

Oman flays Somalia hotel attack

The Sultanate of Oman expressed its denunciation and condemnation of the attack, which targeted a hotel in Somalia's capital city Mogadishu, said a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry. Oman also expressed its sincere condolences and sympathies to the Somalian government and people, as well as families of the victims, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA



P10

SEEB OVERWHELM AL BASHAYER



P15

BRITISH ENERGY PRICES TO SOAR THREEFOLD



P18

HANAE MORI: GRANDE DAME OF JAPANESE FASHION



MUSCAT

INDUSTRY TOLD TO DRAFT IP POLICIES

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion called upon all sectors to devise clear-cut policies for intellectual property (IP) rights and guide their research establishments prior to appropriating any such rights. The ministry underscored this procedure to secure the rights of all parties. The ministry said that the policies of property rights determine who is the exclusive owner.

DETAILS ON P3

MOSCOW

DAUGHTER OF PUTIN'S CLOSE ALLY KILLED

The daughter of a right-wing ideologue close to Russian President Vladimir Putin has died in a suspected assassination attempt near Moscow, according to investigators. "The identity of the deceased has been established — it is the journalist and political scientist Darya Dugina," the national investigative committee said on Sunday. The 29-year-old daughter of Putin confidante Alexander Dugin was considered a fervent supporter of Russia's war against Ukraine. According to reports by Moscow media, she was on Britain's sanctions list for spreading false news about the war. According to investigators, Dugina's car exploded on Saturday evening in a Moscow suburb. **SEE ALSO P7**



INSIDE



Head and members of OCCI Elections Committee named

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has issued a Ministerial Decision No 494/2022 naming the head and members of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) Elections Committee.

Article (1) states the OCCI Elections Committee shall be headed by Dr Saleh bin Said bin Salim Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

Article (2) stipulates that the



committee shall perform its specialisations stated in OCCI

Election Committees Regulation. The panel's specialisations include supervising elections, proposing elections' sub-committees, determining voting and candidacy dates (and options to extend the same if deemed necessary) checking requests for candidacy, endorsing the final lists of voters

and candidates approving related forms (for voting, objections, petition) and approving the final results of voting.

Article (3) says that this decision shall be enforced from the day following its date of publication in the Official Gazette.

— ONA

167,678 TOURISTS VISITED COUNTRY IN SEVEN MONTHS

Oman eyes to attract more Indian tourists

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 21

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is organising a promotional campaign that includes seminars across Indian market to promote tourism potential of Oman.

The campaign comes as a result of the increasing number of Indian tourists coming to Oman between January and July 2022, which has reached 167,678 visitors.

The seminars, which runs till 29 August, will cover five main Indian cities, including New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru.

The seminars will be attended by a delegation from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and representatives of hotels and airline companies in Oman.

Further, the seminars will also include meetings between the ministry's delegation and

Tourism seminars are set to cover New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru and will try to attract more visitors

MINISTRY OF
HERITAGE AND
TOURISM

Indian senior officials in the field of tourism and Indian media channels.

Recently, Fitch Solutions International raised its positive forecast for the recovery of tourism sector in Oman during 2022 and 2023, with stronger growth expected during the medium-term forecast period (2024-2026).

The agency's report indicated

that there is a noticeable recovery in the sector in Oman, which began in the late fourth quarter of 2021, with expectation of a continued growth over the coming years, benefiting from the economic diversification agenda of Oman Vision 2040 and the tourism development plans implemented by the government through recovery programmes from the effects of the pandemic, digital marketing initiatives, and the announcement of new investments in the tourism sector.

Oman aims to raise the tourism sector's contribution to the GDP to 5 per cent by 2030, and the sector's contribution to rise to about 10 per cent by 2040. The direct and indirect added value of the sector stood at RO 1.3 billion by the end of 2019.

Over the past years, the sector has witnessed a steady growth as a result of the efforts made by the government.

