

Household business activities regulated

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a ministerial decision promulgating a regulation on making homemade business products. The decision streamlines and legalises the activities of owners of household business activities undertaken by citizens to generate income. **DETAILS ON P13**



P11

VINGEGAARD HEADS FOR PARIS AND TOUR DE FRANCE



P13

NEW BOOST FOR GROWTH OF MICRO-ENTERPRISES IN OMAN



P19

SCIENTISTS REVEAL ORIGIN OF MAMMAL EVOLUTION MILESTONE: WARM-BLOODEDNESS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO TUNISIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of the Republic of Tunisia on his country's Republic Day Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to President Saied. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on President Saied while the Tunisian people realise further aspirations of progress and prosperity. — ONA

OIA’s seven overseas joint ventures deliver promising results

MUSCAT: The seven joint ventures of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) with Arab and non-Arab countries are giving the nation an edge in promising markets. This was revealed in the recently published first annual report of the authority.

Highlighting the results, Mulham bin Basheer al Jarf, OIA Acting Deputy President

for Investment, said that these strategic projects help the Sultanate of Oman to further promote its relations with Arab and non-Arab countries, and get into strategic partnerships that serve the interests of all parties.

He said OIA has successfully entered into seven joint ventures since its inception and together made some good results in the

form of promising additional investments, yields from timely exits, increased capital, and directing some investments to new areas.

With a view to strengthen the partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar, Al Hosn Investment Company (HIC) was established in 2007, as a closed joint stock

company with its head office in Muscat. With assets totalling RO 135 million, and a capital up to RO 250 million, the company invested in the economic sectors in Oman, e.g. banking, industry, communications and technology, food, healthcare, and education. Currently, the company's portfolio has 14 investment projects in different

sectors. Established in 2001 as a joint venture between OIA and the Government of Pakistan, Pak-Oman Investment Company (POIC) is a finance company with a capital RO 40 million. The company achieved a net profit as a result of its diversification initiatives between fixed and floating interest rates.

TURN TO P5

OMAN AIR ADDS MORE FLIGHTS TO INDIA

As demand grows, Oman Air, the Sultanate of Oman's national airline, will operate 10 weekly flights instead of 7 weekly flights between Muscat and Kochi, Delhi, and Chennai in India between August 1 and October 29. “We are pleased to announce additional frequencies to Kochi, Delhi, and Chennai effective next month as part of our comprehensive plans to better serve our international markets and meet our guests’ travel expectations during the holiday season,” said Hamad bin Mohamed al Harthy, Regional Vice-President Sales - Indian Subcontinent and Asia-Pacific. The airline will operate a total of 122 flights per week between Muscat and its 8 Indian destinations with the additional 18 flights per week, offering 10 flights per week in each direction. **DETAILS ON P5**



ZANZIBAR PRESIDENT INVITED TO VISIT OMAN

President Hussein Ali Mwinyi of Zanzibar received at his office on Sunday Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs. Al Wahaibi conveyed greetings of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, to President Mwinyi. He also handed the President of Zanzibar an invitation to visit the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as means of enhancing cooperation to serve the joint interests. — ONA

Depression to make landfall in Oman

MUSCAT: The latest weather charts and analyses of the National Early Warning Centre indicate the probability of the Sultanate of Oman experiencing the impact of a low pressure originating in India.

Under its influence Oman may experience heavy rains on Tuesday and Wednesday, with columns of rain clouds predicted for the next few days.

Oman's Meteorology Office reported that the northern parts of the country will undergo an elongated low pressure on Tuesday and Wednesday, noting that the depression is expected to bring heavy rains in the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Muscat and South Al Batinah.

It added that the low pressure may extend gradually to cover the governorates of North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and Musandam.

During the peak of the low pressure, rainfall will range between 30 mm to 80 mm, causing wadis to overflow, showers of snow pellets and active winds measuring 20-40 knots (40-80 km/h), said the Meteorology Office.

It warned that the tropical condition could entail dusty



winds and cause low visibility, on land, as well as high waves measuring 4 metres along most of Omani coast. The Civil

Aviation Authority (CAA) urges all to exercise caution and avoid crossing flooded wadis or going to sea. — ONA (SEE ALSO P4)



INSIDE



3 KILLED IN PHILIPPINE UNIVERSITY SHOOTING | P7



CONFRONTING THE GROWING DROUGHT RISK | P9

Biden improves ‘significantly’

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's condition has improved “significantly” since the 79-year-old tested positive for Covid, and his main symptom on Sunday was a sore throat, the White House said.

“The president is responding to therapy as expected,” and his treatment with the antiviral Paxlovid will continue as planned, with supportive

treatment of acetaminophen and oral hydration, Biden's physician Kevin O'Connor said in a memorandum to the White House press secretary.

“His symptoms continue to improve significantly,” with body aches and coughing diminishing considerably, his blood pressure, temperature and respiratory rate normal and his lungs clear, O'Connor wrote. — AFP

Scientists uncover the mystery of prized white truffle

PARIS: The prized white truffle emits intense aromas of garlic, fermented cheese and methane, and is so rare that the truffle can fetch up to £9,000 a kilogram.

Now, the puzzle that has confounded experts for more than half a century, of how to cultivate the elusive white truffle on a commercial scale, appears to have been solved, the British Guardian News reported.

This week, scientists from

France's National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (INRAE), will reveal that, at a secret location in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, western France, they have cultivated 26 white truffles.

While more than 90 per cent of black, highly prized Périgord truffles sold are cultivated, previous attempts to farm their rarer white cousins have failed. This bumper harvest follows

two productive years at the experimental plantation during which barely a handful were cultivated.

“This significant increase in production is very promising,” said mycologist and project leader Dr Claude Murat, of INRAE and the University of Lorraine, Nancy.

“It confirms the truffle is well established”. “With black truffles it is usual to have just a few truffles at first and then a quick increase,

and it seems the white truffle is behaving in the same way, which is good news for future cultivation.” Truffles, like many other fungi, form symbiotic relationships with certain tree species by linking up with their roots. They deliver extra water and minerals to trees in exchange for carbon-based nutrients.

Scientists developed a way to inoculate trees with Périgord truffles in the 1970s, leading to

the establishment of thousands of plantations in France, Italy and later Spain. The same technique failed with Italian white truffles (*Tuber magnatum*), despite planting more than 500,000 seedlings in Italy.

Starting in 1999, researchers at INRAE and the Pépinières Robin nursery, in France, produced oak trees genetically confirmed to have partnered Italian white truffles. — Agencies

Sincere congratulations and blessings
to His Highness

Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said

The Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth
on the occasion of his graduation from
The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

May Allah grant His Highness all success
and prosperity



Sincere congratulations

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3



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Second Arab Tourism forum kicks off in Dhofar



SALALAH: The Second Arab Tourism and Heritage Forum, organised by the Arab Tourism Media Centre, began in Salalah on Sunday.

The two-day event, which takes place within the context of Dhofar monsoon programme, was opened by His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The forum includes specialised workshops on a variety of topics: "Role of the new media in activating tourism", "World

heritage sites in the Sultanate of Oman" and "sustainability and social development".

The forum seeks to establish strong partnership between media institutions and government and private sector establishments operating in the field of heritage and tourism. The aim is to enhance marketing in the backdrops of economic challenges facing all countries, bearing in mind that the tourism sector plays a vital role in the future vision of every country. — ONA

Shihab receives Commander of Royal Saudi Air Force

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received Lt. Gen Turki Bandar Al Saud, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force and his accompanying delegation, in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday. During the meeting, they reviewed the relations between the two countries and exchanged viewpoints on matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO).

In a separate meeting Air Vice Marshal Al Ghafri, Commander of the RAFO and Lt. Gen Al Saud, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force exchanged viewpoints and discussed a number of military matters that serve the air forces of the two countries. They also reviewed several matters of



common interest. The meeting was attended by Senior RAFO officers and the Military Attaché at the Saudi Embassy in Muscat.

Lt. Gen Al Saud, Commander of the Royal Saudi Air Force and his accompanying delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). During the visit, the guest

was accompanied by Air Vice Marshal Al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO). Upon the guest's arrival, he was greeted by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser Al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Acting Head of the MSC.

The guest toured the centre's

facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was also briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre within its national duties, as it coordinates with relevant authorities in ensuring the safety of the maritime environment.

— ONA

Long-term visa likely for more sectors

KABEER YOUSUF

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More sectors are likely to come under long-term visas to boost foreign investment in the country

Accordingly, more investors will be able to enjoy the benefits of longer residence permits once the ceiling of investments is brought down upon receiving approval from the Council of Ministers.

The National Programme for Investment and Export Development at the Oman Vision

2040 has earlier clarified that the second phase of the investor residency programme will have more categories aiming at encouraging more investments to the country.

"We have discovered after the implementation of the first phase that there is an increasing demand from other sectors and investors with lesser capping and we have submitted this proposal to the Council of Ministers for approval," said Khalid al Shuaibi, head of Nazdaher, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-up Unit.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), started issuing longer residency status to foreign investors and retirees with 10-year and five year residency permits in September 2021.

The Investor Residency Programme grants the awardees the right to long residency in the Sultanate of Oman, and aims to facilitate granting residency to investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also aims to support

integrative efforts to enhance the investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman, promote economic diversification and attract quality investments within the economic stimulus plan and in pursuit of its objectives related to improved incentives for the business environment.

Investors who obtain an investor residence card can obtain many incentives, as the investor is granted the right to own one property outside the ITC, whether for residential, commercial or industrial purposes, and is transferable to others.

MoL conducts training for job seekers

IBRA: A training programme entitled Tamkin-Sahim for the empowerment of youth wishing to take up government jobs was conducted by the Ministry of Labour in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah.

The five-day course is the second leg of a training programme targeting 2,216 job seekers who passed interviews and tests from different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. It seeks to raise the volume of productivity in the workplace

for government job candidates. Among them 202 from North Al Sharqiyah Governorate).

Tamkin-Sahim Empowerment Programme is undertaken by the Ministry of Labour, represented by the Training Support Centre based in different governorates of Oman.

The first stage of the programme was conducted in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah last June. The third will be in Dhofar Governorate next week.

TRA issues guidelines on wired Internet

VINOD NAIR

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With more residential houses opting for wired Internet, the national regulatory body has issued a special advisory video on wiring in the premises.

Ibrahim al Maawali of the technical specifications department at the Telecom Regulatory Authority, said that in every building there must be special infrastructure to facilitate the delivery of telecom services by service providers.

He said the main principles of connection include equipping the building with wall wiring to the main distribution box in the middle on the ground floor.

The extension of the cables should be continuous without intermediate connections and the sizes of cables should consider the future needs of such services.

The path for communication cables inside the building should



be separate from the electrical cables at an appropriate distance according to the electrical voltage.

The electrical contractors involved in the process should take care not to install communication sockets in a place that may be exposed to moisture, dust, or extreme heat, and not to place communication sockets in a place less than 30

cm above the floor surface.

For single-story residential buildings, it is recommended to use an extension of Class VI copper cabling to connect the main distribution box to all telecommunication sockets through ducts, and to provide cables from the main box for each wireless network device (WiFi).

For multi-storey residential

buildings, they must provide the main distributor box on the ground floor linked to rising channels with the floor distribution boxes on each floor.

The technicians must provide a distribution box in each unit on the one floor with the provision of cable passage channels. As for commercial buildings, a separate communication room must be provided as an alternative to the main distribution box.

Last week, TRA warned about risks when creating wireless networks for the purpose of sharing Internet services with neighbours.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the TRA said that such activities can cause technical glitches.

"There is a possibility of interference in wireless networks and the impact on the speed and quality of service for the rest of the subscribers in the same area."

Prepaid meters from Majan Electricity Company are the best choice for electricity Conservation

Majan Electricity Company announced the strengthening of its efforts in providing prepaid meters to its customers starting from July 2022. Majan Electricity Company, recently witnessing high demand from applicants to obtain prepaid electricity meters and receiving positive feedback from customers who already had them installed.

Mr. Sultan Al-Wahaibi, Manager of the Prepaid Smart Meters Department at Majan Electricity Company, confirmed the company's readiness in providing its customers with prepaid meters. Prepaid meters are an ideal solution for customers of all categories (residential, commercial, agricultural, fisheries and tourism) to manage and control their consumption by paying for it in advance to ensure that it does not exceed their budget. This helps avoid the accumulation of electricity bills and a sudden increase in consumption.

In order to obtain a prepaid electricity meter, new customers need to apply for a connection through the Majan company website majanco.co.om or through one of its customer service centers. Existing customers would need to submit a request to replace a postpaid electricity meter with a prepaid one, ensuring that all previous dues are

paid. A specialist from Majan Electricity Company will then register the request, and the customer will receive a visit from a technician to ensure that there are appropriate technical connections for the installation of the prepaid meter. Once the application is complete, one of the contracting companies will start the installation process.

It is worth noting that Majan Electricity Company, one of Nama Group companies, is the company licensed to distribute electricity in the regions of North Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi. The company launched the prepaid meter installation service in October 2019 at a lower scale, with the aim of identifying customer demand before providing it on a larger scale, which started this month.





Rains and strong winds likely in northern areas

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The National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre issued a weather alert on Sunday stating the low pressure system in India could affect the Sultanate of Oman this week.

By late afternoon on Sunday, rains of varying intensity accompanied by active wind was reported over parts of the governorates of South Al Batinah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat and Al Dhahirah.

According to Oman Met Office, there is continuous expansion and extension of formations on Al Hajr Mountains. Since Saturday evening, there have been formations and expansion of cumulus clouds and scattered rains over the mountainous areas of the governorates South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah.

In addition, the numerical models taken during afternoon and evening showed that the active downward winds were ranging between 15-30 knots that is 30 to 60 km/h.

Four arrested for deliberately crossing wadi

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Sunday arrested four citizens for deliberately crossing a flooded wadi and putting their lives at risk.

In a statement issued, ROP said the incident happened in Wilayat of Rustaq. "The Police Command of South Al Batinah Governorate arrested four citizens for deliberately crossing a valley in the Wadi Bani Ghafer area in the Wilayat of Rustaq, and exposing themselves to danger. Legal procedures are being completed against them to refer them to the judicial authorities."

There have been continuous alerts from Oman Met Office on chances of thunderstorms with varying intensity of rainfall over

Hajr Mountains, specifically on the mountainous areas located in the governorates of North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah. The impact is expected to include the plains and deserts of Al Dhahirah and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. The expected rainfall is between 10 and 40 mm associated with hail which may lead to the flow of wadis.

The weather maps and analysis of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicated that the Sultanate of Oman will be affected on Tuesday and Wednesday by an extension of low pressure system from India.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the effect could start gradually, said Oman Met Office, "over northern governorates by the extension of low pressure system."

Chances of thunderstorms have been forecast during this period for the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Muscat, South Al Batinah, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, North Al Sharqiyah and Musandam.

Tourism is back but needs a long-term vision, say experts

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@vinot_nair

The travel and tourism industry is back on its track, but difficult to say whether it has come with a vengeance as international travel has been affected by a lack of preparedness, mainly the shortage of manpower.

Since travel was limited to emergencies for the most part of the 2020-21 any improvement in terms of percentages will look impressive.

Travel has picked up even in Oman this year and it was evident from the presence of a large number of foreign delegates who attended several important conferences and exhibitions organised in the second quarter of this year.

The capital Muscat organised several important events that included the luxury tourism meet, the World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists, and the Muscat Book Fair.

With the advent of the Khareef season in the south, Dhofar Governorate has been witnessing a big influx of tourists, including travellers from Saudi Arabia who have direct road access to the Sultanate of Oman for the first time. The number of international airlines operating flights to Salalah has also increased this year, including some airlines arriving for the first time.

Speaking to the Observer,



The number of international airlines operating flights to Salalah has also increased this year, including some airlines arriving for the first time.

industry experts said that it is an opportunity to chalk out long-term plans better to grow tourism. One report said that a lack of skilled professionals could potentially hinder the growth of the Middle East's tourism and hospitality sector.

Recently, an official associated with a leading online tour operator in the country said, "Domestic tourism sustained these sectors during the two years of restrictions, but that has changed now, and people are travelling abroad, mainly to beat the summer here. With oil prices still at higher levels and airfares expensive, we must find ways to entertain the travellers who cannot afford to travel." He added, "There is no harm in commercialising the public facilities, but users can get good services in return. The Ministry

of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has already launched the process to hand over the facilities to private parties, the results of which can be positively visible in the coming months as the country prepares for its busy winter season.

According to the UN World Tourism Organization, international tourist arrivals registered a 182 per cent increase to an estimated 117 million in the first quarter of 2022 from about 41 million in the year-ago period.

