, which has been designed to attract international researchers and scholars to learn about the Omani experience on Islamic banking, educate members of the society about Islamic

banking products, encourage banking innovation, and enable the bank’s experts to generate and share knowledge in their various fields of expertise. He explained that knowledge is the most valuable intangible asset that Alizz Islamic Bank is keen to develop through this initiative, acknowledging its vital importance in the world of finance and business as a platform to drive and build sustainable partnership.

“By devising innovative approaches and initiatives like ‘Manar Alizz’ we make sure to benefit the society and fulfil the mission of Islamic banking. There are many other interesting initiatives that we are launching soon as part of our drive to make the community at the centre of all that we do and offer. We believe in giving back, which will not only bring about positive change in the communities in which we live and work, but will have more far reaching impact to enable individuals and businesses to thrive”, stated Al Riyami.

Students also commended the role of Alizz Islamic Bank towards reinforcing collaboration and solidarity in the community as part of its CSR commitment.

Bank Nizwa’s Masoliyati team honoured for CSR initiatives

MUSCAT: As a bank that is invested in the welfare of the community, Bank Nizwa has been steadfast in implementing meaningful CSR activities that have a long-term, sustainable impact on the lives of the people.

In line with the Islamic value of ‘giving’, the bank’s ‘Masoliyati’ programme has undertaken a number of initiatives to extend a helping hand to those in need. With the aim to continue to promote the spirit of community service amongst its employees, the bank recently conducted a gathering to recognise and honor the efforts of the team members who have played an active role in the various volunteer initiatives conducted throughout the year.

The event was attended by the CEO of Bank Nizwa, Khalid al Kayed, along with other members of the executive management. Members who played exemplary roles and rendered their services for voluntary work in the past year were handed out appreciation certificates and recognised for their efforts.

“As the leading Islamic bank in the country, Bank Nizwa upholds strong values of



philanthropy, public service and community involvement. Our ‘Masoliyati’ team mirrors these values and has shown utmost dedication in going the extra mile to help enrich the lives of those less fortunate.

Apart from the ongoing pandemic, the devastating effects of Cyclone Shaheen had also severely impacted the community. From offering financial support to providing hands-on services to help alleviate the plight of those affected, our Masoliyati team members have

recorded over 900 hours of service to date,” said Al Kayed.

“At Bank Nizwa, the values of being of service to society are deeply embedded within day-to-day operations and our employees have been proactive in seeking out opportunities to assist those in need. We are indeed proud of the commendable efforts of our ‘Masoliyati’ team and will continue to encourage them to spearhead yet more initiatives that are geared towards benefiting the community.”



Pact signed to strengthen environmental policy in SEZs and free zones



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the Environment Authority (EA) signed on Sunday a technical cooperation programme aimed at strengthening and developing cooperation in environmental aspects in the special economic zones and free zones. The agreement was signed by Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman — OPAZ, and Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority.

As part the agreement, both sides with work to exchange experiences that serve the public interest in various fields, including the implementation of the environmental protection and pollution control laws, protection of drinking water resources from pollution, preserving natural reserves,

wildlife and biodiversity, and the system for handling and using chemicals.

In addition, the programme aims to review the procedures related to issuing licenses and environmental controls, as well as proposing enhancements to those procedures.

Further, the programme stipulates strengthening the coordination between the two authorities in the legislative and supervisory aspects and cooperation in conducting awareness programmes aimed at spreading awareness and instilling concepts and requirements for dealing with the environment among all segments of society, including organising environmental events.

Moreover, both sides will work to implement the decisions of international agreements related to common environmental affairs to which the Sultanate is a party.

Sohar Port and Freezone maintains momentum amid challenges

Key indicators: The port's performance saw an overall increase of 6.1 per cent, wheeled cargo increased by 46 per cent year-on-year and Liquid Bulk increased by 7 per cent, Dry Bulk increased by 4.3 per cent, while Break Bulk remained the same

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

SOHAR Port and Freezone continued to make solid progress in the first nine months of 2021 despite a global downturn in trade and supply chain disruption.

The port's performance saw an overall increase of 6.1 per cent, wheeled cargo increased by 46 per cent year-on-year and Liquid Bulk increased by 7 per cent, Dry Bulk increased by 4.3 per cent, while Break Bulk remained the same. Ship to Ship cargo saw an impressive growth of 59 per cent.

The Freezone's performance has been stellar with a 16 per cent increase in the land occupancy and 14 per cent increase in throughput compared with the same period last year. The complex also saw an 8 per cent increase in exports. SOHAR Port and Freezone remains on course for a strong end to the year.

Mark Geilenkirchen, Chief Executive Officer of SOHAR Port and Freezone said, "Given the prevailing global circumstances outside of our influence, the



results of the last nine months have been extremely gratifying and further reaffirm the progress we are making to position ourselves as a major global logistics hub.

The Port and Freezone has remained open at full capacity throughout the pandemic, operating safely and efficiently to serve the industrial and economic sectors. We are confident that by the end of 2021, we will have achieved one of our most successful years yet."

Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi, Deputy CEO of SOHAR Port and CEO of SOHAR Freezone, added, "SOHAR is integral to the supply and exchange of goods to serve clients within the Freezone, across

the country and further afield, as well as a gateway to the region for a growing roster of overseas companies and local SMEs.

Over 60 per cent of all goods entering the Sultanate pass through SOHAR, as well as more than 40 per cent of exported goods and 80 per cent of re-exported goods.

We are grateful to the entire SOHAR team, both at the Port and Freezone and offshore, for their hard work and commitment throughout the year to date and we anticipate a strong end to the year as the manufacture of consumer goods, food and industrial supplies ramps up for a busy 2022."

SOHAR Port and Freezone has attracted close to \$30 billion in total investment as part of a long-term commitment to developing the national economy in line with the objectives of Vision 2040.

Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, SOHAR is one of the world's fastest-growing complexes of its kind and significant developments within its industrial and food clusters are currently under way.

The company is also exploring investment in green and renewable energy in order to make the complex more efficient and environmentally conscious for the benefit of tenants, clients, the community and the environment.

World Bank approves \$600m funding for Philippine reforms



A worker installs steel rods at a construction site in Manila, Philippines — Reuters

MANILA: The World Bank has approved a \$600 million loan for a Philippine reform programme to position the country for a competitive and resilient economic recovery, the bank said.

The quick-disbursing loan backs measures to free up retail services and promote private investment, cut the cost of doing business, and expand broadband services to boost investments in information and communications technology, the lender added.

Such reforms are crucial to level immediate and long-term barriers to growth, said Ndiame Diop, the bank's country director.

"Reforms that promote competition in broadband and mobile telecommunications will benefit a large portion of underserved populations by increasing coverage and quality of service, increasing their access to markets, as well as access to remote education and health services," Diop said in a statement. — Reuters

S&P Global Platts launches first carbon neutral hydrogen assessments

Energy markets: New daily assessments bring new transparency to hydrogen's role in the energy transition

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 12

S&P Global Platts, the leading independent provider of information, analytics and benchmark prices for the commodities and energy markets, has launched the world's first suite of Carbon Neutral Hydrogen (CNH) assessments, effective December 9, 2021.

Building on Platts first to market cost of Hydrogen production valuations, the Platts CNH assessments reflect the carbon neutral value of hydrogen as it leaves the production facility at key hubs in Northwest Europe, the Middle East, Far East Asia, Australia, California and the US Gulf Coast.

Platts CNH assessments consider carbon neutral trading activity in which emissions have been, in order of priority: avoided where possible through the use of low emissions generation, removed through the use of carbon capture and storage, and offset through the use of carbon credits or equivalent instruments.

Alan Hayes, Head of Energy



Transition Pricing at S&P Global Platts, said: "Our new Carbon Neutral Hydrogen assessments will first and foremost reflect the value of the hydrogen molecule, irrespective of production pathway or colour. As the energy transition gains momentum, market participants, governments, industry and investors need a trusted and independently assessed price that reflects the value of hydrogen as a commodity to make informed trading and investment decisions and manage risk.

Extensive feedback from market participants has illustrated that for a nascent global hydrogen market to grow, its price should be determined by a methodology that focuses on hydrogen as a commodity, not one that is based on a rainbow of colours or its production pathway."

The first assessment of Platts Carbon Neutral Hydrogen (CNH)

was published on December 9 with regional differentials already evident. In the Asia-Pacific Region Platts CNH was assessed at \$3.45/kg on an ex-works basis Australia, and this compares to the Middle East CNH assessment of \$4.05/kg.

However, the Far East CNH price was much higher with a carbon neutral hydrogen price of \$7.95/kg and the assessment for CNH NW Europe was Eur7.35/kg (\$8.30/kg). In contrast, Platts CNH Prices in the US were lower than any other region, with Platts USGC CNH priced at \$1.70/kg.

The daily Platts Carbon Neutral Hydrogen (CNH) assessments will be published on a per kg and per MMBtu basis, and assessed for Far East Asia, Australia and Middle East markets at 4:30 pm Singapore, for California and US Gulf Coast at 1:30 pm Houston, and for Northwest Europe markets at 4:30 PM UK time.

The new CNH assessments

will build off Platts existing cost of production factors, which will provide baseline inputs in the absence of market activity.

Platts will consider marginal costs of production for hydrogen for a given location in which renewable power prices and carbon capture costs are considered, with any remaining accounted emissions offset using relevant carbon market instruments.

S&P Global Platts Analytics shows the pipeline of new low carbon hydrogen production projects to be around 12.5 million tonnes by 2030, catering to the demand primarily from power, industrial, chemicals, and mobility sectors.

The new CNH assessments reflect 99.99 per cent purity and minimum lot sizes of 20,000 kg for prompt delivery during the calendar month following the trade date. Platts launched the world's first North American and European hydrogen cost of production assessments in December 2019 and has expanded its assessment coverage into Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

These assessments reflect the value of hydrogen produced at worldwide hubs by different production pathways, including the costs of using carbon capture and storage.