UNEARTHING 'INCREDIBLE' ARTISTIC TALENTS

Nehru Centre Art Gallery, Mumbai, India, was the venue for the recent international art exhibition for artists from the Sultanate of Oman and Sudan. The 12-day-long event named 'Adwin Petals' marked a new vibe for the 23 artists who took part in the art expo showcasing about 46 of their paintings. Different varieties of paintings with themes based on cultures, lifestyles, abstract, scenery, flower prints, Buddha and landscapes attracted the connoisseurs of art. **DETAILS ON P20**

Endemic reptiles of Oman need conservation

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The Sultanate of Oman is home to 111 reptiles, out of which 96 are terrestrial and 15 are marine. Interestingly the 15 marine reptiles include 10 sea snakes and five marine turtles. Out of the total number of reptile species 16 of them are endemic.

The reptiles are identified, but more resources are needed to understand climate change and its impact on them. Another concern is also man-made changes to their habitats.

The e-book, 'A field guide to the reptiles of Oman', authored by Salvador Carranza, Johannes Els and Abernathy Burriel Carranza, in coordination with the Environment

Authority of Oman, described that the reptiles represent the most diverse group of terrestrial vertebrates and a major component of the global biodiversity.

They said in the book that, "The evolutionary relationships and their taxonomy have been very contentious and could not be clarified until genetic and genome data have been available. The main objective of the book, was to provide an updated account on the systematics, diversity and distribution of Oman reptiles."

The book published last year is a result of the work spanning over 16 years. The areas that were studied include Al Hajar Mountains, adjoining areas covering the coastal Al Batinah plain and inland areas and Dhofar mountains and the



islands, some of the desert areas and coastal areas of the Arabian Sea.

What they found over the years were many interesting aspects such

as Sako's Toad-headed Agama is an endemic species of the Al Sharqiyah Sands and has adapted to live in extremely arid conditions. With 41 species, Gekkota, the authors concluded, are the most diverse terrestrial reptile group in Oman.

The researchers are of the opinion that there should be more studies on the 16 endemic reptiles such as their population structure, biology, ecology and threats.

Reptiles are present in the Empty Quarter, Salt Flats and islands of Oman. The highest number of reptiles are found in Masirah Island with 21 species and two of them are endemic to Masirah Island — Hemidactylus masirahensis and Pristurus masirahensis. **TURN TO P2**

Dhofar to get more green projects

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is weighing approvals for land covering an estimated 450 million square metres to be earmarked for renewables and green hydrogen projects in the Governorate of Dhofar.

According to the Director-General of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Governorate of Dhofar, the process is being facilitated in coordinated with a number of ministries and government agencies concerned.

The entire effort, he said, is being pursued to attract local and foreign investments in projects. **DETAILS ON P13**



As khareef peaks, tourists rush to savour Dhofar

KABEER YOUSUF

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With the khareef at its peak, the number of tourists in Dhofar has jumped manifold.

Dhofar's attraction was reaffirmed after the Second Arab Forum for Tourism and Heritage, held in Salalah recently selected Dhofar as 2022's best Arab tourist destination.

The various tourist attractions are reporting visitors not only from the region but also from other GCC countries heralding a renewed awakening to the tourism in the region that bore the brunt of the pandemic in the last two years.

"We are receiving a large number of tourists from across the Sultanate of Oman and beyond," said Juan Paulo Alphonso, General Manager of Omran's Alila Hinu Bay resort in Mirbat.

"What makes this year's khareef Dhofar is that there has been an increase in the number of tourists from other GCC countries, from the Middle East region and European countries and the US," said Alphonso, who took over as the GM of the national property during the peak of Covid-19 in 2021.



Other hotels and resorts, flat owners and commercial villa managers, and tour guides too echo his opinion.

"I accompany a lot of tourists these days compared to other months and it's a mixed segment of people from across the globe who need to be accompanied to various destinations and to be explained the features of each spot," said



Adnan al Maashani, a tour guide.

According to statistics released by the Ministry of Tourism, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of visitors in Dhofar and passengers travelling through the Salalah Airport.

Nearly 315,000 passengers travelled through the Salalah Airport from the beginning of June till last week of August against

206,657 passengers who used the airport during the same period in 2021.

Travel and tourism experts opine that the governorate has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Gulf region due to its diverse natural features, exceptional weather and varied terrain.