In the Middle East and Europe, earnings climbed to about 50 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, according to the UNWTO.

Summer travel in various parts of the world has been affected. Many airports and hotels have been unable to recruit back the personnel who were let go during restrictions.

PRIDE OF OMAN



The Royal Navy of Oman's Shabab Oman II won the first place in sports competitions as part of the Tall Sail Ship Festival 2022 at the port of Antwerp, Belgium.

German globetrotter on bike falls in love with Oman

LIJU CHERIAN
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Friedrich Schatz has a passion for riding bikes which he slowly developed into an adventure. This German from Dresden is globetrotting on Royal Enfield Bullet 500.

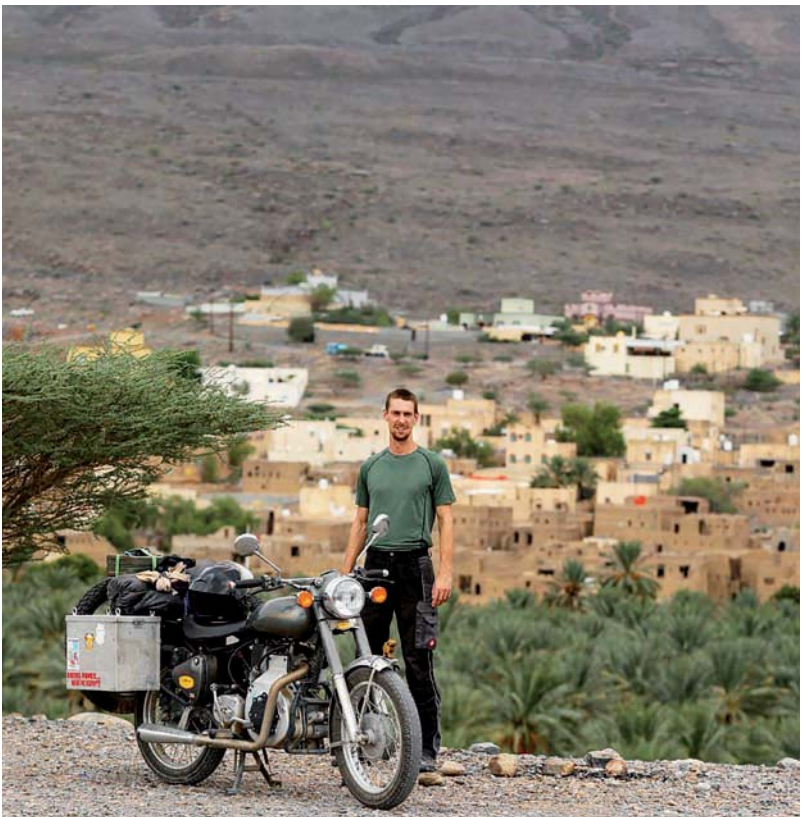
Crazy about bikes and thump, he drove into Oman on July 8 from Al Ain border.

"I love Oman and I love to swim in the wadis to keep the heat away," he says as he rolls out names of locations he had been to— Ibri, Al Fath, Suhar, Wadi Dam, Nizwa, Al Hamra, Jabal Shams and Bahla fort.

"Oman is the most beautiful place in the Middle East," says Friedrich as he scurries through his Google map each moment during his conversation scanning

for new locations. Before crossing over from UAE, Friedrich had travelled over to Austria, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey and Iran. "The pandemic drove me to explore a new world and meet people after two years. It was a real spontaneous decision to take the bike and travel around," says Friedrich.

As a teenager he earlier worked with the German army and in an automobile workshop from where he hit upon an idea to travel around the world. Through the help from Sommer, his engineer friend from Bavaria, remodified his bike to change the engine, removing the gearbox and converting it to a diesel engine. The rear of the bike has two metallic boxes fixed to the sides which Friedrich has filled with a petrol cooker (whenever



he feels like cooking on the way), clothes, spare parts and tools. As a mascot for the bike, he got a wooden camel fitted on the top of the mudguard calling it a 'Camel Gustav'.

Anas bin Malik bin Hilal al Abri, a marketing student from UTAS, happened to notice Friedrich at a fuel station in Nizwa. They both became friends as they both share a passion for bikes and adventure. They both stayed together at Al Hamra and went trekking around Al Hamra and Wadi Nakhr, the Grand Canyon of the Middle East.

Anas says, Friedrich is certainly an inspiration to young Omanis to travel around the world. "It is a challenge as he drives on a small old bike to carry forward his passion. We made him try local food, shuwa and it was sheer joy to enjoy his friendship."

Friedrich also carries his German passport and a Carnet de Passage for motor vehicles which he has to produce at the customs clearance office for entry and exit. The only hassle he encountered was the enormous delay at the Bandar Abbas port in Iran which took him about 3 days by ship to get him to Sharjah, UAE.

He says he prefers to stay longer in Muscat before he drives down to Salalah and from there by ship to Somalia or to Saudi Arabia and Sudan by ship and enter the African continent from Ethiopia.

He has set his eyes on South Africa and wants to enjoy Lake Victoria, the world's largest tropical lake. This 26-year-old says he wants to live for the present and not worry about tomorrow. Writing diaries, reading travel books are some of his pastimes.



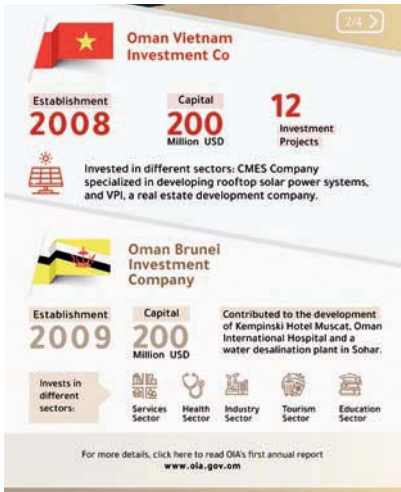
OIA's ventures deliver good results

FROM PAGE 1

In 2008, Oman Vietnam Investment Corporation was established as a joint venture between OIA and the State Capital Investment Corporation (SCIC). It invests in businesses and projects aiming to achieve development and sustainable economic growth. The value of this joint venture is \$200 million covering 12 investment portfolios. From June 2020 to December 2021, the company invested \$20 million in CMES Company specialised in developing rooftop solar power systems, and \$30 million in VPI, a real estate development company. Moreover, the company fully exited from BCG Solar Farms with an IRR of 13 per cent, where the value of investment increased by 3.1 times, and partially exited 70 per cent from CII Company operating in infrastructure projects, with an IRR of 13 per cent, where the value of investment increased by 4.2 times. Moreover, the company reviewed and updated its investment plan in order to cope with the expected changes in the Vietnamese market, and to focus on the promising sectors; i.e. technology, education, health, logistics, retail and industrial zones.

OMAN BRUNEI INVESTMENT COMPANY

Established in October 2009, OBIC's investment strategy focuses on optimisation of capital in companies with high growth potential through private equity and investing in new projects or in joint ventures. OBIC seeks to achieve an IRR not less than 12-15 per cent through a diversified portfolio that includes service, industry, health, education and tourism sectors. OBIC was founded with an initial capital of \$100 million, which was later increased to \$200 million in 2019. Currently, the company invests in assets worth of \$1 billion. It contributed to the



development of several key projects in Oman, including the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, Oman International Hospital, which is managed by an international operator, a water desalination plant in Suhar in partnership with a specialised company from Spain, and a portfolio of aircraft rental in partnership with a German company. It is working on developing a private school in collaboration with a global specialised educational company. Additionally, it invests in projects in the Sultanate of Brunei, including a shrimp aquaculture project, and another salmon aquaculture project in the pipeline. It managed to profitably exit from previous investments such as Majan Telecommunication (Renna Mobile), Babylon Medical Services Company, and a stock portfolio

specialised in the energy sector.

UZBEK OMAN INVESTMENT COMPANY

Uzbek Oman Investment Company (UOI) was established in 2010 as a joint venture between OIA and Uzbekistan (75 per cent from Oman and 25 per cent from Uzbekistan), with a capital of \$200 million. UOI invests in textile, food and pharmaceutical products, retail, financial and technological services, real estate and foreign currencies. The company currently has 12 investment projects after it fully exited from a number of investments. During the fourth quarter of 2021, the company's board of directors approved a proposal to restructure its investment portfolio with the aim of maintaining the portfolio's value and improving its returns by shifting from low-return assets to high-

return assets.

OMAN-INDIA JOINT INVESTMENT FUND

The Oman-India Joint Investment Fund (OIJIF) was established in 2011, and invests in different economic sectors in India in two portfolios. The first portfolio is a 50/50 joint investment fund between OIA and State Bank of India (SBI) and includes 7 investment projects. It exited completely from 13 investments and partially from one investment, with an IRR of 2.3 times of the cost. The value of the second portfolio is \$229 million, of which 63 per cent is for OIA, while 22 per cent is owned by State Bank of India and another 15 per cent is owned by other investors. Over 80 per cent of the fund's capital is directed to investment projects.

SPAIN OMAN PRIVATE EQUITY FUND

Spain Oman Private Equity Fund is established in 2014 as a 50/50 joint investment between OIA and COFIDES, a company owned by the Spanish Government. The capital of this joint fund is EUR 200 million. Currently, it has 6 investment projects representing 43 per cent of the Fund's total capital. In April 2021, it invested in Logalty, a company that specialised in the provision of electronic evidence service for e-contracting, communication, and personal identity.

After it successfully added 35 new investments to its investment portfolio in the private equity markets, exited some investments with good returns, and realised average returns of 10.3 per cent since its inception, OIA is pursuing new opportunities through partnerships with brotherly and friendly countries. OIA's first annual report, which has been issued recently, gives an overview of its business and investments since its establishment on 4 June 2020 under Royal Decree No. 61/2020 till December 31, 2021.

— ONA

Oman Air to increase India flights

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 24

As demand grows, Oman Air, the Sultanate of Oman's national airline, will operate 10 weekly flights instead of 7 weekly flights between Muscat and Kochi, Delhi, and Chennai in India between August 1 and October 29.

"We are pleased to announce additional frequencies to Kochi, Delhi, and Chennai effective next month as part of our comprehensive plans to better serve our international markets and meet our guests' travel expectations during the holiday season," said Hamad bin Mohamed al Harthy, Regional Vice-President Sales — Indian Subcontinent & Asia-Pacific.

The airline will operate a total of 122 flights per week between Muscat and its 8 Indian destinations with the additional 18 flights per week, offering 10 flights per week in each direction to Delhi, Kochi, and Chennai, 7 flights per week to Bangalore, Mumbai, Kozhikode, and Hyderabad, as well as 3 flights per week to Goa.

Al Harthy continued, "The airline will offer wide-body service, including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A330 in addition to the Boeing 737, between Muscat and destinations in India. Oman Air is renowned for its exceptional award-winning products and services, both in the air and on the ground, and for the signature Omani hospitality accessible to guests on every flight." Oman 'Stopover Packages' offer Oman Air-ticketed passengers the flexibility to discover some of the most desirable tourist spots in and around Muscat. Each stopover is designed to offer visitors a distinct taste of some of Oman's leading attractions. Enabling the country's flourishing tourism potential is something Oman Air Holidays does exceptionally well, and the launch of its stopover packages adds to Oman's growing inventory of custom stays and experiences.

Oman Air welcomes all guests to the Sultanate of Oman on board its award-winning flights. Updated flight times and schedules can be found by visiting omanair.com. As of May 22, all Covid-19 preventive safety precautions and procedures previously in place at airports across Oman have been lifted.

Guests departing Oman should ensure that they are aware of all pre-departure requirements and requirements during their flights, which are provided at omanair.com.

WHO to take stock of Covid-19, Monkeypox cases in region

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The World Health Organization (WHO) will assess the regional as well as international incidence and updates on Covid-19 and Monkeypox.

The assessment meeting chaired by Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, will be held on Tuesday and holds importance after the UAE reported Monkeypox cases.

Dr Maha el Rabbat, Special Envoy of the Director-General for Covid-19 Preparedness and Response, Dr Richard Brennan,

Regional Emergency Director, WHO/EMRO, and Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, Manager, Infectious Hazards Prevention and Preparedness, WHO/EMRO will also be present.

The briefing will highlight the latest global and regional updates on Covid-19 and the announcement of Monkeypox as a public health emergency of international concern.

UAE has earlier announced its readiness to deal with the disease and start early surveillance for it, while Saudi Arabia has said that the possibility of monkeypox patients transmitting to the Kingdom is very weak.

Qatar said that it has taken a full set of public health measures for early detection of any suspected cases, just in case it appears and to contain any possible spread of the same.

Kuwait too has sounded the same and confirmed that no cases of monkeypox were detected in the country. It further said that Monkeypox is a usually mild infectious disease that is endemic in parts of West and Central Africa and is a rare virus similar to human smallpox and human-to-human transmission occurs between people in close contact with cases who show symptoms.

OVER 301,000 HOURS OF PART-TIME WORK NOW OPEN

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour has announced the availability of 301,172 hours of part-time jobs as part of an initiative code-named "A Million Hours of Employment" in government units. It is open for aspirants with different qualifications. — ONA

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUCTION

Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) hereby announces auction as mentioned in the following table:

Auction No.	Material for Sale	Last Date of Buying	Preview Date	Last date of Submission
02/2022	Selling of Scrap Materials at Saih Al Khirat Power Station - Dhofar Governorate	2/08/2022	4/08/2022	10/08/2022

In accordance with the following conditions:

- Interested and Specialized Companies in scrap activities and have official registration with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain the auction documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment of RO. 50/- (Rial Omani Fifty Only) for each set of documents. The fees of the auction shall be deposit on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824.
- Offers should be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to the Chairman of Procurement Committee, Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C), marked with the auction number and subject. Other marks or reference whatsoever should be printed on the envelope. The identity of the bidder should not be revealed and should be submitted before 1:00 P.M. on the assigned date for submission of the auction.
- The buyer must pay the complete amount of his offer within **Two Weeks** of such notification by deposit or certified cheque.
- The buyer must transfer all the material and clean the location within **One Month** from the date of client notification for taking the materials. If the buyer does not transfer the materials purchased within the specified period, the same will be confiscated by the company. Such confiscated materials will be released to the buyer upon payment of demurrage charges to be calculated by the Seller.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company has the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.
- Preview of the material to be determined later during the formal working hours.

For more information please call: 80077787



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GS Inima BARKA LLC

Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV/06/2022 for supply Forklift & Pallet Trolley

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC the EPC contractor for Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC, invites Omani companies to bid for the supply of:

- Quantity One Diesel Forklift 5 ton capacity for general use.
- Quantity One Pallet Trolley 2-3 ton capacity for general use.

Offers will be sent to e-mail address : barka.v.site@inima.com not later than **27th July 2022 1:00 PM** and offer shall include equipment data sheets.

- Validity of offer: One month, currency: OMR.
- General Terms and Condition are applied.



Two Palestinians killed in Israeli raid

NABLUS: Israeli forces killed two Palestinians during an overnight raid in the occupied West Bank, officials on the two sides said on Sunday, in what Israel described as a shootout with gunmen.

The Israeli army said it carried out operations and used live fire in several locations, including in Nablus, adding it arrested four “individuals suspected of involvement in violent activities”.

The military said “hits” were identified against multiple “gunmen” and said there were no reported wounded on its own side.

The Palestinian health ministry identified the dead as Muhamad Azizi, 25, who it said was killed by a bullet to the chest, and Abdul Rahman Jamal Suleiman Sobh, 28, who was shot in the head.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported treating 19 wounded in Nablus, including 10 people hit by live fire.

Israel’s security forces have launched near-daily operations in the West Bank following a spate of attacks in Israel in recent months.



Palestinian rescue teams rush to the scene of clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian gunmen in the Old City of Nablus on Sunday. – AFP

The Jewish state has occupied the West Bank since 1967.

Israel’s Prime Minister Yair Lapid said those targeted in the overnight raid were linked to recent “shooting attacks” on Israelis, and he commended the security forces for an “efficient and successful operation.”

“Several gunmen were killed in the exchanges of fire and several more were wounded. Considerable weaponry was seized,” Lapid said.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, a spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, called the raid an “Israeli crime.”

“The entire region will remain in a cycle of violence until the occupation is ended and a just peace is achieved,” he added in a statement to Voice of Palestine radio.

OPERATIONS

The Israeli army said in a statement that its operation in Nablus was carried out alongside police, and that it also launched operations in several other locations including the town of Mughayir, Ayda camp and the city of Jenin.

It said the operation in Nablus was launched “to apprehend armed suspects”.

“An exchange of fire took place between the armed suspects and Israeli forces. Hits on a number of gunmen were identified,” it said.

The Israeli military alleged that a “violent riot was instigated” during the “operational activity”.