Oil prices post biggest weekly gain since August

NEW YORK: Oil prices rose slightly on Friday and posted their biggest weekly gain since late August, with market sentiment buoyed by easing concerns over the Omicron coronavirus variant's impact on global economic growth and fuel demand.

The Brent and US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude benchmarks each posted gains of about 8 per cent this week, their first weekly gain in seven, even after a brief bout of profit-taking.

Brent futures settled up 73 cents, or 1 per cent, at \$75.15 a barrel, after falling 1.9 per cent on Thursday. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) rose 73 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$71.67 after sliding 2 per cent in a volatile session the previous day.

"Oil traders are coming out of their shell-shock and feeling more bullish as they recalibrate their demand expectations in the aftermath of the Omicron variation of the coronavirus," said Phil Flynn, senior analyst price futures group in Chicago.

Earlier in the week the oil market had recovered about half the losses suffered since the Omicron outbreak on November 25, with prices lifted by early studies suggesting that three doses of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine offers protection against the Omicron variant. — Reuters

Money travels in Hong Kong even if people can't

Does it matter if you can't visit a place so long as your cash can get there? Asking for Hong Kong friends.

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority, in conjunction with the People's Bank of China, wheeled out a roster of grandees to extol the city's position as a financial hub.

Frustration about strict pandemic restrictions dominate business lunch conversations and fuels speculation about alternative Asian bases. Unsentimental financiers can't ignore the hard numbers, however.

The seminar on Hong Kong's future as a financial centre was the first to be organised jointly by the two central banks. A parade of representatives from the International Monetary Fund, Bank of International Settlements, HSBC and beyond touted well-known advantages of the local stock market, enthusiasm for green finance and developing the offshore yuan market.

Frustration about strict pandemic restrictions dominate business lunch conversations and fuels speculation about alternative Asian bases

One new addition to the pitch was Hong Kong's beaches and hiking trails.

Even if the discussion was anodyne, its timing was not. JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs are among the big companies offering \$5,000 to help cover employee quarantine costs.

Hong Kong has banned visitors from more than 50 countries with the new Covid-19 Omicron variant and requires a three-week hotel isolation for returning residents.

Financial services account for a fifth of Hong Kong's economy, per government figures, and 8 per cent of its jobs, so unhappy workers are an issue. Yet the industry itself is booming in many ways. Stock trading volume has risen by a third this year to a daily average of \$22 billion even as the number of big new listings fell. Flows through the system linking the city's securities trading with bourses in Shanghai and Shenzhen also have surged.

Most notable about the conference was that authorities felt the need to hold it at all, and in English. Featuring Yi Gang, head of the PBOC, also was telling. It suggests a degree of concern about Hong Kong's image overseas, which also has been battered by geopolitical tensions and the sweeping national security law Beijing imposed last year. The financial case presented at the gabfest, however, was right on the money.

— Reuters



WHAT'S COOKING?

Afghan craftsmen perform a procedure of making carpets in Herat. Around 1.5 million Afghans of a population of 38 million work in the carpet sector according to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. — AFP

A better deal for the world's workers



DANI RODRIK

The author is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government

HISTORICALLY, IT IS THE COUNTERVAILING POWER OF LABOUR THAT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT GAINS FOR WORKERS

The last four decades of globalisation and technological innovation have been a boon for those with the skills, wealth, and connections to take advantage of new markets and opportunities. But ordinary workers have had much less to cheer about.

In advanced economies, earnings for those with less education often stagnated despite gains in overall labour productivity. Since 1979, for example, US production workers' compensation has risen by less than a third of the rate of productivity growth.

As a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic, labour problems are receiving renewed attention – and rightly so. But how can workers not only get their fair share but also have access to decent jobs that enable meaningful lives?

One approach is to rely on the enlightened self-interest of large corporations. Happy, fulfilled workers are more productive, less likely to quit, and more likely to provide good customer service.

But many firms that claim to take the high road in labour standards are also vehemently anti-union; taking the low road by minimising workers' pay and say is too

often a profitable corporate strategy.

Historically, it is the countervailing power of labour — through collective action and union organisation — that has brought about the most significant gains for workers.

So, a second strategy to help workers consists of increasing the organisational power of labour vis-à-vis employers.

US President Joe Biden has explicitly endorsed this approach, arguing that the shrinking of the American middle class is a consequence of the decline in union power, and has vowed to strengthen organised labour and collective bargaining.

A third strategy, which aims to minimise unemployment, is to ensure adequate labour demand through expansionary macroeconomic policies. When fiscal policy keeps aggregate demand high, employers chase workers – rather than the other way around – and unemployment can remain low.

Research by Larry Mishel and Josh Bivens of the Economic Policy Institute shows that macroeconomic austerity is a major reason why US wages have lagged behind productivity since the 1980s.

By contrast, the Biden administration's

aggressive fiscal response to the Covid-19 crisis has ensured that US wages have increased amid a sharp fall in unemployment. But although tight labour markets can help workers, they can also pose an inflation risk.

Moreover, macroeconomic policy cannot target the lowest-skilled workers or the regions where jobs are most needed.