"Where else can one find a

tourist destination as diverse as Dhofar where rugged mountains stand on one side, and arid desert and vast beach merge on the other side than in Salalah," asks Rowen Stevens, a European tourist who was visiting Wadi Dabat waterfalls.

Catapulting the khareef Dhofar's international repute, several international airlines have

According to statistics released by the Ministry of Tourism, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of visitors in Dhofar and passengers travelling through the Salalah Airport

started special flights to Salalah, including the low-cost airline Wizz Air, with two weekly flights from Abu Dhabi, and Gulf Air which is operating two weekly flights from Bahrain.

Oman's national carrier Oman Air and Salam Air, the budget airline too have increased flights to cater to the demand. Oman Air is operating 12 domestic flights per day, while SalamAir has nine.

Salalah, the 'Land of Frankincense' and selected by Unesco for its two World Heritage sites, namely, the ruins of Al Baleed Port and Khor Ruri, is expecting more tourists to its misty clime and soothing greenery during the khareef which will end during the first week of September.

Endemic reptiles need conservation



FROM PAGE 1

Dhofar has the highest diversity with 60 species, followed by South Al Sharqiyah with 48, Musandam 21, Al Buraimi 29 and North Al Batinah 27.

They stated in the book that, "The Sultanate of Oman has approximately 50 per cent of the total number of reptile species in the Arabian Peninsula, ranking it as one of the countries with the highest reptile diversity in Arabia."

However, the authors point out that there are gaps in the knowledge of the life history, population size and real distribution of Oman reptiles.

Another major concern is that climate change could cause heat stress and change in their natural habitats and may not be able to foresee how they will be affected.

They pointed out that the conservation of reptiles is important because they have significant role in the natural ecosystems, as predators, commensal species and as natural pest control in addition to medical health.

Expats not allowed in certain telecom jobs

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The Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA) on Sunday issued a decision 109/2022 on Omanisation in maintenance and installation of IT devices, systems, or networks.

As per article 3 of the decision, expatriates will be not allowed in jobs like connecting wires or optical fibres at the last mile of the licensee's networks; supervising the laying of communication cables; installing, setting up, connecting, or maintaining communication devices and systems in exchanges, distribution points, or stations, installation; and setting up of communications and information technology networks or devices in homes.

Some provisions of these decisions will be applied to small and medium-sized enterprises holding an entrepreneurship card 18 eighteen months from the date of enforcement of this regulation.

The decision will come into force from the day following the date of its publication in the official gazette and the stakeholders must



reconcile their status within three months from the date of its enforcement.

"It is not permissible to carry out the services in the stipulated field of telecommunications mentioned above without obtaining a permit to that effect from the authority. The application for obtaining a permit must be submitted to TRA in a specific form, accompanied by all the required data and documents and a receipt for payment of the permit fee. The Licensing and Compliance Department at the authority will

study the application and decide within 30 days from the date of its submission. No response from the authority during this period will be considered as a rejection of the application."

The licensees must abide by the following terms that include not assigning the implementation of services in the field of telecommunications to an unauthorised person, obtaining the authority's prior approval in case of contracting with companies or establishments that are not registered in the Sultanate

of Oman. They must submit data every six months on the contracts assigned to the authorised person according to the form prepared by the authority.

The licensees must follow the Omanisation percentages in the professions of specialists and permits will not be renewed if the rate falls below 70 per cent. The Omanisation rate after 12 months from the issuance of the permit will be 30 per cent, 40 per cent after 24 months, 50 per cent after 36 months, 60 per cent after 48 months, 70 per cent after 60 months for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that hold an entrepreneurship card.

For SMEs registered with Riyada, Omanisation rate is 55 per cent after 12 months, 60 per cent after 24 months, 60 per cent after 36 months, 70 per cent after 48 months and 70 per cent after 60 months.

For the rest of the companies and institutions, it will be 60 per cent after 12 months and subsequently, they have to maintain the Omanisation rate of 70 per cent.

Citizen drowns in Ibra

MUSCAT: The body of a citizen who drowned in a valley in the Wilayat of Ibra, was recovered by locals and was transported to the hospital on Thursday.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, (CDAA), said: "Rescue teams at the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate responded to a report of a citizen drowning in a valley in the Wilayat of Ibra. He was pulled out by the citizens and taken to the hospital but was declared dead."