“The rioters hurled explosive devices and rocks and shot at... soldiers, endangering their lives,” it said. “The soldiers responded with riot dispersal means and live fire.” — AFP

Iraq, Kurdistan choose talks to ease oil dispute

BAGHDAD: The federal government in Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdish region have pledged to “increase dialogue” to ease a simmering oil dispute that has been playing out in the courts in recent months.

The announcement came during a rare visit to the Iraqi capital by the Kurdistan region’s prime minister. Masrour Barzani, who had not visited Baghdad since 2019, met Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi for wide-ranging talks.

An oil dispute that has been poisoning relations between the two sides, and threatening to harm Iraq’s lifeline oil industry according to analysts, was among the topics.

— AFP

Lanka president’s office to reopen after crackdown on protesters

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s besieged presidential office will reopen on Monday, police said, days after anti-government demonstrators were flushed out in a military crackdown that triggered international condemnation.

Widespread public anger over the island’s unprecedented economic crisis saw protesters storm and occupy the colonial-era building earlier this month.

Soldiers were forced to rescue then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa from his nearby residence on the same day, with the leader fleeing to Singapore and resigning days later.

Troops armed with batons and automatic weapons cleared the 92-year-old presidential secretariat in a pre-dawn raid on Friday on the orders of Rajapaksa’s successor, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

At least 48 people were wounded and nine arrested in the operation, during which security forces tore down tents set up by protesters outside the complex since April.

“The office is ready for reopening from Monday,” said a police official on Sunday, who declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.



Members of security personnel guard Presidential Secretariat in Colombo. – AFP

“The siege of the secretariat, which lasted since May 9, has now been lifted.”

Police said forensic experts had been called in to check damage to the Presidential Secretariat and gather evidence.

Western governments, the UN and human rights groups have condemned Wickremesinghe for using violence against unarmed protesters who had announced their intention to vacate the site later on Friday.

Wickremesinghe defended the crackdown and said he had told Colombo-based diplomats on Friday that blocking government buildings was unacceptable.

Police spokesman Nihal Taldewa said protesters were free to continue their demonstrations at a designated site near the presidential office.

“They can remain at the official protest site. The government may even open a few more places for demonstrators in the city,” Taldewa said on Sunday.

The military operation to clear the secretariat building and its immediate surroundings came less than 24 hours after Wickremesinghe was sworn in and just before a new cabinet was appointed.

BURNING FUEL CRISIS

Sri Lanka’s 22 million people have also endured months of lengthy blackouts, record inflation and shortages of food, fuel and petrol.

Its government is officially bankrupt, having defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt, and is currently in bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund.

The economic crisis which fuelled the protest campaign shows no sign of easing, but the government announced on Sunday it would reopen schools which had remained shut for the better part of a month.

The education ministry said students and teachers will be asked to return to school only for three days each week as transport is still hampered by a national fuel shortage.

Miles-long queues of motorists waiting to fill up were seen across the country on Sunday despite the government introducing a rationing system.

New president Wickremesinghe has said he will unveil a fresh budget for the rest of the year in August as previous revenue and expenditure estimates were unrealistic. —AFP

Floods wash away dozens of houses in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Flash floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains left seven people dead and swept away dozens of houses in north-western Pakistan, officials said on Sunday.

More than three dozen houses in Kohistan region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were washed away by the flash floods leaving hundreds of people homeless, Taimur Ali, a spokesperson for the provincial disaster management authority said.

At least seven people were killed in rain related incidents across the country, according to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

The death toll from more than five weeks of heavy rains across the country has now reached 310, according to the NDMA.

Ali said that the authorities were assessing the damage and trying to reach villagers facing shortage of safe drinking water.

Heavy rains inundated several neighbourhoods in the southern city of Karachi and Zhob in the south-western province of Balochistan.

Images by the local media showed submerged roads and houses in major cities, whereas flash floods swept away homes, destroyed crops and damaged roads and bridges.

Meteorological officials said the rains were expected to continue few more days.

Pakistan faced a severe heatwave in May. Weeks later the authorities issued warnings for worst flooding in decades.

— dpa



A man uses a plastic sheet to shelter during a monsoon rainfall while driving a three-wheeler vehicle in Lahore. – AFP

SHORT TAKES

DAMASCUS

Attack on Syria church gathering kills two

Two people were killed and 12 injured on Sunday by bombardment of a church as it was being inaugurated in Syria’s central province of Hama, the official SANA news agency reported.

“A rocket fired by armed organisations targeted a religious gathering in the town of Al Suqaylabiyah near Hama, killing two people and wounding 12,” it said.

SANA said the attack came during a ceremony to inaugurate the Ayia Sofia church.

Britain-based war monitor the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a vast network of sources on the ground, confirmed the attack.



KABUL

Taliban delegation heads to Intl conference

A Taliban delegation led by their Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi left Kabul on Sunday to attend an international conference on Afghanistan in the Uzbek capital Tashkent, the de facto authorities announced.

Uzbekistan, which has developed close diplomatic relations with the Taliban in Kabul, is hosting the two-day conference that will open on Monday with participants from over 20 countries and international organisations.



AMMAN

Jordan king protests militia attacks on border

King Abdullah II protested in an interview published on Sunday over attacks on Jordan’s borders by “militias”, following deadly clashes with drug smugglers on the frontier with Syria.

Jordan faces “regular attacks on its borders by militias”, he told Al Rai newspaper.

Abdullah called for “a change of behaviour” and said that Jordan “does not want tensions in the region”.

“Jordan, like the rest of the Arab countries, seeks good relations with neighbours, with mutual respect, good neighbourliness, respect for the sovereignty of other states and non-interference in their affairs,” the king said.





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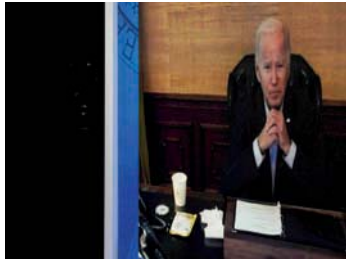
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In brief

■ WASHINGTON



WHITE HOUSE SAYS BIDEN IMPROVING FROM MILD COVID

President Joe Biden, who tested positive for Covid-19 on Thursday, is improving in health and none of his 17 identified close contacts have so far tested positive for the coronavirus, White House Covid coordinator Ashish Jha said on Sunday. Jha told ABC News Biden “had a great day yesterday, was feeling well,” and that Biden’s close contacts were continuing to follow the protocols of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Biden, 79, had experienced mild symptoms, according to the White House. His diagnosis came as a highly contagious subvariant of the coronavirus drives a new wave of cases in the United States.

■ ROME



POPE DEPARTS FOR CANADA TO ASK FORGIVENESS

Pope Francis has departed on a trip to Canada during which he is expected to ask for forgiveness after a series of revelations about abuse and violence in institutions run by the Catholic Church. The pope begins his six-day journey in Edmonton, where he lands on Sunday. He is due to meet several of Canada’s Indigenous groups, after the nation was rocked by the gruesome discoveries of hundreds of children’s bodies near former Catholic boarding schools last year. They triggered outrage at the Catholic Church, which placed Indigenous children, who had been snatched from their families, in the institutions.

■ TOKYO



VOLCANO ERUPTS ON WESTERN JAPANESE ISLAND OF KYUSHU

A volcano on Japan’s major western island of Kyushu erupted on Sunday evening, sending black smoke billowing high into the air, but there were no immediate reports of any damage or of anybody being hurt. The volcano, which is called Sakurajima and is located on the southern tip of Kyushu near the city of Kagoshima, erupted at about 8:05 pm. NHK public television cited reports of volcanic stones raining down at a distance of 2.5 km from the volcano. The eruption alert level has been raised to 5, the highest, with some areas advised to evacuate.

PORT STRIKE CASTS DOUBT ON MILESTONE GRAIN DEAL



Firefighters work at a site of a Russian missile strike in a sea port of Odesa.—Reuters

Russia hits Ukrainian warship and missiles depot in Odesa

KYIV: Russia said on Sunday that its missile barrage on a Ukrainian port key to a freshly-inked grain export deal had targeted military infrastructure at the facility, after the attack sparked an outcry from Ukraine and its allies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced on Saturday’s strike on the Odessa port — that came just one day after the warring sides struck a deal to resume exports blocked by the conflict — as “Russian barbarism”.

Turkey helped broker the accord and said after the double cruise missile attacks that it had received assurances from Moscow that Russian forces were not responsible.

But Russia’s foreign ministry spokeswoman appeared to roll back on that denial on Sunday, saying the strikes had destroyed a Ukrainian warship.

“Kalibr missiles destroyed military infrastructure in the port of Odessa, with a high-precision strike,” Maria Zakharova said in a statement on social media, claiming a “patrol boat” had been sunk.

The port attack has thrown into doubt the milestone agreement aimed at relieving a global food crisis that was hammered out over months of negotiations and signed in Istanbul.

Zelensky said the strikes on Odessa showed Moscow could not be trusted to keep its promises and that dialogue with Moscow was becoming increasingly untenable. “This apparent Russian

THE DEAL INCLUDES POINTS ON RUNNING UKRAINIAN GRAIN SHIPS ALONG SAFE CORRIDORS THAT AVOID KNOWN MINES IN THE BLACK SEA

barbarism brings us even closer to obtaining the very weapons we need for our victory,” Zelensky said in a late-night address to the nation.

Under the deal brokered by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and United Nations chief Antonio Guterres, Odessa is one of three designated export hubs.

MYKOLAIV ATTACKS

Ukrainian officials said grain was being stored in the port at the time of the strike, although the food stocks did not appear to have been hit.

Guterres — who presided over the signing ceremony on Friday — “unequivocally” condemned the attack. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the “reprehensible” strikes showed Russia’s disregard for its commitments.

The United States “strongly condemned” the attack, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying it “casts serious doubt on the credibility of Russia’s commitment to yesterday’s deal”.

Until Zakharova’s claims on Sunday, there was no response from Moscow, but Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said Russia had denied carrying out the attack.

“The Russians told us that they had absolutely nothing to do with this attack” he told state news agency Anadolu.

The Odessa region’s governor, Maksym Marchenko, said the strikes left people wounded and damaged port infrastructure in Odessa, without specifying the number or severity of the injuries.

The first major accord between the countries since Russia’s February attack on Ukraine aims to ease the “acute hunger” the UN says an additional 47 million people are facing because of the war.

Ukraine at the signing warned it would conduct “an immediate military response” should Russia violate the accord and attack its ships or stage an incursion around its ports.

Zelensky said responsibility for enforcing the deal fell to the UN, which along with Turkey is a co-guarantor of the agreement. Turkey said it was committed to the accord after the attack.

The deal includes points on running Ukrainian grain ships along safe corridors that avoid known mines in the Black Sea.

Huge quantities of wheat and other grain have been blocked in Ukrainian ports by Russian warships and the mines Kyiv laid to avert a feared amphibious assault.— AFP

700 migrants rescued off Italy, five found dead

ROME: Almost 700 migrants, including five dead bodies, were rescued off the southern coast of Italy, a coastguard statement said on Sunday, as flows of migrants crossing the Mediterranean increase during favourable sea conditions.

Most of the 674 migrants were found on a fishing boat 124 miles off the coast of Calabria, the boot of Italy. Others were rescued in the water.

Search and rescue operations were carried out by a merchant vessel and Italy’s coastguard and finance police.

The migrants were transferred to port cities in Sicily and Calabria, the statement added. The five dead bodies were brought to the morgue in the hospital of the Sicilian city of Messina.

More than 34,000 asylum seekers and migrants have landed in Italy since the start of the year, up from some 25,500 in the same

period last year, data from Italy’s interior ministry shows.

Mediterranean countries on major migrant routes into Europe expect more than 150,000 arrivals this year as food shortages caused by the Ukraine conflict threaten a new migration wave from Africa and the Middle East. On Sunday morning, Norwegian-flagged ship Ocean Viking spotted an overcrowded rubber boat in the international waters off the coast of Libya and rescued 87 people, including 57 unaccompanied minors, it said on Twitter.

Separately, on Saturday German NGO search and rescue ship Sea-Watch rescued over 400 migrants, including several young children and two pregnant woman, travelling on four overcrowded boats. According to Sea-Watch, flat seas and lack of wind have helped arrivals of migrants to the Italian coasts.

— Reuters

3 killed in Philippines university shooting during graduation



Police officers work at the scene after three people were killed in a shooting at Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City. — AFP

MANILA: Three people died in a shooting at a university graduation ceremony in the Philippines’ capital region on Sunday, including a former mayor from the volatile south of the country, police said.

Local Quezon City police chief Remus Medina said the shooting appeared to have been an assassination of the former mayor of the southern Lamitan city, Rose Furigay.

The suspect, wounded in a shootout with a campus security officer and arrested after a car chase, was now in custody and being interrogated, Medina told reporters. “He looks like he was a determined assassin,” Medina

said, adding he was found with two pistols. Quezon is part of the Manila capital region, an urban sprawl of 16 cities home to more than 13 million people.

Furigay was shot as she was about to attend the graduation of her daughter at the law school of Ateneo de Manila University, one of the country’s most prestigious, Medina said. The suspect, who had no relatives at the graduation, was also a native of Lamitan city in Basilan province, a stronghold of Abu Sayyaf, an extremist group known for its banditry and kidnapping. The two others killed were a campus security officer and an unidentified male, the police said. — Reuters

China launches second of three space station modules

BEIJING: China on Sunday launched the second of three modules needed to complete its new space station, state media reported, the latest step in Beijing’s ambitious space programme.

The uncrewed craft, named Wentian, was propelled by a Long March 5B rocket at 2:22 pm (06:22 GMT) from the Wenchang launch centre on China’s tropical island of Hainan.

A quarter of an hour later, an official from the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) confirmed the “success” of the launch.

Hundreds of people gathered on nearby beaches to take photos of the launcher rising through the



Beijing launched the central module of its space station Tiangong in April 2021. — AFP

air in a plume of white smoke. After around eight minutes of

flight, “the Wentian lab module successfully separated from the

rocket and entered its intended orbit, making the launch a complete success,” the CMSA said.

Beijing launched the central module of its space station Tiangong in April 2021.

Almost 18 metres long and weighing 22 tonnes, the new module has three sleeping areas and space for scientific experiments.

It will dock with the existing module in space, a challenging operation that experts said will require several high-precision manipulations and the use of a robotic arm.

“This is the first time China has docked such large vehicles

together, which is a delicate operation,” said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

He said until the next module arrives, the space station will have a “rather unusual L-shape” which will take a lot of power to keep stable.

“These are all technical challenges that the USSR pioneered with the Mir station in the late 1980s, but it’s new to China,” he said. “But it will result in a much more capable station with the space and power to carry out more scientific experiments”

— AFP

Give hope to children and bank on a better future



Frederique Seidel
@FrederiqueSei

The writer is WCC
Programme Executive
for Child Rights

When I was a teenager in Germany, at the age of 16, 35 years ago, we distributed sun cream factor 100 and bananas “grown in Germany”, to alert people in an engaging way about global warming. The curve of greenhouse gas emissions has only continued going up ever since. Today, 75 per cent of children and youth worldwide are scared by global warming, according to a recent report by “The Lancet”.

So, being a mother myself today, why do I have hope for children’s future?

Because I discovered the massive potential of everyone’s banking choices for an effective response to the climate emergency.

Every bank account holder can request that their assets are not invested into sectors known to accelerate global warming, but

instead by shifted to renewable energies development.

This powerful lever for climate solutions – none of the children suffering from eco-anxiety have any influence on.

Most of them do not yet have bank accounts, and cannot undertake stakeholder engagement to defend their right to a future. Children worldwide try what they can at the expense of sacrificing school and their right to play.

But we, adults, can efficiently influence the investment choices of our banks.

This is why @WCC4children together with UNEP-FI, UNEP Faith for Earth, the Muslim Council of Elders and the NY Board of Rabbis, published this year a high-level appeal asking our financial service providers to align with the

A BRIGHT FUTURE IS POSSIBLE
IF ALL OF US ENGAGE WITH
OUR BANKS AND PENSION
FUNDS, SO THAT MONEY NO
LONGER FUELS THE CLIMATE
CRISIS

Paris Agreements.

The statement is supported by United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who underlined. “The scientific and moral imperative is clear: there must be no new investment in fossil fuel expansion.” As documented by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), this is a condition for the planet to remain

inhabitable for future generations.

Many people in the decision-making seats are not yet aware how much their assets are contributing to global warming. They do not have the intention to harm children.

Let us come together and influence how money is invested. Family money, a company’s money, a nation’s money. We need everyone to take this step for children.

This is why we started assembling free capacity building resources for all on climate-responsible banking. For example, a draft letter which anyone can send to their banks and pension funds.