A fourth strategy, then, is to shift the structure of demand in the economy in order to benefit less-educated workers and depressed regions in particular. The shortage of secure, middle-class jobs is closely linked to the disappearance — as a result of globalisation and technological change — of blue-collar manufacturing work and service-sector sales and clerical jobs. Policymakers must focus on expanding the supply of jobs in the middle of the skill distribution in order to reverse these polarising effects. This entails revising existing industrial and business-development programmes so that incentives go to the firms most likely to generate decent jobs in the right places and are designed with these firms' needs in mind.

© Project Syndicate, 2021

Misreading China's WTO record hurts global trade



SHANG-JIN WEI

The author is Professor of Finance and Economics at Columbia Business School and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs

The 20th anniversary of China's accession to the World Trade Organization on December 11 has once again highlighted long-standing debates about how well China has lived up to its WTO obligations, and whether any deviation from its commitments boosts or slows its economic growth.

This discussion affects many countries' views on whether the current global trading system should be built up or pulled down.

The United States claims that China routinely violates its WTO obligations, and that the body is ineffectual at changing Chinese behaviour.

But the data do not support such assertions, and the misperception that this narrative has created is hurting the global trading system. To be sure, there are still

many distortions in the Chinese economy.

For example, China has an industrial policy for shipbuilding that has been in place for a decade and a half.

Helped by multiple subsidies for land use, cost of capital, production, and investment totalling about CN¥540 billion (\$85 billion), China has gone from being an insignificant player in the industry to becoming the world's largest exporter of commercial ships.

Many in both the US and China seem to regard this rapid increase in market share as a sign of the success of Chinese industrial policy (though the US believes it is an unfair way to promote economic growth).

But to assess its effect on China's growth, we also need to know the opportunity cost of the subsidies

and the spillover effect from having a large shipbuilding industry.

According to an excellent 2019 paper the subsidisation policy has given Chinese shipyards an additional profit of about CN¥100 billion, and Chinese shipowners another CN¥18 billion. But these gains are less than half of the subsidy's cost.

And while there is no reliable estimate of the spillover effect, a generous guess might be CN¥100 billion. That would imply that this industrial policy has destroyed value in the aggregate, and therefore dragged down, not lifted up, China's overall economic growth.

China also lowered entry barriers for both domestic private firms and international companies. It is these reforms, and not state intervention, that have given rise to the country's rapid economic

growth.

Assessments of China's compliance with WTO rules also are rife with misjudgment. The Trump administration's trade officials often repeated the claim that China has actively evaded its WTO obligations much more frequently than other member countries.

Because China is not bound by the organisation's rules, the argument goes, the US must use tactics outside the WTO system, such as import tariffs, to address Chinese transgressions. The WTO, according to this view, is useless or worse.

In fact, China's WTO compliance record, while imperfect, is broadly comparable to that of other member countries. The WTO system has been generally effective in ensuring that China remains as open as it promised to be when it

joined in 2001.

WTO data on trade disputes — in particular, the number of legal complaints brought by other member countries against China — provides some objective support for this conclusion.

Since 2001, there have been 47 complaints lodged against China, accounting for 12.2 per cent of all WTO dispute cases during that time. Over the same period, there were more than twice as many complaints against the US, accounting for 28.4 per cent of the total. In other words, other WTO members regard China as only half as likely as the US to have violated its obligations under the organisation's rules. The WTO system has worked better than many have claimed. It must not be pulled down. But it can and should, be made better still.

© Project Syndicate, 2021

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Tally
POWER OF SIMPLICITY

TALLY FOR VAT

For Tally Sales, Services or Customization

Contact: TallyGuru +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@rtsgroup.com
Roudh Lotas Group LLC

TallyPrime

<http://www.rltsgroup.com/tally-accounting-software/>

MONDAY DECEMBER 13, 2021 JUMADA AL ULA 8, 1443 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer

Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Tally is now available on the **Cloud**

Ask for FREE Demo

Think TALLY
Call **977 TALLY**
(977 82559)

TallyPrime GOLD

TSO, Tally Solutions for Oman, by Infinity Thoughts LLC : 977 TALLY (977 82559) * sales@tallysolutionsoman.com * www.TallySolutionsOman.com

SIT. WANTED

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, BLA (Honours), 27, Sri Lankan, experienced in Soft & Hard Landscape Design, Master Planning, 3D Visualizations and Site Inspections, seeks suitable placement in Oman. Contact: 9550 7986 / duminduudara@gmail.com

EXPERIENCED Pakistani driver with Omani light vehicle driving licence seeks suitable opening. Speaks Arabic, Hindi, English and is familiar with Muscat, interior areas. Contact GSM 95856719

Smile Dental Clinic
Al Ghubrah, Muscat

• Orthodontics
• Root Canal Treatment
• Ceramic Crowns & Bridges
• Treatment for Bad Breath
• Treatment for Bleeding Gums

Tel: 99785613 / 24499698

Quality Comes First

Tower Cranes & Passenger Lifts:

- Sales and Rental Services
- Installation
- Maintenance Service
- Breakdown Service
- Spare Parts Supply
- Hoist & Lowering
- Support Fixation
- Dismantling

Steel Fabrication Works

NEW MANARA TECHNICAL SERVICES LLC
Mobile: +968 9853 1975, 9853 1970
E-mail: info@newmanara.com / newmanaratechnical@gmail.com
Website: www.newmanara.com

Al Eman Dental Clinic

Flat 22, Floor 2
Abu Zaki Trading Building
Opp. Al Nahda Hospital
Sultan Qaboos Street

+968 24834113
+968 97454854
+968 96438854

Our Mission: To preserve your teeth and smile for a lifetime

FOR SALE

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.