Reckless crossing of wadis; non-abidance of safety instructions near water bodies and beaches; and parents leaving kids unattended at swimming pools or water logged areas are major reasons behind the surging number of drowning cases in the Sultanate of Oman.

More than 500 drowning incidents were reported in Oman in 2021, a recent statistics has revealed. (CDAA) said that the water rescue teams dealt with 521 calls of drowning accidents in 2021.

Mirbat windows bear witness to former glory

TEXT & PHOTO

BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The ornate wooden windows of the buildings in the old town of the Wilayat of Mirbat opens into the hoary past when the town was a bustling trading post for frankincense and Arabian horses. Magnificent two-storey trading houses in the town centre still bear witness to the wealth of that time.

The Wilayat of Mirbat (75 km from the city of Salalah) is one of the important historical cities in the Dhofar Governorate, which is located in the Jabal Samhan plain and overlooks the Arabian Sea. It was famous for breeding horses. The name Mirbat means horse market.

The Wilayat is famous for many

natural tourist sites, historical monuments and ancient buildings, most notably Mirbat Fort, which overlooks the old port of Mirbat. Its construction dates back to the ninth century.

Whoever visits the old quarter will notice the antique window designs that adorn the buildings of this quarter. The House of Sidov is one of the most important archaeological monuments with a unique structure that embodies traditional Arab style, and its construction dates back to about 200 years. These houses overlook beautiful beaches and bays.

These houses were built in a harmonious way. All of them are close and have similar layouts and are made of mud and stones.



Most of the houses have windows with ornate grilles that allow free circulation of wind.

The ancient windows are characterised by unique geometric shapes, decorations and engravings. Historical sources indicate that most of these windows were imported from India during the trade between the subcontinent and the Sultanate of Oman in ancient times.

The maze of old pathways are lined with these once magnificent status symbols now left to crumble. Most of them had been stripped of their impressive windows and doors, imported from as far away places like Zanzibar, and the decay, which often follows in hot pursuit of abandonment, had set in.



Saudi studies Oman's census

MUSCAT: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics reviewed the National Center for Statistics and Information's experience of the Sultanate of Oman in implementing a census based on national administrative records as a global model for the transition from traditional censuses based on field surveys to a census based on national administrative records.

During the meeting, the centre touched on the interrelationship of administrative records in the registration census, the use and interdependence of classifications in administrative records, checking and consistency and addressing discrepancies between administrative records, the task of technical support in calculating indicators in administrative records and other topics related to administrative records data.

This meeting came within the framework of exchanging statistical knowledge and experiences and reviewing best practices in the statistical field, as the e-census 2020 in Oman represents a quantum leap in the census process. — ONA

Prices of schools supplies under control: CPA

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With government schools reopening next month, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has allayed fears of price rise and assured adequate stock supplies like bags, shoes, stationery, sportswear, accessories. The chairman of CPA said the prices of student essentials are well under control and any unjustifiable price rise of any product will not be tolerated

"Prices in the Sultanate of Oman are under control and we are constantly monitoring the market," said Sulayem bin Salim al Hakmani, CPA Chairman.

He further added that the CPA inspectors are visiting the retail outlets to keep a tab on the prices of various essentials including 'back to school' merchandise on a regular basis and any discrepancy is highlighted.

There have been news that prices of some of the products required for children for schools have been shot up in view of the sudden unprecedented demand after two years of online classes.

"We always make sure that prices of products, be it essentials or back to school products, are kept under control and no unreasonable rate



hike of any of our products at any of our branch," said KA Shabeer, General Manager, Lulu Oman.

However, some wholesale dealers confirmed that there have been some scarcity or insufficient supply of some of the products which resulted in a price rise.

"We faced lower supply of some products from China and Taiwan against the demand as schools are about to open hence, there was a slight hike in their prices," Abdul Kareem, a wholesale dealer in Muttrah told the Observer.

"But now that the supply is

stable and demand saturated, prices are more or less the same and no undue price hike was experienced in the market," said Kareem.