It takes 10 minutes to send it to the CEO’s of your financial service providers. By doing so, you can help billions of young people worldwide – lifting a far too heavy burden from their shoulders. Because money

will then be re-directed into the acceleration of renewable energy solutions. It’s amazing to see that so many solutions already exist. But most of the green technologies for now cannot be accelerated and spread broadly - because of lack of investments into innovation research:

For example in Dubai – a high school has become net-zero by converting all energy produced in the gym classes into energy.

In Canada, the first airplane entirely fuelled by hydrogen transported passengers.

A bright future is possible if all of us engage with our banks and pension funds, so that our money no longer fuels the climate crisis, but accelerates solutions through renewable energy systems.

The solution is in our hands.

Gaza’s women and girls see no escape from violence

CLAIRE GOUNON AND MAI YAGHI

Seventeen-year-old Istabraq Baraka fell pregnant soon after her wedding in the Gaza Strip. Three months later her husband killed her.

“She died from a severe beating, which caused bleeding on the brain and lungs and broken ribs,” said her mother Nazmiya.

Sitting with her husband Suleiman in a garden in Abassan, near the city of Khan Yunis in the south of the Palestinian territory, the 53-year-old talks at lightning speed about last year’s killing of one of her two daughters, as well as the loss of an unborn grandchild.

Istabraq’s father wipes tears away with the corner of a red-and-white keffiyeh wrapped around his head.

He laments the slow pace of legal proceedings since his daughter’s husband handed himself in to the police shortly after the killing.

“The perpetrator admitted his crime, a year and a month until now and nothing’s happened,” said the 70-year-old.

Femicide is on the rise in Gaza, according to figures from the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, a Palestinian civil society group.

The organisation registered six killings and suspicious deaths related to domestic violence in 2019, a figure which rose to 19 the following year.

UN Women said the situation worsened at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which resulted in the “lockdown of survivors of violence with their abusers”.

Ayah Alwakil, a lawyer from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, said women can consider violence from their husbands normal behaviour in Gaza’s patriarchal society, which has been controlled by the Hamas since 2007.

“Some women don’t know their rights and some others are afraid of going to court, for lack of family support,” she added.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said 38 per cent of women in Gaza faced physical or psychological violence from their husbands in 2019, but Alwakil estimated the true figure to be far higher.

UN Women says such “outdated and discriminatory laws” impede justice.

Additionally, those seeking to escape domestic violence risk losing their children. If a wife obtains a divorce, custody passes to the ex-husband once a daughter turns 11 or a son reaches nine.

Noha Khaziq, 31, stayed with her abusive husband because they had four children. —AFP

Last stand at Azovstal: Inside the siege that reshaped the Ukraine war



Michael Schwirtz

The writer is an
investigative reporter
with the NYT

The two Mi-8 helicopters tore across enemy territory early on the morning of March 21, startling the Russian soldiers below. Inside were Ukrainian special forces fighters carrying crates of Stinger and Javelin missiles, as well as a satellite internet system.

They were flying barely 20 feet above ground into the hottest combat zone in the war.

Ukraine’s top generals had conceived the flights as a daring, possibly doomed, mission. A band of Ukrainian soldiers, running low on ammunition and largely without any communications, was holed up in a sprawling steel factory in the besieged city of Mariupol.

The soldiers were surrounded by a massive Russian force and on the verge of annihilation.

The plan called for the Mi-8s to land at the factory, swap their cargo for wounded soldiers and fly back to central Ukraine. Almost everyone understood that the city and its defenders were lost.

But the weapons would allow the soldiers to frustrate the Russian forces for a few weeks more, blunting the onslaught faced by Ukrainian troops elsewhere on the southern and eastern fronts and giving them time to prepare for a new Russian offensive there.

“It was so important to the guys, who were fully encircled, to know that we had not abandoned them, that we would fly to them, risking our lives to take their wounded and bring them ammunition and medicine,” said a military intelligence officer with the call sign Flint, who was on the first flight and described the operation to The New York Times, along with three others involved. “This was our main goal.”

As the two Mi-8s drew closer, they banked hard over the Sea of Azov, flying just above the water’s surface to avoid Russian radar.

Then it appeared, the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works, the last bastion of the Ukrainian defenders. In a video from the flight, Azovstal looms like a besieged industrial fortress, bathed in early morning sunlight.



Anna Zaitseva and her 6-month-old son, Svyatoslav, with a friend after evacuating from Mariupol, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.

Beyond it was Mariupol, a city reduced in less than four weeks to a smouldering shell. Corpses littered the streets while the living — those who remained — were mostly below ground, hungry and scared, emerging from basements only to scrounge for water and food.

“It was a sad sight,” said Flint, who was on the lead helicopter. “It was already mostly in ruins.”

For the Kremlin, Mariupol was a prize.

Barely had President Vladimir Putin of Russia given the order to attack Ukraine, on February 24, when Russian soldiers began pouring over the border in tanks and armoured vehicles, rolling toward the city, a strategic port on the Sea of Azov.

Missiles streaked through the predawn darkness, slamming into apartment buildings and wounding the first civilians of the war.

That morning, the general director of Azovstal, an industrial behemoth with more than 11,000 workers, convened his board.

The director, Enver Tskitishvili, went on a war footing, deciding to power down the blast furnaces and cease operations for the first time since World War II. Then the board made

a decision that would shape the battle for eastern Ukraine.

Beneath the steel plant were 36 bomb shelters, a legacy of the Cold War. The shelters, some more than 20 feet underground, had enough food to feed thousands of people for several weeks. Believing the fighting would not last long, the executives saw the plant as a sanctuary and invited employees to come there with their families.

What Tskitishvili did not know was that Ukraine’s military was also arriving at Azovstal.

To the Ukrainian soldiers, the plant was a stronghold, surrounded on three sides by water, ringed by high walls, as seemingly impregnable as a medieval keep. It was the perfect place to make a last stand.

“The military never told us, and we never supposed that they would deploy with us,” Tskitishvili said in an interview.

“We planned only for the civilian population, and only as refuge from attack.

We did not consider ourselves to be participants in the war.” For the next 80 days, Azovstal would be a fulcrum of the war as Russian brutality collided with Ukrainian resistance.

—The New York Times

March of legacy and prosperity goes on



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

Over the past five decades since ascending to the throne, late Sultan Qaboos had built the country and people. The Sultanate of Oman has been witnessing growth year after another till it became a prosperous nation today. Sparing no effort and leaving no stone unturned, the late Sultan sacrificed his time, effort and personal life to fulfil his promise to bring his fellow citizens a brighter future. He dedicated his

life to build the new Oman, which is known today worldwide as a destination of peace!

On the other hand, announcing His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as a successor to late Sultan Qaboos was a kind of relief to ensure the smooth transformation of leadership in the country. The speed and manner in which a successor was named could help project a sense of unity, continuity and stability of the nation. Thanks to the wise vision of late Sultan for laying the road map for the future of Oman and its people in such a wise and visionary way.

Announcing the successor, based on late Sultan's recommendation, was a relief to Omanis. They all believed in the new Sultan as a great successor who could carry on the blessed Renaissance of the Sultanate of Oman and continue its legacy. What an emotional and inspiring moment it was to see the new Sultan ascending the throne. It was a moment of history repeating itself, mirroring the ascending to throne of late Sultan Qaboos on July 23, 1970.

Both Sultans gave hope of a better life for their people since their first day on throne. Here is the late Sultan's promise to his fellow citizens, "My people, I will proceed as quickly as possible to transform your life into a prosperous one with a bright future." Similarly, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik addressed, "We will proceed along the path of development and we will continue the blessed renaissance march as the late Sultan wished it to be. Conscious of the immense responsibility, we reaffirm that Oman will always remain our supreme goal, in all actions and pursuits".

On the other hand, both Sultans delivered a national call addressing the people of Oman to shoulder the nation-building responsibility with the government. The late Sultan addressed, over five decades, "We hope that everyone of you will do his/her duty in helping us to build the thriving and happy future that we seek for this country, because, as you know, unless there is cooperation between the government and the people we will not be able to build our country with the speed required to free her from the backwardness she has endured for so long."

In the same way, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik addressed, "People of Oman, the trust thrust on our shoulders and the resultant immense responsibilities require us all to work together for the sake of our country's magnificence, with a persistent resolve to promote it to the loftiest levels. This cannot be realised without your support and cooperation and combination of all efforts to achieve the desired supreme national goal. Your contribution to enrich all efforts of progress, development and prosperity will be highly appreciated".

Since first dawn of the blessed Renaissance, Oman began to flourish in every corner. Remarkable changes have been witnessed in different spheres of life in the country. In view of that, Omani citizens have experienced rapid transformation, which made their lives shifting into a much safer, easier and prosperous one. The renewed Renaissance is continuing the march started over 52 years ago and rather it is building on the previous legacy of Oman. All of what has happened in the country over these years of the blessed Omani Renaissance marks the fruitful outcomes of both the leaders' great mission and wise vision.



SAVING THE FOREST

A local resident takes part in a protest after the government re-approved of constructing a metro railway train car shed at the Aarey forest which locals call as "Mumbai's Amazon", in Mumbai, India, on Sunday. – AFP

Confronting the growing drought risk



Ibrahim Thiaw

The writer is Executive Secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Drought may be an ancient scourge, but it is getting worse. No region or country today is immune to its effects. Southern Europe is in the grip of a severe drought — the worst in 70 years for Italy. In the western United States, the past two decades have been the driest in 1,200 years. Chile is in its 13th consecutive year of drought, and Monterrey, Mexico's third-largest city, is now being forced to ration water.

In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia are recording their fourth consecutive year without rains, and the situation has grown increasingly dire for people, livestock, and the ecosystems that support them.

Owing to a lack of adequate nutrition, children are dying from diseases they would ordinarily survive. Even camels — which typically survive longer than people or other animal species — are dropping dead in large numbers across this region.

This suffering evokes traumatic memories of my own first encounter with drought in Mauritania. I was barely 12 years old when every household in our community lost everything — food, livestock, and their livelihoods. Unable to provide for their families, many adults took their own lives.

The experience has stayed with me, motivating my efforts to ensure that no more children have to live through what I did. Sadly, many still are being traumatised by drought, and many more soon will be. Scientists project that climate change will increase the frequency, duration, and geographic spread of droughts, with three out of four people affected by 2050.

Areas across all regions are becoming drier, and while there is not yet a consensus on where exactly the most acute drought conditions will emerge, scientists agree that land degradation exacerbates the problem.

Worse, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's sixth assessment

report warns that we are not making sufficient progress to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and avert even more severe conditions in the decades ahead.

Together, recent traumatic experiences and the latest scientific projections should convey a sense of urgency, compelling everyone to build resilience against future drought risks.

OWING TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND DEGRADATION, DROUGHTS ARE BECOMING MORE FREQUENT, MORE SEVERE, AND MORE WIDESPREAD. BUILDING NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RISK-MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS THAT CAN ENDURE WHAT IS COMING WILL REQUIRE POLITICAL WILL AND SIGNIFICANTLY MORE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Drought is a natural phenomenon; but it need not become a natural disaster. Land degradation can be mediated at least partly with better land- and water-use decisions and land-restoration initiatives.

In a recent report, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) identify successful examples of systems that have reduced drought risk among vulnerable populations. In Brazil, Ethiopia, India, and Tunisia, a combination of water harvesting and sustainable land-management practices are being used to reduce the impact of droughts.

While it may take time, all countries can adopt similar strategies to help move their people from water scarcity toward

water security.

A major shortcoming of the current approach, however, is that it is based on national systems, even though droughts do not observe political boundaries. Proactive planning across sectors within countries is essential; but without international collaboration, the effects of drought eventually will reach other countries.

Common knock-on effects include conflicts over diminished water resources, soaring food prices or shortages, wildfires, mass wildlife and livestock loss, sand and dust storms, human displacement and forced migration, and civil unrest.

Collaborative arrangements to anticipate and respond to droughts quickly can avert or reduce the scale of these outcomes.

Australia and the US, for example, have long had policies and planning protocols in place to ensure that affected communities can endure droughts with dignity.

Building such resilience globally will take time and political will. Fortunately, even in the world's most vulnerable regions, policymakers already have foundations that they can build on. For example, Africa's Sahel has a regional drought-risk system, set up 50 years ago to bring together a broad range of stakeholders, from producer associations to political decision-makers, and benefits from the pooling of scientific and technological capabilities at the regional level.

India has adopted an even more comprehensive approach that includes drought management as part of its national disaster-management plan. An intricate strategy is in place to include all the relevant government ministries and closely coordinate national, state, and local responses.

After a process that started 15 years ago, India now has an integrated water-management system that also serves as a drought warning system.

In June, the US announced that drought will henceforth be considered a strategic domestic and foreign-policy priority.

As home to one of the most sophisticated and advanced drought-monitoring and response mechanisms in the world, the US could help to fast-track the development of better risk-management systems globally.

Around the world, there is a strong appetite among governments to act quickly before the effects of increasingly frequent and severe droughts become unmanageable.

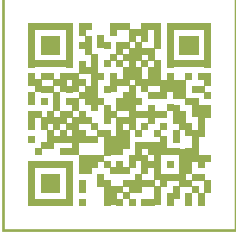
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Southern Europe is in the grip of a severe drought - the worst in 70 years for Italy.

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Pankaj Khimji elected as ICC Associate Member Director

BIRMINGHAM: Oman Cricket’s Chairman, Pankaj Kanaksi Khimji has been named as one of the hands to the steering of Associate Cricket being elected as the ICC Associate Member Director for 2 years in the ICC’s Annual General Meeting held in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Pankaj Khimji is the newest member to the 3-Man position with Usman Khwaja(Singapore) and Neil Speight(Bermuda) retaining their position respectively.

The voting was conducted at the Formal Associate Member’s Meeting by a weighted secret ballot in which 40 Associate Nations and 5 Regional Representatives cast their votes.

Khimji claimed the second of the director’s position bagging 24



votes to his favour. Earlier, Pankaj Khimji had contested for the same position in 2020 missing out be a solitary one vote.

Being elected as the Director, Pankaj Khimji said,” I am overwhelmed by the trust and belief of fellow associate nations in extending their support to my candidature for the ICC board seat! Associate Cricket has miles to go and lots to be done. I am looking forward to getting the

Associate Nations’ interests in the minds and hearts of the fellow Full member nations to further emphasise and prioritise to be able to provide the associate cricket nation’s a base for development of basic cricket infrastructure and sustainable income which is critical for the survival and growth of the associate cricket.”

Delighted to hear the News , Paul Sheridan – Vice-Chairman , Oman Cricket said ,” It is indeed a remarkable achievement and reflects his contribution to Oman Cricket and specially his efforts in bringing the T20 World Cup to Oman last October which was a great success. It also reflects the efforts and success of our National Team which currently stands at No. 17 in both the One Day International and T20 formats of

the game. The world of cricket took notice and this was reflected in the votes of the ICC Associate Members.

All of us at Oman Cricket are very proud of our Chairman and we know that he will bring the same dedication, energy and vision to his new role on the ICC Board as he continues to give to Oman Cricket.”

The year 2022 was one of the most remarkable year for the chief architect - being appointed as the Vice-President of the Asian Cricket Council and now winning the position of the ICC Associate Member Director. He was also appointed Adviser at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion by a royal decree issued by His Majesty earlier this year.



Leclerc crashes out of French Grand Prix while leading

FRENCH: Ferrari’s title contender Charles Leclerc crashed out of the French Formula One Grand Prix while leading from pole position on Sunday.

The Monegasque driver spun and crashed off into the tyre barrier mid-corner at Le Beausset, the 11th turn, on the

18th of 53 scheduled laps.

It was Leclerc’s third retirement while leading a race this season after Spain and Azerbaijan.

Leclerc went into the race second in the championship, 38 points behind Red Bull’s Max Verstappen, who took over at the front in France. — Reuters

LAS VEGAS: Raphinha made it two goals in two matches as Barcelona defeated Real Madrid 1-0 on Saturday in their Las Vegas Clasico.

Raphinha, signed from Premier League Leeds United earlier this month for around \$60 million, followed up his debut in a 6-0 thrashing of Inter Miami with the lone goal of the high-profile clash at Allegiant Stadium, the \$1.97 billion, 65,000-seat home of the NFL’s Las Vegas Raiders.

The Brazilian was perfectly placed to intercept an ill-advised pass from Real’s Eder Militao along the top of the area. After one touch to settle he lashed a left-footed shot over Thibaut Courtois into the top right corner of the net to put Barcelona up 1-0 in the 27th minute

The fourth edition of the Clasico to be played outside of Spain -- the second ever held in the United States -- featured all the intensity of the long rivalry.