INVESTOR REQUIRED

INVESTOR required to start a small cold-pressed cooking oil extraction unit in Oman. Cold pressed oil will be extracted by using traditional wooden churners. This method helps to retain the natural minerals and vitamins in the oil and is beneficial for health. For more information please contact: 0091-9743234719. edelweissbhoomi@gmail.com

SERVICES

AUTOCAD/ REVIT ARCH MEP, part/full-time. Contact WhatsApp: 79037728.

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

RENT A CAR

Buttercup

Rent A Car

AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. 972494490.

LUXURIOUS

Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crococoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

ZEN POLYNE

"TARPAULIN WAREHOUSE IN OMAN"
INDIAN BRAND BEST QUALITY LDPE TARPAULINE CROSS LAMINATED MULTI-LAYER TARPAULIN

FEATURES OF ZEN-POLYNE

- U.V. STABILIZED
- 100% WATER PROOF
- LIGHT WEIGHT
- THERMO - WELDED JOINTS.
- FLEXIBLE & CUSTOMISED SIZES.
- STRONGEST TARPAULIN EVER
- SUPERIOR DART IMPACT STRENGTH

RAVIRA INDUSTRIES

Please Contact: OMAN : +968 9329 1473 / 7937 1865
UAE : +971 5030 88676
Mail Id: raviranet@omantel.net.om Visit: www.raviranet.com

Naseer & Suleiman GROUP OF COMPANIES

Naseer & Suleiman Group Companies (NSG) proudly announces Sub-franchising opportunities for international brands in the Sultanate of Oman.

Investors who are interested, kindly contact the business development department on **+968 24541111 or +968 93315939**

EURO CHOICE FOODS L.L.C.
(Importers of Frozen, Chilled, Fresh & Dry Food Products)

Food Service • Catering Supply • Ship Chandling • Re-export • Fresh Fruits & Vegetables • Fresh & Chilled Meat and Chicken • Dairy Product & Grocery Items

Tel: +968 24435211 / 24435177
foodservice@eurochoicefoodsllc.com
www.eurochoicefoodsllc.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

FOR RENT

Substantial Villa in Hay Al Shatti near Grand Hayatt. 3 Floors with 40 Rooms, 22 Bathrooms which is suitable for Embassy / Clinic / School / Multipurpose Office / Residential Premises.

TEL : 99643760 / 24704994

M M T CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR SERVICE

MUSCAT: 95605353, 95605454
BARKA: 95893242, 93743308
SOHAR: 96773031, 95347988
FALAJ: 94002341, 95136067
SALALAH: 94575905, 97858656
DUQUIM: 97218831, 94002341

ROAD, SEA & AIR TRANSPORT WORLD WIDE

GTC Building, Near Badr Al Sama Hospital, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
E-mail: mmtcargo@yahoo.com
Customer Care: 96773031 / 97695454

Sea Cargo **800 Bz/Kg** Express Cargo to Kerala 5 to 7 days*

AL NAMANI CARGO
DOOR TO DOOR AIR & SEA CARGO WORLD WIDE

ALL OVER INDIA EXPRESS DELIVERY

Online Tracking
TOLL FREE NUMBER **80066766**

24/7 FREE PICK UP

www.alnamanicargo.com

INDIA | BANGLADESH | INDONESIA | PHILIPPINES | SRI LANKA | ETHIOPIA | ALL GCC SERVICE AVAILABLE

95587410, 99785420, 99638698, 98523831

HO - RUWI - HAMRIYA - GHALA - AL AMRAT - SEEB - SOHAR

AL KHOORY EQUIPMENT EST.
P.O.Box 545, P.C. 117, Al Wadi Al Kabir Area, Sultanate of Oman

Official distributor of **Schneider Electric**

Stockist & Wholesaler of Low Voltage Switchgear Products and a One Stop Solution for all Switchgear Products and Assembly

Tel: +968 24832474, +968 79474556
E-mail: alkhoory@omantel.net.om • www.alkhooryoman.com

GCL GALAXY CARGO LOGISTICS

WORLD WIDE AIR & SEA CARGO SERVICES

Location: Rex Road, Behind Modern Oman Bakery
GSM : +968 99635330 / 93569551
Email : gcloman@hotmail.com
Website : gcloman.com

Airport to Airport
Port to Port
Door to Door
FCL Services
LCL Services
Consolidation
GCC Road Transport
Professional Packing
Moving Local & International

VIGAS CARGO
WORLD WIDE DOOR TO DOOR

Transportation, Packing & Cargo Services

♦ CARGO SERVICES BY AIR & SEA WORLD WIDE

♦ DOOR TO DOOR DELIVERY IN INDIA, INDONESIA & UK

♦ PROFESSIONAL PACKERS & MOVERS

♦ MUSCAT - DUBAI - MUSCAT REGULAR TRANSPORT

H.O. Ruwi
99851366
92495068

Ghubrah : 93571703
Falaj : 93571704
Store : 93571823
Misfa : 98119561
93260956

vigas.cargo@yahoo.com

OMAN OBSERVER

Now get news on the go

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp <your name> to 96473232

www.omanobserver.om @omanobserver

URGENTLY REQUIRED

A leading medical device distributor operating in 13 countries in MENA & India region requires:

Sales representative (Male) with the following qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree Graduate
- Min 2 years of experience in sales for medical device/ healthcare will be preferred but not limited to with good English communication skills
- Knowledge of MS office software
- Omani National

Location: Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Please send your application to: Email to careers@amicogroup.com

Observer

For Advertisements
Please Contact with our Team:

Muscat Office
Sohar Office
Salalah Office
Dhofar Office

Need a Job

A young Omani Women looking for a job in Muscat. She holds a bachelor's degree in computer networks and has experience at Muscat International Airport.

zozoalmashari4@gmail.com

features

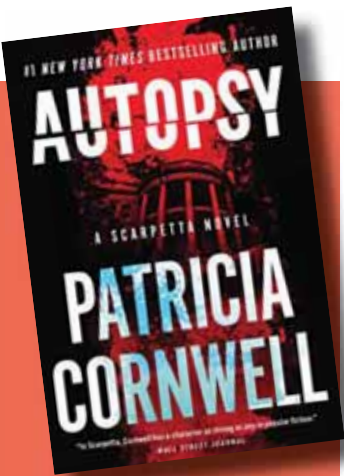


Planting the seeds of interest for science and discovery

Hamdoon al Rashdi has always been fascinated with science, of how it allows the advancement of a person's mental growth and understanding as well as the flourishing of civilisations. Finding joy in his simple discoveries, he started a digital channel that allows him to share his passion... **P20**

ENTERTAINMENT

READ



AUTOPSY
BY PATRICIA CORNWELL

The 25th book in the Kay Scarpetta series. Scarpetta investigates crime scenes in Virginia and outer space.

Camels disqualified from Saudi beauty pageant over use of Botox

DOZENS OF CAMELS have been disqualified from a Saudi beauty contest for having undergone Botox injections as well as other forms of physical enhancement, Saudi state news agency SPA reported on Thursday.

Organisers of the King Abdul-Aziz Camel Festival uncovered multiple cases of "deliberate

tampering" including 27 camels disqualified for having undergone body part stretching and 16 camels for receiving Botox injections, the agency said.

The festival, which is being held near the Saudi capital Riyadh and began earlier this month, offers a total of 250 million riyals (over 66 million dol-

lars) in cash prizes in its numerous different contests, Saudi media said.

In a bid to land a prize or to raise the price tag of their animals, some camel owners resort to using cosmetic techniques to enhance their animals' features, SPA added.

The organisers employ specialists and high-tech equipment to expose "all tampering," it added.

The camels are all subject to thorough physical examinations including X-rays, genetic analysis and lab tests.

Violators face stiff penalties, the agency said without giving any details.

The festival is named after oil-rich Saudi Arabia's founder and is organised by the Saudi Camel Club, which is overseen by the monarchy's powerful Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman. — **dpa**





find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



AROUND THE WORLD

GASTRONOMY

Vietnam War veteran launches 'affordable' gold steak restaurant



A VIETNAMESE HOTEL is offering diners the chance to try gold leaf-coated steaks, seeking to tap a wave of publicity after a government minister was caught on camera being fed the dish at a London restaurant, where steaks can cost over 1,000 pounds.

The Dolce Hanoi Golden Lake Hotel had a makeover last year using a tonne of the metal to gold-plate everything from bath tubs to toilets, all housed behind a gold exterior.

Now as part of a rebranding, the hotel has renamed one of its eating outlets the Golden Beef Restaurant and put the famed gold-encrusted "Tomahawk Wagyu" steak the Vietnamese minister ate in London on the menu, charging from around \$45 a person.

"We have served more than 1,000 guests who came to try out the golden steak," said Nguyen Huu Duong, chairman of Hoa Binh Group, which owns the hotel managed by US-based Wyndham Hotels & Resorts Inc.

Turkish celebrity chef Nusret Gokce, or "Salt Bae", uploaded a video of himself last month feeding Minister of Public Security To Lam the gold-leaf encrusted Tomahawk steak, causing a stir in Vietnam. Steaks at Gokce's restaurant sell for up to 1,450 pounds (\$1,914).

Many in the Southeast Asian country questioned how such a high-ranking Communist Party official allowed himself to be filmed indulging in such expensive food amid a state crackdown on corruption. Vietnamese officials have not commented on the incident.

There was further publicity after Vietnam police summoned a beef noodle seller who filmed himself imitating Gokce's flamboyant style. Police in Vietnam routinely summon activists and people publicly critical of the ruling Communist Party for questioning. The man denied he was trying to mock anyone.