Real Madrid, playing their first pre-season friendly, nearly opened the scoring in the 18th minute but Federico Valverde was denied by the post in the 18th minute, seizing the ball after a poor clearance by Jordi Alba and blasting a volley from 25 yards out that beat Marc-Andre Ter Stegen only for the upright to intervene.

Two minutes later it was Barcelona who saw a chance get away when Eduardo Camavinga lost possession to Pedri in front of Real’s goal. Pedri found Fati, who pulled Real keeper Thibaut Courtois off his line but put his shot just wide of the far post.

Overall it was Barcelona -- energised by the debut of Polish striker Robert Lewandowski after his move from Bayern Munich -- who controlled the tempo in the first half against the reigning Champions League and La Liga title holders.

The first half ended on a testy note after Jordi Alba’s sliding tackle on Militao that earned a yellow card.

Some jawing and shoving escalated, with players having to step in and separate Madrid newcomer Antonio Rudiger and Barcelona’s Ronald Araujo.

Lewandowski’s night ended without a goal as he was departed at the half, replaced by Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as part of a raft of changes at the midpoint.

Aubameyang had a chance just two minutes into the second half with a header from the centre of the area off a cross by Raphinha but missed it left.

A back and forth between substitute Marco Asensio and defender Lucas Vazquez gave Real Madrid a golden opportunity in the 59th minute, but after Vazquez played the ball back to Asensio in front of goal he pulled his shot wide.

They pressed desperately in the closing minutes for an equaliser, but Carlo Ancelotti’s side clearly missed French star Karim Benzema, who was granted an extended holiday by the club and sat out the contest after joining up with his team-mates in Los Angeles just days before.

Real Madrid continue their US tour on Tuesday against Mexico’s Cub America at San Francisco’s Oracle Park baseball venue while Barcelona take on Italian giants Juventus in Dallas on the same night.

Both play again on July 30, when Barcelona take on Major League Soccer’s New York Red Bulls and Real Madrid play Juventus. — AFP

RAPHINHA STRIKES AGAIN AS BARCELONA BEAT REAL MADRID 1-0



US women stun Jamaica in relays, men falter again



EUGENE, Ore: The American women's sprint relay quartet pulled off a stunning upset over Jamaica at the World Championships on Saturday while a flubbed baton handover proved costly for the US men's team as they finished second to Canada.

Jamaica were anchored by new 200 metres champion Shericka Jackson but Twanisha Terry ran a terrific final leg to bring home the hosts' 10th gold medal in Eugene.

"It's just an amazing feeling," Terry said. "The race was electrifying. The stadium went crazy."

Germany took a surprise third-placed finish after Britain's Dina Asher-Smith pulled up injured.

The United States had looked set to retain the men's title until Elijah Hall and Marvin Bracy lost time with a slow exchange, the latest disappointment for a country with incredible depth of sprinting talent.

Andre De Grasse, the Olympic 200m champion, beat Bracy to the finish line while Britain collected bronze.

"It's special to win here. There are many Canadians cheering us on. It's not on home soil, but it felt like it," De Grasse said.

Portugal's Pedro Pichardo (triple jump) and Kenyan Emmanuel Korir (800m) added world titles to their Olympic crowns but Canada's Damian Warner, also a gold medallist in Tokyo, suffered injury heartbreak in the

decathlon.

Pichardo jumped a world-leading 17.95m to take gold ahead of Burkina Faso's Hugues Fabrice Zango and China's Olympic silver medallist Zhu Yaming.

Korir produced his trademark devastating kick to clinch the 800m title with Algerian Djamel Sedjati taking a surprise silver ahead of Canada's Marco Arop.

Warner was in firm control of the decathlon after the first four events but his hopes of winning a first world title were dashed after an injury in the 400m, with Puerto Rico's Ayden Owens-Delerme moving into the overall lead.

Anderson Peters of Grenada beat Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra to retain his javelin title with a throw of 90.54m, with Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch third.

Ethiopia's Gudaf Tsegay charged down the final straight to win the women's 5,000 metres while world record holder Letesenbet Gidey and Olympic champion Sifan Hassan missed out on a podium finish.

Allyson Felix helped the US women's 4x400m relay team qualify for the finals as they finished with the fastest time of the heats.

Their male counterparts, winners of seven of the past eight world titles and eight of the past 10 Olympic golds, also cruised into the finals, which will take place on the last day of the championships on Sunday.

— Reuters



Jumbo-Visma team's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey cycles during the 20th stage of the 109th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 40,7 km individual time trial between Lacapelle-Marival and Rocamadour, in southwestern France, on July 23, 2022. — AFP

VINGEGAARD

HEADS FOR PARIS AND TOUR DE FRANCE CROWNING GLORY

PARIS: Jonas Vingegaard rides into Paris on Sunday to be officially crowned the 2022 Tour de France champion after three weeks and 3,350km of relentless struggle up peaks, over plains and through a crushing heatwave.

The 21st and final stage is a largely ceremonial run which will see the remaining riders sip champagne as they breeze into the French capital.

The peloton rolls past the Jardin de Luxembourg, through Saint Michel, over Pont Neuf and past the Louvre before a sprint over eight laps of the Champs Elysees.

A presentation ceremony beneath the Arc de Triomphe takes place as the sun sets on the 109th edition of the world's greatest bike race that has been broadcast live in 60 nations.

Team Jumbo's Vingegaard tops the overall standings, 3min 34sec ahead of two-time defending champion Tadej Pogacar, while Geraint Thomas, the 2018 winner, stands third at 8min 13sec.

The 25-year-old Vingegaard, who was runner-up in 2021 behind Pogacar, said he was already thinking about his 2023 challenge.

"I want to celebrate this victory first but of course I want to come back to the Tour to win another



one," said the reluctant star.

"I didn't set myself five Tours de France or anything like that. I just want to come back and win."

The Dane was eight seconds faster than his great rival on Saturday, and Pogacar looked downhearted at the finish line.

"I'm proud of myself, I did what I could, and at least I have the white jersey (best under-25s)," Pogacar said.

"I learned a lot, I'll go away and analyse it."

Thomas will also be remembered for his under the radar approach that delivered a podium place at 36.

"I'm over the moon to be on the podium, people talk about age, but for me it's about mentality, if you

eat, train, rest properly you can achieve a lot," said Thomas.

Just three weeks ago, a wall of sound accompanied Vingegaard as he set out on the Tour which started on home ground in Copenhagen.

- 40-degree heat — Danish fans turned out in astonishing numbers as the race sped through the verdant Scandinavian nation, taking in a sensational crossing of the 20km long Great Belt Bridge.

On day three, local man Magnus Cort Nielsen was cheered all the way through Jutland.

Many stars emerged along the route with Belgian rider Wout van Aert, a Jumbo teammate of Vingegaard, coming third on all three opening stages then pulling

off a late escape to finally land a win on stage four at Calais as the race returned to France.

Defending champion Pogacar made all the early running with his lone wolf mentality, gradually clawing into top spot on stage six.

But the stars aligned against Pogacar as he lost teammates to Covid and injury.

And he is also a man known to dislike heat which was a major hurdle in the final week as the Tour witnessed temperatures of over 40 degrees.

Vingegaard took the yellow jersey from Pogacar on stage 11 and while the UAE man refused stubbornly to give up he lost further ground on stage 18.

Their epic struggle was captioned by a touching moment of sportsmanship when Pogacar fell at high speed only for the champion-elect to wait for him to catch up in one of the race's iconic images.

Pogacar's last chance came in Saturday's 41km time-trial but Vingegaard was too strong even if he almost came off his bike in what he described as a "heart attack" moment.

But he steadied himself to finish second behind van Aert and ensure his coronation in Paris.

— AFP

Korir, Pichardo add world titles to Olympic crowns

EUGENE, United States: Kenya's Emmanuel Korir and Pedro Pichardo of Portugal added world titles to their respective Olympic crowns on Saturday, but there was injury heartbreak for Canada's Damian Warner in the decathlon.

Two other gold medallists from last year's Tokyo Games had a mixed bag, Indian Neeraj Chopra having to content himself with silver in the men's javelin, but Dutch runner Sifan Hassan leaving Eugene medal-less after finishing sixth in the women's 5,000m.

The 4x100m relays saw the US

women beat a loaded Jamaican team featuring individual sprint champions Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Shericka Jackson, to win gold, but a Canada team anchored by Olympic 200m champion Andre de Grasse beat the favoured US men's team into silver.

"It felt great to do it, to spoil the party for them," said De Grasse, who contracted Covid-19 three weeks before the championships and was too fatigued to race the 200m.

"We talked about this moment so many times. We came up a



Kenya's Emmanuel Kipkurui Korir crosses the line to win the final. — Reuters

little bit short at the Olympics, and we were all like, we could do better...it's a good way to end the championship."

Korir produced a trademark kick from 200 metres out to win the men's 800m in 1min 43.71sec, well ahead of Algerian Djamel Sedjati with silver and Canada's Marco Arop bronze.

"I knew there were some guys close behind me in the last 100m," Korir said.

"I was expecting someone to come, but no one did. I never shake my end in training but I do in races. It's like magic. I have

been working for this. It's been a long wait — I failed in 2017 and 2019 and I made it now."

Pichardo was imperious in the triple jump, all but tying up competition when he went out to 17.95 metres on his first attempt.

"I opened strongly," the Cuban-born Pichardo said, adding that he had been mentally focused on the mythical 18-metre mark in a bid to better his two previous silvers.

"My mindset was focused on 18m. It did not come out today, but more importantly, I won gold. This world title was elusive to me."

— AFP

SOUTH AFRICA WIN THEIR FIRST WOMEN’S CUP OF NATIONS TITLE



RABAT: South Africa striker Hildah Magaia scored twice as they claimed their first Women's Africa Cup of Nations title by beating hosts Morocco 2-1 in Saturday's final.

Magaia's two goals came in the space of eight minutes as she tapped home from close range in the 63rd minute and added a second in the 71st from a similar position.

A lapse of concentration saw South Africa give away possession to allow Morocco to pull a goal back in the 80th minute through their English-born striker Rosella Ayane.

It set up a nervy finish, which included nine minutes of added time, in front of a capacity crowd in the Moroccan capital Rabat. It was South Africa's first title after having finished runners-

up five times, including the last edition in 2018. Morocco were playing in their first final and will be heading with South Africa to next year's Women's World Cup along with

the two beaten semifinalists Nigeria and Zambia. The Cup of Nations serves as Africa's qualification event for the tournament in Australia and New Zealand. — Reuters

■ RUUD BATTLES BACK TO BEAT BERRETTINI IN GSTAAD



Top seed and defending champion Casper Ruud came from a set down to beat second seed Matteo Berrettini 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 in a high quality final of the clay-court ATP event in Gstaad on Sunday.

Alcaraz breaks into top 5 by reaching Hamburg final

HAMBURG: Carlos Alcaraz will become the youngest player to reach the top five of the ATP rankings since Rafael Nadal in 2005 after powering into his fifth ATP final of the season in Hamburg on Saturday. The 19-year-old Spaniard eased to a 7-6 (7/2), 6-1 success against Slovakian Alex Molcan and will face Lorenzo Musetti in Sunday's final at the clay-court event. Alcaraz has won all five of his previous Tour finals, including Masters triumphs in Miami and Madrid earlier this year. "Lorenzo is playing really well," Alcaraz said. "Of course he's a great player. It's going to be a great final. "He has played great matches



before the final. (I have) as well, so I have a lot of confidence for the final and hope to make it six-for-six." He will pass Casper Ruud, who reached the Gstaad final on Saturday, in the updated rankings which will be released on Monday. Alcaraz struggled to pull away from Molcan in the first set, being

broken when serving for the match at 5-3. But he eventually wrapped it up on his fifth set point in a tie-break and raced through the second set. Earlier, Italy's Musetti reached his first ATP Tour final with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) victory over Francisco Cerundolo. "It means a lot for me," the 20-year-old said. "It's a surprise for me because I was not playing my best tennis last week (in Bastad), so I didn't expect to be in the final here." The world number 62 dominated the majority of the match but missed a match point when leading 5-4 in the second set when an underarm serve backfired. — AFP

Piercy boosts lead with birdie run at storm-hit PGA 3M Open

WASHINGTON: American Scott Piercy missed out on a sixth consecutive birdie on Saturday as play resumed in the thunderstorm-interrupted third round of the US PGA Tour's 3M Open. Piercy, who led by three strokes when the day began, birdied five holes in a row to grab a four-stroke lead and was on the green at the par-3 eighth when players were pulled off the course. After a delay of six and a half hours, 2016 US Open runner-up Piercy left a birdie putt from just inside 50 feet some five feet short then sank his par putt. That left Piercy on 18-under overall, 5-under in the round, at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota. Argentina's Emiliano Grillo was second on 14-under after eight holes with American Tony Finau a distant third on 10-under after eight. World number 297 Piercy, 43, seeks his fifth PGA title, but his first since the 2018 Zurich Classic pairs event and first solo crown since the 2015 Barbasol Championship. Tee times had been moved to the morning with groups of three in hopes of completing play before the storms arrived. Piercy birdied his fifth hole in a row at the seventh on a putt from just outside 10 feet to leave Grillo four adrift. Piercy began Saturday's birdie run with an 18-foot putt at the



third hole then added a seven-footer at the par-3 fourth, a 14-foot putt at the fifth and dropped his approach three feet from the cup at the par-5 sixth to set up another birdie putt. World number 132 Grillo, third at the 2020 3M Open and

second three weeks ago at the John Deere Classic, won his only PGA title at the 2015 Frys.com Open. He opened with a birdie, added another on a 28-foot putt at the fourth and eagled the sixth on a putt from just inside 40 feet. — AFP



New boost for growth of micro-enterprises in Oman

The new decision prohibits the practice of household business activities without a valid licence from the MoCIIP in coordination with the competent authorities

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Seeking to fuel the growth of micro-enterprises — small businesses operating from within households — in the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a ministerial decision to better regulate and organise such activities.

As many as 9,092 micro-businesses are currently registered to operate within homes in the Sultanate of Oman. Only citizens can operate micro-businesses in households in line with the government's efforts to enable Omanis to bolster household incomes.

By obtaining licenses to operate home businesses or acquiring commercial registrations for the purposes, Omani entrepreneurs are governed by laws and regulations that safeguard the rights of sellers and consumers alike.

Sunday's Ministerial Decision requires that anyone who engages in home-based business activities must regularise their status in accordance with the provisions of the regulations within six months from the date of its coming into force.

It also repeals Ministerial



Courtesy: Eshraqa

Decision 4/2011 regulating the practice of certain household business activities and cancels any provisions that contradict the provisions of the new Ministerial Decision.

The new decision prohibits the practice of household business activities without a valid license from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in coordination with the competent authorities.

Following are business activities approved for operation within households: Packaging activities; Retail sale of flowers and natural plants; Retail sale of artificial flowers and plants; Hairdressing

and cosmetics for women; Retail sale of textiles and fabrics of all kinds; Retail sale of ready-made garments; Manufacture of Omani khanjars; Silver handicraft making; Products made from ingredients distilled from flowers and herbs; Manufacture of craft products for the production of frankincense water and oil; Production and refining of olive oil; Manufacture of handicraft products from cotton fabric or wool; Manufacture of craft products from leather; Manufacture of craft products from fronds;

Manufacture of craft products from wood; Manufacture of craft products for cosmetics and perfumes; Manufacture and

processing of incense; Manufacture of handicraft products of pottery and earthenware; Manufacture of handicraft products from stone and gypsum; Manufacture of handicraft products from copper and metals; Manufacture of artisanal products for traditional fishing tools; Manufacture of craft products derived from bones; Tailoring and embroidery of Arab and non-Arab women's clothing; Renting of textiles, clothing and shoes (including wedding dresses); Parcel wrapping and gift-wrapping; Tailoring and embroidery of women's abayas; Organising parties; Manufacture of Arabic sweets; and Dates packaging.

RO 656m worth cheques 'bounced' in 2021: CBO



CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

An estimated 399K cheques with a face value totalling around RO 656 million went dishonoured last year, largely for want of adequate funds in the drawer's account, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has revealed.

This compares with around 485K cheques that went unpaid in 2020, the apex bank stated in its Financial Stability Report 2021, issued last week.

Dishonoured cheques — also known as bounced or dud cheques — can attract prison terms and / or fines if they are not honoured upon their re-presentation, unless the drawer has a valid explanation to avoid legal action.

Significantly, 'Insufficient Funds' remained the dominant reason for cheques going unpaid, with around 312K — representing 78.2 per cent of the total — being returned to the drawer last year, according to the Central Bank.

A further 47K cheques (11.7 per cent of the total) were returned on account of the drawer's account being

'Closed / Frozen / Transferred'. However, in the great majority of the cases, the cheques going unpaid was because of "financial reasons" and not technical factors, the Central Bank stated.

In value terms, however, bounced cheques continue to follow a seesawing trend. The phenomenon hit a peak of RO 1.519 billion in 2017 (427k returned cheques) before slumping a year later to RO 856 million (469K returned cheques). In 2019, to total was back at RO 1.367 billion (379K returned cheques) before plummeting to RO 547 million (486K returned cheques) in 2020.

Of late, bounced cheques are on the downtrend as paperless digital and electronic transactions pick up pace in the Sultanate of Oman.

"Due to the rise of electronic alternative payments, there is a remarkable decline in the use of cheques for payments in the last two years: 3.8 million cheques in 2021; 4 million cheques in 2020 compared to more than 4.7 million cheques in 2019," the Central Bank stated in its report.

OETC invests RO 64 million in new power networks

In Muscat Governorate, the company completed the construction of Al Khoud Station and the associated transmission lines at a cost of RO 8m

HAMMAM AL BADI
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), member of Nama Group, has announced the successful completion of a number of key network projects in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman at a total cost of over RO 64 million. The projects will contribute to enhancing the stability and reliability of electrical networks across the country.

Notable is the North-South Interconnection Project (Rabt), which will link the Main Interconnected System (MIS) of North Oman with the Dhofar System, while also integrating the Duqm System and that of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The strategic project is being implemented in two phases.

The first phase, which extends



from the North to Duqm and the Wilayat of Mahout, is currently being implemented in five stages, involving the construction of five 400 kV grid stations and associated overhead lines running across more than 660 km. This phase is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2023.

Phase 2, currently in design,

will feature three grid 400 kV grid stations and over 500 km of overhead lines. This phase is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, Chief Executive Officer — OETC, said the interconnection project will enhance investment inflows into Duqm Special Economic

Zone. Additionally, it will attract investments in renewable and green energy projects in Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. As the new electrical backbone of the country, the Rabt project will enable the cost-competitive production of green energy to consumers, he noted.

In other projects completed and

delivered by OETC, a 220 kV grid station was built in the Wilayat of Ibri to evacuate power from the newly operational Ibri Solar Power Project. It is first electricity transmission station linked to major solar power plant in the Sultanate of Oman.

As part of the RO 7.5 million investment, electricity output

from the solar plant is transferred directly to the main network by 220 kV ground cables and then onward to OETC's main network via overhead transmission lines.

In Al Dhahirah Governorate, a new 132/33 kV grid station has been completed in the Wilayat of Yanqul at a cost of RO 6 million. A similar project, centring on a 132/220kV grid station, has been constructed at Al Khabourah in North Al Batinah Governorate at a cost of RO 11 million.

In Muscat Governorate, the company completed the construction of Al Khoudh Station, 132/33 kV, and the associated transmission lines at a cost of RO 8 million. The company also completed the construction of Al Maabela Industrial Station, 132/33 kV, and its associated transmission lines.

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, OETC completed the construction of a 400 KV overhead transmission line from Izki all the way to Misfah in the Governorate of Muscat. Total investment in the 120-km overhead line project is over more than RO 10 million.

In Dhofar Governorate, OETC invested RO 11 million in the construction of a new 132 / 33 kV grid station at Mirbat.

Majan Electricity ramps up prepaid meter roll-out

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 24

Majan Electricity Company announced the strengthening of its efforts in providing prepaid meters to its customers starting from July 2022. Majan Electrcity Company recently witnessed high demand from applicants for prepaid electricity meters, with customers who already had them installed offering positive feedback on their experience.

Sultan al Wahaibi, Manager of the Prepaid Smart Meters Department, at Majan Electricity Company, confirmed the company's readiness in providing



its customers with prepaid meters. Prepaid meters are an ideal solution for customers of all categories (residential,

commercial, agricultural, fisheries and tourism) to manage and control their consumption by paying for it in advance to ensure that it does not exceed their budget.

This helps avoid the accumulation of electricity bills and a sudden increase in consumption.

In order to obtain a prepaid electricity meter, new customers need to apply for a connection through the Majan website majanco.co.om or through one of its customer service centres.

Existing customers would need to submit a request to replace a postpaid electricity

Prepaid meters are an ideal solution for customers of all categories and helps avoid accumulation of electricity bills

meter with a prepaid one, ensuring that all previous dues are paid.

A specialist from Majan Electricity Company will then register the request, and the customer will receive a visit

from a technician to ensure that there are appropriate technical connections for the installation of the prepaid meter. Once the application is complete, one of the contracting companies will start the installation process.

Majan Electricity Company, a Nama Group company, is licensed to distribute electricity in North Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi governorates.

The company launched the prepaid meter installation service in October 2019 at a lower scale, with the aim of identifying customer demand before providing it on a larger scale, which started this month.

Bank Nizwa's event receives huge success during Khareef

MUSCAT: Furthering its commitments to national initiatives that focus on economic diversification and complementing the efforts of the government in achieving the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently hosted a creative two-day event titled 'What is happening in Salalah'

After successfully running the event last year, this time the event was held in Salalah coinciding with the Khareef season, bringing together a group of effective social media influencers to shed light on well-known touristic sites and position Salalah as a unique tourist destination.

Commenting on the event, Her Highness Al Sayyidah Wisam al Said, Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications said, "Guided by the Islamic value of giving back to the community we serve, Bank Nizwa continues to adopt several innovative campaigns and engage with society. Bank Nizwa had efficaciously organised a similar event in the last two years, which was well received. Hence, we



decided to host another edition of the same event in the Governorate of Dhofar in conjunction with the Khareef season in Salalah. During this monsoon time, Salalah transforms with marvellous greenery and pleasant weather, a view of promoting the destination as a unique and iconic tourist spot as well as driving visitors from inside and outside the Sultanate to the location."

The social media influencers, who were selected, based on the values they exhibit and their skills

in the field of videography were divided into four groups to allow them to compete in conceptualising unique video concepts and ideas to promote Salalah.

The teams were then given a map highlighting the main attractions in Salalah that included popular historical and tourist sites like Wadi Darbat, Ittin Salalah, and Al Mirbat Fort, amongst many others.

Apart from social media influencers, each team also had a tour guide to assist the team

members to achieve the goal set for the event.

"We, at Bank Nizwa, commend the efforts made by social media influencers in achieving the desired goals of this initiative i.e. interacting with the Dhofar community and establishing a relationship with them."

"Furthermore, they have helped a vast audience in being acquainted with the beauty of Salalah as well as popular historical and tourist sites through their active pages on social media platforms,

positioning it as an iconic tourist region. The bank endeavours to effectively support the country to achieve the sustainable development goals by enhancing meaningful community initiatives and activities, contributing to enriching the local community. Our strategic objectives are aligned with the national agenda of Oman Vision 2040, supporting the growth and prosperity of the social and economic scene," HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said added.

As a bank that believes in growing and prospering with the nation and its people, its corporate social responsibility initiatives have played a pivotal role in contributing to the socio-economic development of Oman. It is worth mentioning that the new edition of 'What is happening in Salalah?' event witnessed a great turnout of audience and an overwhelming response thanks to the participants' efforts. Bank Nizwa remains dedicated to undertaking initiatives that are geared towards serving the local community and creating a sustainable positive impact on various grounds.



Bilal bin Faiz al Raisi, AGM Cards and Bancassurance

BankDhofar invites to attend Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, in partnership with Visa, the official payment services partner of Fifa, offers BankDhofar Visa credit card holders a chance to win a covered expense trip to attend the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022.

Customers need to spend a minimum of RO 50 to get the chance to be one of the two winners, courtesy of Visa.

On the offer, Bilal bin Faiz al Raisi, AGM - Cards and Bancassurance at BankDhofar, said: "As the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 is around the corner, we are glad to work with Visa to introduce this special offer for our customers. BankDhofar Visa credit card holders will get the chance to attend the mostly awaited global sports event, courtesy of Visa. We encourage our customers to use their Visa credit cards during the period of the offer, as they might be one of the two lucky winners. We are looking forward to announce the winner, and we wish all the best for our customers."

To be eligible to enter the draw, BankDhofar Visa credit card holders should spend a minimum of RO 50 and get a chance to win a travel package.

The package includes, two guests per package, tickets for two to Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 with pre-match hospitality, 2-night stay at a 5-star hotel in Doha – all courtesy of Visa. The offer is valid until August 25, 2022.

This offer adds to the wide array of exclusive services and special offers available to BankDhofar customers. For further information contact the Customer Engagement Hub 24/7 at 24791111 for inquiries.

Enjoy exciting drives in the Toyota Rush with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Toyota Rush is a peppy and fun to drive SUV that is spacious, fuel-efficient and offers comfortable seating for occupants. The Rush is available with Service 3 years / 30,000 kms (whichever is earlier). The campaign is valid until September 15, 2022.

Delivering a dynamic driving experience, the Toyota Rush is available with a 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine that generates a maximum output of 103.3 hp and 13.87 kg-m of torque. The engine is paired to a four-speed automatic transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with superior fuel efficiency.

Designed for those looking for functionality, the compact SUV offers a high degree of utility with its comfortable seating and plentiful luggage space. With a 5.2-metre turning radius, the Toyota Rush boasts excellent manoeuvrability as a result of the vehicle's FR (Front-engine, Rear-drive) platform, in addition to exceptional ride comfort and handling stability through an axle type 5-link rear suspension.

The Toyota Rush exhibits a modern and sleek identity with

its long cabin and robust body. The front of the vehicle features large, wraparound headlamps and a thick lower grille that seamlessly encompasses the Toyota logo and headlamps for an aggressive and dominating look.

Furthermore, the vehicle has an aerodynamic hood with a longitudinal bulge, which gives it a further distinctive character. From the back, the Rush continues to look sporty with its large tail lamps and chunky boot lid, while a seamless line flowing from the side to the rear further enhances the vehicle's dynamic image.

With an attractive interior and a sophisticated feel, the cabin of the Toyota Rush has been decked out with a range of enhanced features for more convenience and comfort including an LCD Multi-information display in the centre of the meters displaying fuel efficiency in an intuitive format, a USB jack, an accessory socket for convenient charging of smartphones and other devices, in addition to 13 bottle holders placed deftly throughout the vehicle.

The sophistication of the interior design has been further



enhanced by the instrument panel, which integrates the speedometer and tachometer that are accented by elegant chrome-plated rings.

Offering three-row seating, the Toyota Rush can comfortably accommodate up to seven passengers with ample space for luggage. From a comfort perspective, both the driver and passengers are ensured a relaxing cabin best-in-class Automatic Air Conditioning System, which allows the temperature of the interior to be quickly adjusted for maximum efficiency. For optimal cooling performance of the entire

air conditioning system, upper vents have been incorporated on top of the centre cluster to achieve maximum cooling for passengers in the rear seats as well.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Toyota Rush, which offers a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants, namely six SRS airbags that include Dual Front SRS Airbags, Side Airbags for the front seats, and Curtain Shield Airbags for front and rear seats; Vehicle Stability Control (VSC); Anti-lock Braking System (ABS);

Hill Assist Control (HAC); Rear Parking Sensors; Rear Fog Lamp; and Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

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

Meta’s Facebook revamping main feed to attract younger users

AKASH SRIRAM AND KATIE PAUL

Meta Platforms said it was revamping the main feed on its Facebook app to prioritise “discovery” of new content, instead of posts from accounts users follow, a bid to style its apps after short-form video competitor TikTok.

Meta executives have voiced increased urgency in recent months around boosting the company’s “Reels” product, similar to TikTok’s short video format that has attracted many younger users.

“Home”, Facebook’s main news feed tab that users will see when they open the app, will start more heavily featuring popular posts from accounts that users do not follow, including Reels and Stories, Meta said in a statement.

Facebook will suggest posts to users with its machine learning ranking system and is investing in artificial intelligence (AI) to serve recommended content, it added.

A new separate tab called ‘Feeds’ will offer aversion of the old approach, which overwhelmingly features posts from friends, pages and groups that users actively choose to follow.

Feeds in that tab will be presented chronologically, without personalised ranking, Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg said in a Facebook post.

Meta said the feeds will not include suggested posts but will still have advertisements.

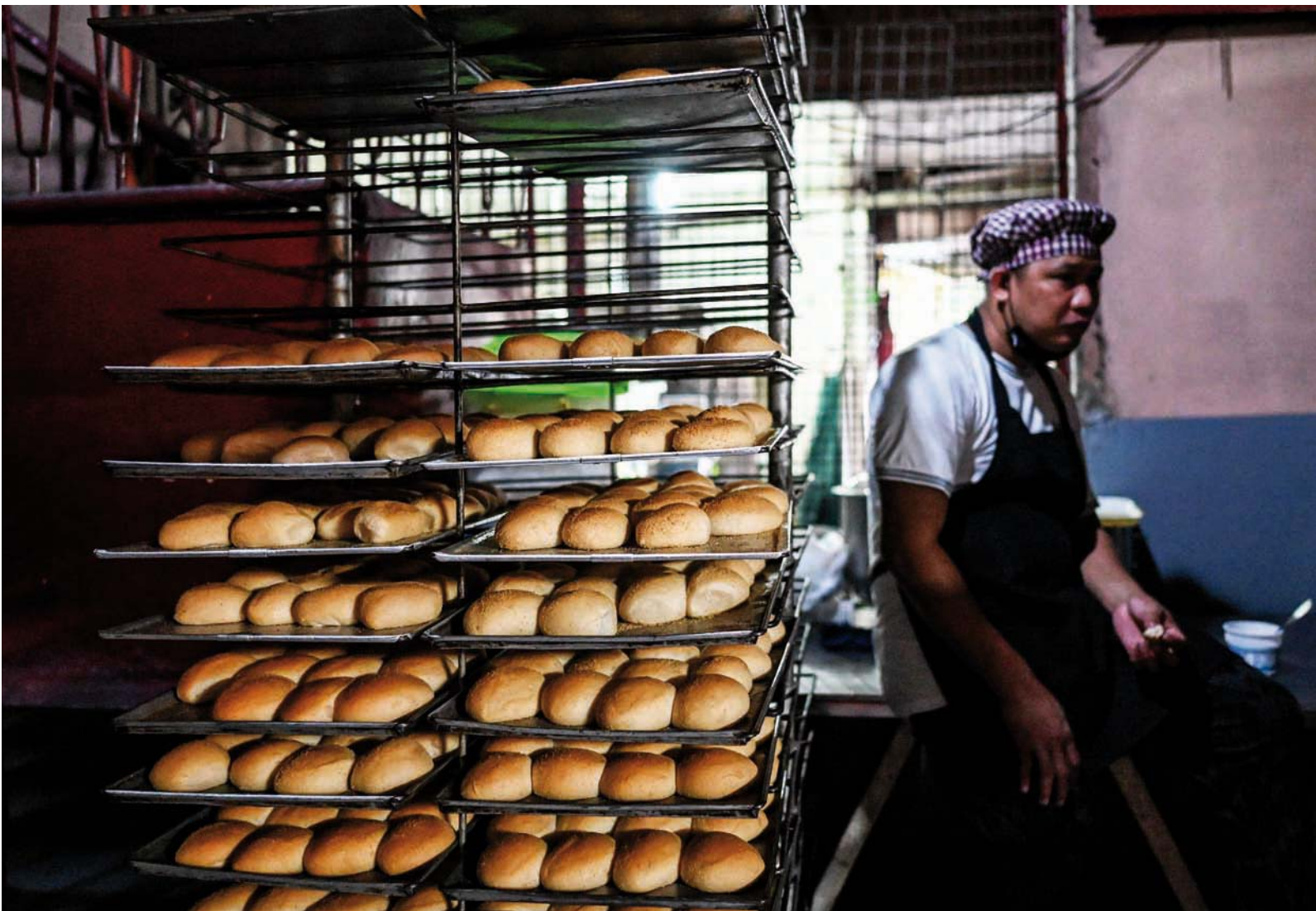
The world’s biggest social media company has gone all in on algorithmic recommendations in recent months as the threat from TikTok has grown, a stark change from its 2018 plan to feature more posts from friends and family in the news feed.

Its Instagram app announced tests of a more “immersive” TikTok-style viewing experience in May, while Zuckerberg told investors in April that Meta was making significant investments to support the “discovery engine” approach.

Earlier this month, Chief Product Officer Chris Cox told employees there was a plan to increase fivefold the number of graphic processing units (GPUs) in its data centres by the year-end to provide extra computing power for AI. — Reuters

Feeds in that tab will be presented chronologically, without personalised ranking

MARK ZUCKERBERG
Facebook, CEO



COPING WITH INFLATION

A baker stands next to trays of the popular breakfast roll ‘pandesal’ at a bakery in Manila. As the war in Ukraine pushes up wheat prices and a weaker peso raises the cost of imported edible oil, many Philippine bakers are shrinking the size of a popular breakfast roll to cope with higher inflation. — AFP

Will Europe’s new TPI be an ATM?