Even though the hotel had already been serving gold steaks, the recent publicity inspired the restaurant's rebranding, said Duong, a Vietnam War veteran and former cyclo taxi driver who made his fortune in construction and property.

The restaurant imports its gold leaves and uses about 10-15 on each Tomahawk steak, which serves four people.

"I thought why don't I open a restaurant that sells golden steaks that are affordable," said Duong.

The dish remains out of reach for many, however, with average monthly income in Vietnam reaching around \$183 per month last year.

Still, diners at the restaurant this week appeared to feel they were getting their money's worth.

"This is one of the most memorable experiences of my life," said first-time customer Pham Duy Bach, 40. — Reuters

CULTURE



Vienna exhibition tests ethics of displaying human remains

A VAST, BLOATED LIVER. An infant with lacerated skin. The deformed skeleton of a young girl.

The recent renovation of one of the collections belonging to Vienna's prestigious Natural History Museum provided curators with a new test of how to display its vast trove of human medical remains, some dating back more than two centuries, without crossing modern red lines of ethics and good taste.

The collection of around 50,000 human body parts was first conceived in 1796 to help train medical students.

In today's world, such gruesome galleries raise tricky questions over whether the public good outweighs moral issues such as human dignity, power and exploitation, and the consent of those — admittedly long dead — subjects on display for all.

"We try to avoid voyeurism by giving as much explanation as possible," says curator Eduard Winter, pointing out that photography inside the galleries is not allowed.

Winter said he hopes that when museum-goers are confronted with "a 30-kilogramme liver... they will realise what alcohol can do to the human body".

Curious visitors can also learn about the effects of viruses on the body or what burn injuries to blood vessels look like. They can peer at human organs, skulls and body

parts — exhibits that some other countries restrict to researchers.

For its supporters, education around the scientific investigation of disease and human health means access to the collection is in the public interest.

"Everyone will have to face illness one day," exhibition director Katrin Vohland says.

"Some people come because they themselves are affected" by certain health problems, while others "want to know more about how science has progressed," she adds.

'NEW LEVEL OF AWARENESS'

The exhibition reopened to the public in September, with only a portion of the world's largest publicly accessible anatomical pathology collection put on display at the renovated museum.

"I knew the former exhibition, but the current one is much better prepared, because everything is described, there is much more information," biology teacher Christian Behavy said during a recent visit to the museum by AFP.

Behavy, who was leading a group of teenagers around the museum, said that his class "could take the information in better" from the exhibits than from textbooks.

Nevertheless, some of the students did seem taken aback by what they saw — the skeleton of the girl

with hydrocephaly, for example, or the preserved body of an infant with lacerations on the skin.

Human remains have been a part of such displays in Europe since the late 16th century when Egyptian mummies were first exhibited.

But according to Marie Cornu, a director of research at France's CNRS institute and an expert on property law as it relates to cultural artefacts, the early 2000s saw a "new level of awareness" on the issue.

The debate was sparked by South Africa's demand for the repatriation of the remains of Saartjie Baartman, a woman from the Khoisan people who was paraded for show in Europe in the 19th century.

After her death, her body was dissected and her skeleton, skull and genitalia were displayed in Paris's Museum of Mankind until 1974.

Controversy also surrounded the plasticising of human remains displayed in blockbuster commercial exhibits in the mid-2000s, with some cities banning the shows on the grounds that organisers could not verify adequate consent and the provenance of body parts.

It has only been in the past 20 years that institutions have "begun to ask themselves questions", says Cornu.

CHANGING ETHICS

To aid such discussions, the International Council of Museums has put together a code of ethics that stipulates that human remains "should be acquired only if they can be housed securely and cared for respectfully".

This must also be done with due attention to "the interests and beliefs" of the community of origin.

Herwig Czech, professor of the history of medicine at the University of Vienna, says that today it would be unthinkable for "someone to die in a hospital and then reappear in an exhibition".

Eloise Quetel, head of medical collections at Paris's Sorbonne University, has also had to grapple with the ethics of such displays and thinks that "they can't be presented as they were before".

Visitors need to be told "why these collections were put together and preserved", she says.

While the Vienna exhibition doesn't raise as many thorny questions relating to colonialism as those in other European countries, Vohland says care must be taken that nothing was obtained illegally and to "know the context in which the specimens arrived".

"It's very important to know what we can show the public." — AFP

AROUND OMAN IN 3RD GEAR



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

The adventure of a blonde and a very old car #21

"HOW QUAIN'T", Mrs J gushed as we slowly cruised down the high street of the coastal town of Sadah. Most of the small restaurants, and even smaller coffee shops, had set up chairs and rickety tables outside for their patrons to meet and exchange news and gossip, and check out every car passing by. Like ours.

Several smiled and waved and gestured at empty chairs for us to join them for a cup of tea. A very smiley town indeed.

Like so many other towns along Dhofar's coast, Sadah had been a port for exporting frankincense many many years ago and some of the old houses previously owned by wealthy sea merchants could still be found along the town's main street.