WILLEM H BUITER

The writer is an independent economic adviser, is a former member of the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee and a former chief economist at Citigroup

It has finally arrived. The European Central Bank has launched a Transmission Protection Instrument (TPI) to prevent monetary policy fragmentation within the eurozone.

Announced just after the ECB Governing Council’s July 21 meeting, the TPI has overshadowed the news that the ECB will raise its policy rate by 50 basis points, which is more than expected but less than the macroeconomic situation and the price stability mandate demand.

According to the ECB’s press release, the TPI “will be an addition to the Governing Council’s toolkit and can be activated to counter unwarranted, disorderly market dynamics that pose a serious threat to the transmission of monetary policy across the euro area.”

If certain pre-established criteria are met, “the Eurosystem will be able to make secondary market purchases of securities issued in jurisdictions experiencing a deterioration in financing conditions not warranted by country-specific fundamentals, to counter risks to the transmission mechanism.”

I can see the economic case for creating a facility to act as a market maker of last resort, or rather as a buyer of last resort when market liquidity is materially

SELF-VALIDATING BOUTS OF FEAR AND PANIC CAN CAUSE MARKET LIQUIDITY TO DRY UP

impaired in sovereign debt markets (and in systemically important private securities markets). Financial markets can be fickle and unreliable.

They are complex, non-linear systems that can swing chaotically from irrational exuberance to unwarranted despondency. Self-validating bouts of fear and panic can cause market liquidity to dry up. In a world of multiple equilibria, even technically efficient financial markets can generate undesirable price bubbles, resulting in self-fulfilling debt crises and defaults.

The question is not whether it is desirable to have an emergency asset-purchase facility managed by the central bank — the only entity in the eurozone with infinitely deep pockets for euro-denominated debt absorption. But why would the ECB create the TPI when it already has a perfectly adequate alternative: the Outright Monetary Transactions (OMT) programme?

The answer is not very encouraging for those who worry about fiscal capture in the

eurozone. The fiscal conditions attached to the OMT are much more robust than those applied to the TPI. With the TPI in place, member-state governments might now risk sovereign default rather than submit to the OMT’s conditions. Moreover, the TPI also has other features that could make it preferable to the OMT.

To be sure, both OMT and TPI purchases are open-ended, in principle, and both the OMT and the TPI permit the ECB to purchase sub-investment grade (say, Greek) debt. Under both facilities, the Eurosystem accepts the same (pari passu) treatment as private or other creditors.

But the liquidity created through the OMT must be fully sterilised by the ECB to limit the effect on the euro’s exchange rate, whereas the TPI is somewhat more flexible. As long as the ECB commits not to leave a persistent mark on the overall Eurosystem balance sheet — and thus on the monetary-policy stance — the TPI can purchase a wider range of assets.

For example, it may purchase securities with remaining maturities of 1-10 years, while the OMT is limited to remaining maturities of 1-3 years; and, unlike the OMT, the TPI may purchase private securities.

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Fed set for another big rate hike with economy on knife’s edge



HEATHER SCOTT

The writer is the Deputy Chief Economics Editor, AFP

US central bankers face an increasingly difficult balancing act as they struggle to douse scorching inflation while still keeping the economy growing, though they have made it clear they are willing to risk a recession.

But with war still raging in Ukraine, and Covid-19 causing ongoing issues in Asia, avoiding an economic downturn will require luck and depend on many factors outside the Federal Reserve’s control.

As families struggle to make ends meet amid surging prices for gas, food and housing, and a rising number of Americans take on second jobs to pay the bills, Fed officials have made it clear that fighting inflation is their top priority even if that means inflicting pain.

The Fed holds its two-day policy meeting next week, where it is expected to hike the benchmark borrowing rate on Wednesday by another three-quarters of a

percentage point in its aggressive campaign to cool demand and ease price pressures.

Despite a healthy job market with near-record low unemployment, workers are seeing their wage gains overwhelmed by sky-high consumer prices that rose by a new 40-year high of 9.1 per cent in June.

Slowing the economy is likely to cause more job losses, but policymakers want to avoid at all costs the greater pain of a price spiral that becomes entrenched or spins out of control.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, herself a former Fed chief, warned last week that achieving a “soft landing... will require skill and good luck.”

Former Fed vice chair Donald Kohn agreed. “It’s a very complicated, multi-dimensional issue,” Kohn said, especially due to the ongoing supply chain uncertainty.

After flooding the world’s largest

economy with support during the pandemic — zero interest rates and a steady stream of liquidity into the financial system — Fed policymakers were congratulating themselves on how quickly the economy recovered, regaining millions of jobs in a matter of months.

But they were caught flat-footed by the rapid run-up in prices, as Americans flush with cash due to massive government aid went on a spending spree, buying up cars, houses and other goods at a time when the global supply chain was still bogged down by pandemic lockdowns that continue in China.

The Fed finally began lift-off — taking the policy interest rate off zero — in March, starting with a 25-basis-point increase, followed by 50 in May and 75 in June.

Higher lending costs make it more expensive to borrow funds to buy cars and homes or expand businesses, which should cool

demand, while also making it more attractive to save rather than spend.

Other major central banks have followed suit, including the European Central Bank that made its first move last week.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell last month said the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee would consider either a 50 or 75 bps hike at the July meeting, and most economists expect a repeat of the June three-quarter-point increase.

Fed Governor Christopher Waller recently floated the idea of a mammoth 100-bps hike, which would be the first since the US central bank started using the federal funds rate for policy in the early 1990s.

The equivalent amount of tightening in a single move hasn’t been seen since the early 1980s, when then-Fed chief Paul Volcker was on a crusade to crush a wage-price inflationary spiral.

But even Waller noted that it

is important not to move too fast, and a full point hike would only be called for if data continue to show accelerating price increases.

“I think they will probably discuss 100 basis points just because the inflation picture is still very bad,” said Julie Smith, a Lafayette College economics professor.

But some recent data “indicate that previous rate increases have very likely started to work,” she said in an interview.

Housing prices have skyrocketed, hitting new records repeatedly, even as interest rates have risen, and consumer spending continues to increase, leading some economists to warn of a contraction in the second quarter.

But there are signs of cracks, including falling home sales, a dramatic drop in mortgage applications and an increasing share of spending going to necessities.

— AFP

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A rising star in marketing sector shares secret to her success

The story of Maha al Balushi, who was chosen as one of the Top 10 Women Leaders In Oman 2022 by Women Entrepreneur, was filled with challenges. As founder and chief strategist of Key Marketing, a company that specialises in providing marketing and advertising techniques to companies, she has proven that the key to achieving success is making yourself better and taking the risk to follow your dreams... **P20**



Hit manga series 'One Piece' celebrates 25th birthday

A MANGA SERIES about a treasure-hunting pirate that has captivated millions of fans worldwide celebrates its 25th birthday as the final chapter of the best-selling saga reveals its secrets.

The last instalment of "One Piece" begins from July 25 in Japanese weekly manga magazine *Shonen Jump*, published by Shueisha, following a one-month pause.

The series has racked up more than 100 volumes and smashed sales records since the first instalment appeared in 1997.

The story revolves around hero Luffy, who hunts for the coveted "One

Piece" treasure alongside other pirates. Author Eiichiro Oda, 47, landed a Guinness World Record for having the most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author — with 490 million produced.

His success has made his creation's 25th birthday a global event, from the United States to France, the second-largest market for manga and Japanese animation.

The 100th volume of the series came out in France last year with 250,000 copies, a number rivalling works that have won the prestigious Prix Goncourt literature prize.

"I'm going to start showing all the



secrets of this world that I've kept hidden," Oda said in a handwritten message posted on Twitter.

"It will be fun. Please fasten your seatbelt!"

Chedli Ben Hassine, a content creator who specialises in pop culture, told AFP "One Piece" has become "not only one of the greatest manga series in the world, but one of the greatest cultural works, all sectors included".

"What makes this manga so special is above all the plot," said Ryuji Kochi,

president for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Toei Animation, the Japanese company that has produced the series since 1999.

The "One Piece" universe includes cultural and geographical references that give it a universal dimension, including Ancient Egypt, Venice and medieval Japan.

Engaging characters and modern themes of breakneck industrialisation, racism, slavery and geopolitical intrigues add to the appeal of the series.

"By proposing totally different universes, the author never bores the reader," Benoit Huot, head of manga at publishing company Glenat, told.

"You have a fresco, an epic, which lasts an extremely long time and where you can't say it goes round in circles."

RELEASE ON NETFLIX

Although the finale of "One Piece" promises plenty of twists and turns, the series has not reached a wider audience beyond Japanese comic fans like the global hits "Star Wars" and "Harry Potter".

Japanese culture is far from matching the influence of Western creations backed by a large market and soft power that a cultural machine like Hollywood can produce on an industrial scale, economist Julien Pillot said.

Producers hope the upcoming release of a Netflix series adapted from the "One Piece" universe will help it conquer new territory, bringing the story to the global streaming platform's more than 200 million subscribers.

Pillot said Hollywood has historically struggled to adapt manga series to the big screen, including the aesthetic and commercial flop that was the adaptation of "Dragon Ball".

"If Netflix managed to create a product of very high quality, which captures the unique spirit of 'One Piece', that would be a good start," he added. — **AFP**

READ

SECRETS IN THE SAND

BY CAROLYN BROWN

The novel is set in 1833, during a British naval survey of the coastline of the Arabian Peninsula. An ambitious Lieutenant James Wellstead's plans are thrown into disarray when two of his shipmates, Jones and Jessop, go missing in the desert while gathering intelligence and he has to carry out a daring rescue.



FAREWELL TO AN ARTIST

Swedish-born artist Claes Oldenburg, who turned everyday objects such as a clothespin, a baseball bat or a flashlight into giant sculptures of public art in the United States and around the world, died on Monday at age 93, the Paula Cooper Gallery said. Oldenburg came to prominence in New York City in the 1950s, forming part of the pop art movement that elevated the ordinary, and later worked in collaboration with his wife, Coosje van Bruggen, who died in 2009 at age 66. — **Reuters**



HOT WEATHER IN GREECE

Tourists protect themselves from the sun while visiting the Acropolis in Athens on July 24, 2022. The country is in the grip of a heatwave that began on July 23 and should last a few days. Temperatures are expected to reach 42 degrees Celsius (107 degrees Fahrenheit) in some regions. — **AFP**





A new ‘architectural openness’ is remaking Saudi streets

FOR YEARS, HAITHAM AL MADINI'S house was like all the others on his block: a beige, nearly windowless facade sealed off from the outside world — as Saudi Arabia itself largely was.

But two years ago, confined during a pandemic lockdown, Madini decided to open things up, adding a street-facing patio, redoing the exterior walls in limestone and installing soft lighting in the entryway.

Local architects and engineers say such features have become a hallmark of renovation and newly-built projects across the capital Riyadh as Saudis, spurred in part by revised building codes, embrace homes and businesses that are inviting rather than imposing.

The result is a kind of visual marker of the more welcoming narrative Saudi officials are pushing for the traditionally ultra-conservative kingdom.

In recent years “there have been manifestations of an architectural openness”, said Abdullah al Jasser, owner of the AF Group design firm that worked on Madini’s house.

“People have become more accepting of change, and of different patterns of decoration and design.”

In addition to his home’s exterior walls and entryway, Madini spruced up the garden with tropical almond trees imported from Thailand and added a swimming pool, creating a new favourite lounge spot for his wife and seven children.

“Now there is an optimum use of the space,” the 52-year-old human resources officer told, giving a tour in his traditional white robe and red-and-white headaddress.

“We have taken a step towards improving our way of life.”

BREAKING WITH THE PAST

Traditional designs — like what Madini’s home used to look like — still prevail on residential streets in Riyadh.

On many homes, the only visible flourish comes in the form of tiny triangular windows typical of architecture in the central Najd region, where Riyadh is located.

The size of the windows reflects a desire not to let in the sun, especially when temperatures stay for much of the day above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

They also provide “greater privacy for the family”, said Saudi architect Ali Alluhidan, owner of Alluhidan Engineering in Riyadh.

But he and other champions of new, more modern architecture find fault with the old approach, and not just because it can result

in living spaces that are poorly lit and ventilated.

It also carries “great social impact... It contributes to a culture of closing in on oneself”, Alluhidan said.

Closed off is exactly what the kingdom was, socially and geographically, with for example no cinemas or tourist visas until the last few years.

In 2018, the Saudi national building code committee updated guidelines for new buildings — mandating bigger windows, for example, in part to promote public health.

Other trends, while not explic-

itly required, reflect changing social and gender norms, a main focus of reforms promoted by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom’s de facto ruler who became first in line to the throne five years ago.

Whereas in the past most houses featured separate reception areas with different entrances for men and women, newer floor plans envision everyone commingling in a single area, allowing for a more efficient use of space, Alluhidan said.

And whereas before exterior balconies were nearly fully enclosed, surrounded by latticed walls that let in air but not much light, more open balconies and terraces are becoming the standard.

Not everything has changed, however.

Even though women gained the right to drive in 2018, new floor plans for affluent Saudis still often include a room for a live-in driver, detached from the rest of the house.

Nevertheless, Alluhidan is convinced the budding mania for modern design “will change the culture of architecture in Saudi Arabia within a few years”.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

These new preferences are not limited to residential properties. They are also reshaping commercial complexes and other public spaces.

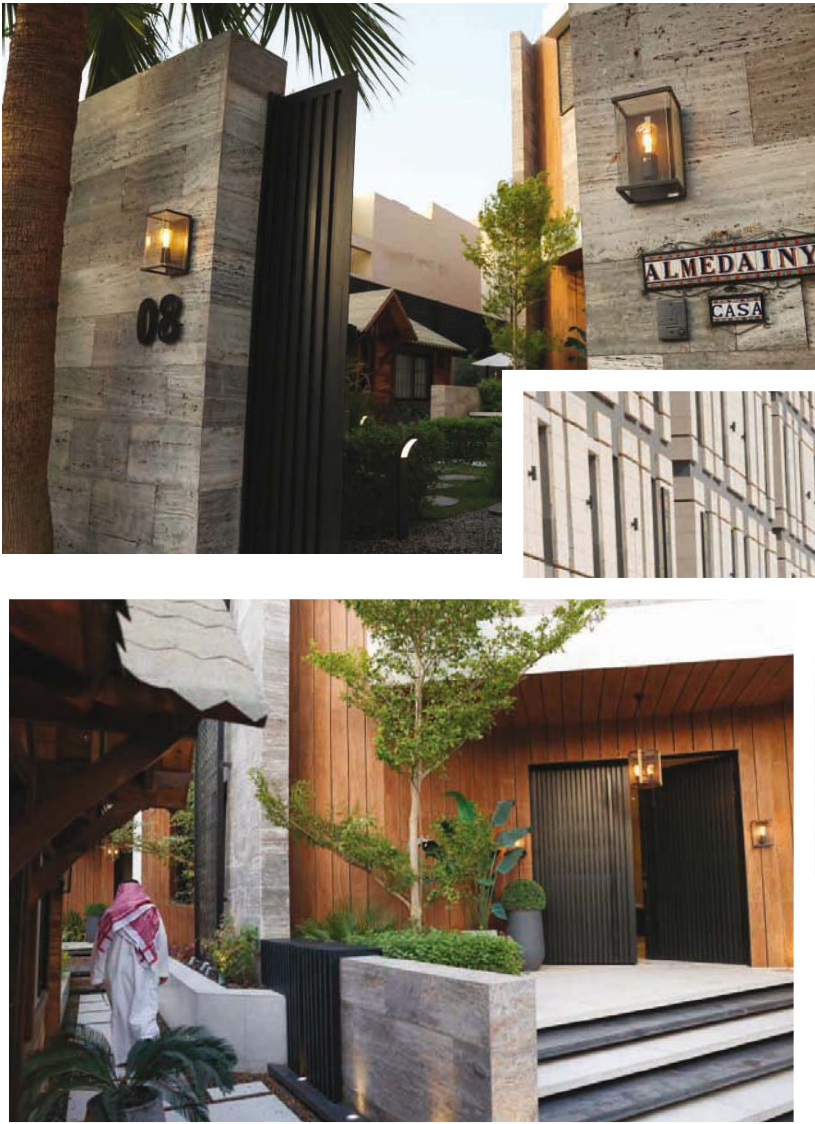
Saudi restaurants used to have separate entrances and seating areas for families and single men, but authorities did away with that rule in late 2019.