Standing out from the rest, they were beautiful with their distinctive decorations of sailing vessels on the facades or over the doors. Similar to the houses we had seen in the neighbouring town of Mirbat, it left the visitors in no doubt what this town was all about — the sea.

We continued down to the harbour, an inlet, perfectly protected from the elements by the rocky hills on both sides. It seemed like an odd place to go diving, but we noticed several groups of young men treading water in circles of 5-6, taking turns diving down in the slightly murky water only to come up gasping for air. Most of them had fins and masks, but no snorkel. Was this some kind of manhood test we didn't know about? We watched them utterly fascinated. After a while some of the youngsters came back to the shore to rest on the rocks like sleek, wet seals, teasing each other and shaking their long curly hair so water drops flew everywhere.

Mrs J worked up a bit of courage and approached the boys. "What are you guys looking for? What's so interesting in the middle of the harbour?" she asked. They laughed embarrassed and nudged each other, having suddenly forgotten their school English. An older man was called over to translate.

"They are practising holding their breath underwater", he told us. Aha, so it was a manhood ritual after all. Except it wasn't, of course. The man went on to explain how this was training and a lead-up to a very old and time-honoured tradition for this

part of the coastline — diving for the elusive and rare Abalone.

This prized sea snail had been thriving in the shallow waters along the Dhofar shores, hiding in the abundant kelp forests where it would attach itself to any rocky surface, perfectly protected by its hard shell. To get these delicacies, you would have to hold your breath like a pearl fisher, dive down in the dense kelp and look for them. With a knife, you would have to gently pry them off the rock without damaging the soft flesh underneath the shell. You would have to measure that the size was above the minimum required by law, or else release the abalone again, hoping it would grow big enough for the following fishing season. The longer you could stay underwater without having to come up for air, the greater your chance of securing the rare sea creatures before someone else spotted it. So training your lungs for this was essential.

For centuries the abalone had been renowned for its aphrodisiac properties, far outdoing the raw oyster, and would fetch a market price that would make your eyes water. Of course, this had caused serious over-fishing and the Omani government had been forced to regulate the fishing for the abalone population to multiply and grow bigger, and once again inhabit the waters of Dhofar. For several years diving for these sea creatures had been banned. But now the countdown had started. The government had announced the first abalone fishing season in years and it was short — only 10 days. Anyone wishing to fish for these nuggets of gold had to first obtain an official licence, before even jumping in the water. The excitement was tangible. Like the 1848 American gold rush where every man was certain that luck was on his side and he would end up wealthy.

"See you in 3 days", one of the youngsters shouted over his shoulder before swimming back out in the harbour to continue his training. 3 days before the big day.

I looked at Mrs J and could see that she too was caught up in the gold rush and excitement. Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed she looked like someone who very much planned to sink her teeth into a sea snail. Who would have thought..?!



Planting the seeds of interest for science and discovery

By Mai al Abri

Doing simple science experiments at home or in your classroom is the easiest way to teach kids to be problem solvers and critical thinkers and help them develop a curiosity about the world around them. These skills empower kids to be confident in their ability to handle life's challenges which is a life skill that cannot be overrated!

Hamdoon al Rashdi (@EdisonOmani) is a 23 years old science lover who has always loved sciences since he was a child. He paid particular attention to technology and experiments of electronics in his free time. Gradually, he started introducing himself to the public through social media, where he started a 'How to make?' series which grasped the attention of fans of science and children in particular.

"I'm not happy just accepting things, I want to know why! Science gives me the why then poses even more questions that need answering. It's not a subject that stops, no one will

ever know everything about Science," he said.

"As our understanding of life, the universe and everything deepens, we realise that there is, even more, we don't understand. That unlimited potential is exciting... that's why I find science so amazing", Hamdoon added.

Hamdoon shared that science is all around us and the fascinating part of teaching Science is sharing knowledge and ideas with people. "Experiments and Scientific models allow students to understand some of the tricky concepts as I conducted many workshops for students in colleges, the Children's Museum and schools," he said.

Giving the information in a simple interesting way is the main focus of Edison Omani. The majority of his followers on social media are children and people who gear towards discovery, particularly in technology. However, the entire concept is to deliver the information to all age categories.

Hamdoon believes that when you start in this field, you will not finish. One experiment leads you to the other.

"I love that science allows you to be ambitious, stretching yourself to ask the questions

"what would happen if...?", "why does that ...?" Science is daring, it allows us to debate the ethics of whether we should do something just because we can. You can readily relate new science to your lessons and grasp the interest of our future scientists," he said.

Hamdoon added, "My friends and I formed a group Tech_cover and we participated in a contest to make a phone cover that is connected with the phone via an application that allows you to change the colour of the cover and the picture on it. However, Hamdoon was saddened that this project couldn't see the light of day until now.

"Unfortunately, we couldn't continue due to the high costs and the advanced technologies," he shared.

As technology continues to advance in the country, Hamdoon believes that through what he created, he is planting the seed for future inventors and discoverers to find joy in science and foster their passion. While he works to attain his dream of creating more innovations, he is happy that he is reaching people within the country to develop an interest in what he does.