The reform has helped drive a rethinking of how shopping centres should be organised, said Mohammed Abdel Moneim, supervisor of commercial design for a real estate development firm.

“The old designs used to serve the idea of a culture of separation and segregation between families and singles,” he said, describing what he termed a “radical change”.

Riyadh Front, an upscale shopping and dining complex with fountains and a tree-lined promenade, is one of the more prominent examples of this, bringing male and female shoppers of all ages together.

“There is demand now for these open spaces,” Abdel Moneim said, “where there is communication without restrictions between everyone.” — **AFP**



CHANGING WORLD

How ‘adopting’ trees helps boost forests and incomes in Kenya



WHEN RUTH KARANJA is planting and nurturing trees with her local conservation group in their central Kenyan village, she’s thinking about water.

Her hope is that the trees she looks after under a government scheme allowing organisations to “adopt” forests for conservation will help protect the local water catchment so she and other farmers in Kiabarikhi can increase their potato yields.

In recent years, crops in the area have been depleted by unusually hot weather and drought that have left the land parched and dried up the Kitiri river, which cuts through Nyandarua County, in the summer months.

“The trees will improve the environmental condition and the agricultural fortunes of the community,” Karanja said as she planted tree saplings with other members of her community forest association (CFA).

“The rains will become plentiful and the water volume in the Kitiri river — a lifeline in the village — will increase.”

Kenya launched its national tree-planting drive in 2018 with the aim of having 10 per cent of the country covered in natural forest by the end of 2022 — up from 7.4 per cent four years ago — in a bid to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change.

That same year, the Adopt-a-Forest scheme was started to address the lack of after-care, a major flaw in many forest-planting projects in Kenya and beyond, said Eric Tetea Nahama, head of partnerships at the Kenya Forest Service (KFS).

Nonprofit groups and companies often earn green bragging rights by planting trees, then walk away, expecting local communities to spend their own time and money looking after the saplings — which results in many being left to die, Nahama said.

“We needed to move quickly and develop a strategy and guidelines for engaging partners that ensure trees don’t die after planting them,” he said.

The initiative connects charities, corporations and government organisations — both Kenyan and foreign — with community forest associations, which plant trees on sites chosen and managed by the KFS.

The backers commit to paying for the care of the trees for at least three years, by which point they are considered strong enough to withstand droughts, floods and other climate-linked stresses.

According to Nahama, 80 per cent of the trees planted under the programme grow to maturity, compared with less than half of trees under more traditional schemes.

“We are now emphasising growing trees as opposed to (simply) planting them,” he said.

GROWING PARTNERSHIPS

Scientists say protecting forests is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to curb climate change because trees suck carbon dioxide, the main gas heating up the planet, from the atmosphere.

As of March, more than 90 organisations had signed up to adopt a section of forest, covering a total area of 44,548 hectares (110,000 acres), Nahama said.

The KFS helps identify which indigenous tree species are best suited to each area — including cedar, cypress and olive — and trains community groups on how to care for them.

The funding pays for the seedlings and their care, including nurseries to raise saplings, electric fences to protect young trees from wildlife and boreholes to provide water, Nahama said.

Community members can make an income by selling seedlings to the organisations involved in the project, he explained.

They can also use the freshly planted areas to farm among the growing trees which shade young crops from intense sunlight and help the soil hold moisture.

But they are not allowed to cultivate maize, to stop the fast-growing crop from competing with the trees for water and nutrients. Once the trees have matured, CFA members are allowed to cut down a small share for firewood or to sell as timber, as long as they immediately replace any that have been felled.

The collaboration between the government, communities and organisations is vital to keeping trees healthy and discouraging illegal cutting, said Victor Kabutbei, forest station manager for North Kinangop Ward. Although one forest ranger is supposed to patrol and monitor 400 hectares, in reality each is responsible for an area nearly three times that size, Kabutbei noted.

“KFS cannot be everywhere, every time, so we need other partners,” he said.

—Thomson Reuters Foundation



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Disney announces two new Marvel 'Avengers' films at Comic-Con



DISNEY ANNOUNCED a slew of Marvel superhero movies including two new "Avengers" films on Saturday at Comic-Con, as it offered screaming fans an emotional first glimpse at its upcoming "Black Panther" sequel.

The record-breaking Marvel movies have dominated Hollywood and global box offices in recent years, with 2019's "Avengers: Endgame" briefly becoming the highest-grossing film of all time at more than \$2.79 billion.

"I wonder if you guys wouldn't mind looking ahead a little bit?" studio president Kevin Feige asked the wildly cheering hall of die-hard superhero fans towards the end of a raucous hour-plus presentation at a San Diego convention centre.

"Avengers: The Kang Dynasty" and "Avengers: Secret Wars" will hit theaters in 2025, he then announced.

The films will aim to follow in the footsteps of "Avengers: Endgame," which built unprecedented hype by rounding off storylines presented in all the preceding Marvel films.

The two new "Avengers" titles will conclude the next "saga" of more than a dozen inter-connected films and television shows in the "Marvel Cinematic Universe," said Feige.

"That will complete the second saga of the MCU, which of course is 'The Multiverse Saga,'" he said.

The Marvel franchise in recent films and shows has explored the "multiverse" concept popularised by superhero comic books, in which infinite universes — and infinite versions of each hero and villain — exist in parallel realities.

'BLACK PANTHER' RETURNS

The Marvel presentation capped off the biggest day at Comic-Con, and drew the week's loudest and most frenzied cheers in the 6,000 capacity Hall H, where many had camped in line for days to gain access.

It ended with the first trailer for "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," a sequel to the first comic book film to win a best picture Oscar nomination, set to premiere on November 11.

Returning director Ryan Coogler, taking to the San Diego stage with a colourful troupe of African drummers and dancers, paid an emotional tribute to the first film's star, the "late, great Chadwick Boseman."

Boseman died from cancer in 2020, and his role is not being taken over by another actor in the new film.

"I promise you, I can feel his hand on me right now," said Coogler.

"Chad is no longer with us physically, but his spirit, his passion, his genius, his pride in his culture, and the impact he made on this industry will be felt forever."

Coogler then presented new characters in the franchise being played by Michaela Coel and Tenoch Huerta.

Coel, who won an Emmy for "I May Destroy You," praised the unique "energy" of the first "Black Panther" film, which was widely seen as a breakthrough for Black representation in mainstream Hollywood movies.

"I think it's got something to do with a Black superhero, padded out a clan of Black superheroes and what that kind of does for Black people," she said. — Reuters

TRAVEL TALES

Scientists reveal origin of mammal evolution milestone: warm-bloodedness



SCIENTISTS HAVE answered a longstanding question about mammalian evolution, examining ear anatomy of living and extinct mammals and their close relatives to determine when warm-bloodedness — a trait integral to the lineage's success — first emerged.

Researchers said on Wednesday that the reduced size of inner ear structures called semicircular canals — small, fluid-filled tubes that help in keeping balance — in fossils of mammal forerunners showed that warm-bloodedness, called endothermy, arose roughly 233 million years ago during the Triassic Period.

These first creatures that attained this milestone, called mammalian synapsids, are not formally classified as mammals, as the first true mammals appeared roughly 30 million years later. But they had begun to acquire traits associated with mammals.

Endothermy evolved at a time when important features of the mammal body plan were falling into place, including whiskers and fur, changes to the backbone related to gait, the presence of a diaphragm, and a more mammal-like jaw joint and hearing system.

"Endothermy is a defining

feature of mammals, including us humans. Having a quasi-constant high body temperature regulates all our actions and behaviours, from food intake to cognition, from locomotion to the places where we live," said paleontologist Ricardo Araújo of the University of Lisbon's Institute of Plasmas and Nuclear Fusion, co-lead author of the study published in the journal *Nature*.

The high metabolisms of mammal bodies maintain internal temperature independent of their surroundings. Cold-blooded animals like lizards adopt strategies like basking in the sun to warm up.

Mammalian endothermy arrived at an eventual evolutionary moment, with dinosaurs and flying reptiles called pterosaurs — creatures that long would dominate ecosystems — first appearing at about that time. Endothermy offered advantages.

"Run faster, run longer, be more active, be active through longer periods of the circadian cycle, be active through longer periods of the year, increase foraging area. The possibilities are endless. All this at a great cost, though. More energy requires more food, more foraging, and so on. It is a fine balance between the energy you spend and the

energy you intake," Araújo said.

The mammalian lineage evolved from cold-blooded creatures, some boasting exotic body plans like the sail-backed Dimetrodon, mixing reptile-like traits like splayed legs and mammal-like traits like the arrangement of certain jaw muscles.

Endothermy emerged relatively quickly, in perhaps less than a million years, rather than a longer, gradual process, said paleontologist and study co-lead author Romain David of the Natural History Museum in London.

An early example was a vaguely weasel-like species, *Pseudotherium argentinus*, in Argentina about 231 million years ago. The later true mammals were the ancestors of today's three mammalian groups: placentals, marsupials and monotremes.

"Given how central endothermy is to so many aspects of the body plan, physiology and life-style of modern mammals, when it evolved in our ancient ancestors has been a really important unsolved question in paleontology," said paleontologist and study co-author Ken Angielczyk of the Field Museum in Chicago.

Determining when endothermy originated through fossils has been tough. As Araújo noted: "We cannot stick thermometers in the armpit of your pet Dimetrodon, right?"

The inner ear provided a solution. The viscosity, or runniness, of inner ear fluid — and all fluid — changes with temperature. This fluid in cold-blooded animals is cooler and thicker, necessitating wider canals. Warm-blooded animals have less viscous ear fluid and smaller semicircular canals.

The researchers compared semicircular canals in 341 animals, 243 extant and 64 extinct. This showed endothermy arriving millions of years later than some prior estimates.

Mammals played secondary roles in ecosystems dominated by dinosaurs before taking over after the mass extinction event 66 million years ago. Among today's animals, mammals and birds are warm-blooded.

"It is maybe too far-fetched, but interesting, to think that the onset of endothermy in our ancestors may have ultimately led to the construction of the Giza pyramids or the development of the smartphone," Araújo said. "If our ancestors would have not become independent of environmental temperatures, these human achievements would probably not be possible." — Reuters

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Stories from the Book of Misers

STORIES FROM Al-Jahiz's Book of Misers, from the chapter covering the people of Khorasan (Iran):

1) "If a guest arrives to a person from the city of Marv and stays for too long, the host would ask him if he had lunch. If the guest answers yes, the host would say: 'if you hadn't, I would've made you something nice'. And if the answer was no, the host would lament the fact that they could've drank something together instead. So, the guest ends up having nothing."

2) Thumama said: "Usually, roosters would collect cereals and put it in front of the chicken to eat. Except for the roosters in Marv who steal it from the chicken's beaks. I knew then that avidity is an aspect in their country, found in the essence of their water and hence affected their animals too."

3) Ahmed ibn Rasheed said: "I was in the house of an old man from Marv and his young boy was playing in front of us. I decided to tease him and asked for some bread. The boy replied: 'You don't want it. It's bitter.' I then asked for a drink of water and the boy answered: 'You don't want it. It's salty.' So, I kept asking for other things and the boy kept giving me excuses for not wanting to have them. His father laughed and said: 'How is it his fault when I taught him all that?'"

4) A merchant from Marv used to travel to Iraq for commerce and pilgrimage. There he struck a friendship with a local Iraqi man who he'd spend days in his hospitality. The merchant ended each visit saying: "I wish I could see you in Marv to pay back your kindness! Here in your homeland, you're in no need of me." A long time passed by and the Iraqi had to travel to Marv for a personal matter. He decided to look for his Marven friend to keep him com-

pany in that strange land. The Marven was sitting among his friends when the Iraqi approached and gave him a hug. The Marven seemed baffled as if he didn't recognise the Iraqi. The Iraqi removed his mask, followed by the turban and finally his cap. Still the Marven pretended not to know him and said in Farsi: "Even if you get out of your skin, I'll deny you!"

5) "A group of Marven friends would buy meat and divide it between them. Each would then skewer it using either a string or a palm leaflet, dip it in the pot where it's cooked with vinegar and spices. Each would then take his portion of the cooked meat and keep the strings for next time as it's saturated now with fat. This group cooking is done to save money and the way of cooking ensures that the meat would stay edible for days."

6) A Marven heard Al-Hasan encouraging people to donate, promising them fast rewards. The Marven donated his whole money and became poor. He waited year after year but no fast rewards were coming his way. He went to Al-Hasan and said: "What have you done to me? You guaranteed the reward and I spent everything based on your promise. Today I've been waiting for such and such years and I haven't seen no little nor more of what I'd given. Is this fair? Would a thief cause more damage than you did?"

7) "Abu Is'haq Al-Sayar had a Marven neighbour who never wore sandals in the jujube's fruit season in fear of pits wearing out the soles."

(To be continued...)

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art & life

Local Scene

f t i y n @omanobserver

MONDAY | JULY 25 | 2022

By Kabeer Yousuf

Trials and tribulations are part of life but success usually follows those who use them as stepping stones.

The story of Maha al Balushi, who was chosen as one of the Top 10 Women Leaders In Oman 2022 by Women Entrepreneur is not any different from the rest who transformed their rocky path into a flowered promenade.

Al Balushi, the founder and Chief Strategist at Key Marketing is nothing but a solid message to both the aspirant and deserters in life.

She, at a very young age, carries out every responsibility at her workplace. Being the founder and chief strategist at KEY Marketing is no less than a challenge for her but she played the game well. Despite her young age, she gained both the knowledge and experience needed to create a successful marketing strategy for her clients' businesses over the years.

Her success mantra is simple. "I believe the minute you take full responsibility for yourself and your actions and stop blaming anyone and anything will you be able to move forward," Maha shared.

The founder of Maha Key, Al Balushi advocates for caring for her company like a mother who takes care of her small child. This fact is proven effective by her, who, at a very young age carries out multiple tasks at her workplace.

At a very young age, she gained both knowledge and experience to create successful marketing strategies for clients' businesses. She said she was lucky enough to get the chance to study abroad which helped her in drawing different strategies for different sectors.

After high school, she secured a scholarship for studies in the UK for six years where she pursued a Diploma in Marketing and Advertising, followed by a Bachelor's degree in media & culture studies and finally a master's degree from the University of Nottingham. Soon after her graduation, she started working in different marketing and advertising agencies around the GCC and she has also worked with many clients in Oman and elsewhere.

In 2021, despite the challenges of the pandemic, she pursued her education further and got certified as a 'digital marketing specialist' by the American Marketing Association.

Her baby, Key Marketing, was started with a zero budget and without a team or an office she carried out every responsibility with her acquired knowledge, hard work and self-confidence.

"I remember I used to create marketing plans, develop marketing solutions by myself and I would go to companies and convince them to collaborate with me," she shared regarding the initial days of her journey.

It was just the beginning. Many people and different companies began to support her just because they could see that she was trying to create something valuable with the little resources she had. Also, she believes that the government, represented by the Riyadh, has played a great role in supporting Key Marketing and other small businesses.

"I had worked in various positions in previous jobs. I met clients in sectors such as telecom, tourism, petroleum, education, banking and more. in both private and public sectors. I also worked with a lot of small businesses which enhanced my experience. I believe I was always blessed with the best bosses and colleagues. In my early years, one of my bosses offered me one hour every week, where I would sit with him and clarify my doubts and learn new things in the industry as I always wanted to learn more about marketing and advertising."

She never spared any stone to learn more. She is a reader and makes it a point to read every day. Also, she enrolls herself in marketing and advertising courses to stay up to date with everything new in the marketing business. According to her, everything she has been doing in her life has together helped her to create a marketing agency and to be a successful marketing strategist where she can deliver something valuable to the table.

Key Marketing was established in 2018 and provides 360-degree marketing services. Starting from marketing plans and strategies to branding, digital marketing campaigns, designing, social media marketing, filming and on-ground activation, it offers a wide range of services.

"We are young and passionate and always aim to grow our client's businesses. Initially, I had to carry out every responsibility. Still, now after building a team, I can build marketing strategies and plans for our clients, which then move to the execution team which turns strategies into reality. When it comes to working with our clients I believe that everyone in my team is an expert."

She believes that if one wants to keep his or her business running, then he or she needs to be flexible and manage to change his strategies along with the current situation he or she is living in. "Marketing is a fast-moving industry, therefore you should never stop learning, and the minute you think that you know enough is the minute you are going to move backwards."

Maha shared, "Believe in yourself, trust yourself, you and only you can create a better future for yourself, and if I can do it then you can too. And I have to mention here that my family has also played a great role in forming my personality and have been very supportive, and I wish that we can have more families supporting their daughters to reach their dreams."

A rising star in marketing sector shares secret to success