Social media was abuzz with the messages that the high prices of stationery and school

supplies should be controlled and demanded that the Consumer Protection Authority needed to intervene.

"There's no situation like that and we are fully convinced of the prices we sampled in many governorates. If the need be, we will intervene and take action against the offenders," said Al Hakmani.

Al Hakmani urged on consumers to communicate with the Consumer Protection Authority if they find price variation in student supplies or other other goods, stressing that the authority is ready to deal with complaints and suggestions.

In an interview to ONA, said the authority is currently undertaking several initiatives aimed at raising consumer awareness in various fields, and is in the process of launching a vehicle recall campaign to maintain the safety of consumers and provide them with the necessary protection.

Al Hakmani said that the authority is in full coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the General Administration of Customs of the Royal Oman Police to combat commercial fraud to ensure markets are free of fraudulent goods.

Oman to host conference on antimicrobial resistance



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will host the ministerial conference on combating antimicrobial resistors in November 2022. This was

discussed when Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health and Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources received Hanan Balkhi, Assistant Director-General for Antimicrobial Resistance of WHO, in Muscat on

Monday.

The meeting reviewed Oman's preparations for hosting the ministerial conference and matters related to logistic support, among other topics. Dr Jan Jabbour, WHO Representative attended the meeting. — ONA

Asyad Group to sponsor cultural initiatives

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with Asyad Group to support and sponsor cultural and technical initiatives.

Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Culture Under-Secretary, said that the MoC forges true partnership between the public and private sectors. The MoC, he added, highlights the Sultanate of Oman's cultural and technical heritage and assigns cultural depth to the services rendered by Asyad, Sayyid Said added, hoping that the MoC will revolutionise cultural and technical action in the future.

The memorandum of cooperation seeks to develop cooperation with Asyad (when providing logistic services), sponsor and support programmes on cultural and technical initiatives by providing state-of-the-art transport and shipping services within Oman and abroad.

The MoC will also highlight achievements through the designs of stamps and other items, besides highlighting the ministry's participation in cultural awareness campaigns undertaken by Asyad.

'Prepare intellectual property rights policies'



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) called upon all sectors to devise clear-cut policies for intellectual property rights and guide their research establishments before filing for any such rights.

The ministry underscored this procedure to secure the rights of all parties. The National Office for Intellectual Property Rights of the ministry affirmed that any successful establishment would take steps to augment its cognitive repertoire through research and through the

protection of its resources by regulating its relationship with other parties (like workers or affiliate students or staff members who single-handedly carry out their projects).

The ministry added that the policies of property rights determine the exclusive owner, the beneficiaries of such rights and what is wholly or partly available among the establishment's instruments since research and development require the use of an establishment's facilities, equipment or other resources.

One million seeds planted across Dhofar Governorate

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The Environment Authority (EA) said that more than one million seeds for trees and wild plants have been planted in the Governorate of Dhofar.

In a statement, EA, said, "Environment Authority, represented by the Directorate General of Dhofar Governorate, was able to plant and scatter 1,042,250 seeds of trees and wild plants in the mountains of the Governorate of Dhofar."

The project aimed at planting the seeds of trees and wild plants for which Oman and the Governorate

of Dhofar in particular are famous for. The trees include Sidr, Taeq, Squt, Arir, Aloebar and Ghaf, in 35 locations in five wilayats (Taqah, Mirbat, Salalah, Rakhout and Dhalkout).

The project comes within the framework of the agency's keenness to increase the vegetation cover in the natural and pastoral areas. Over 382 volunteers and the authority's employees participated in the campaign

Earlier this year, EA successfully tested drones to spread seeds in Dhofar, and the second experiment was carried out in one of the Khors in the Wetland Reserve. This also comes

as part of the authority's efforts to implement the national initiative to plant 10 million trees and employ modern technologies in the environmental field.

The National 10-Million Tree Initiative, which lasts till 2030, seeks to improve plant cover and enhance natural resources, including grazing areas in depleting zones. It is also aimed at raising awareness about the benefits of green cover, both to the environment and society. It highlights the significance of social segments' contribution to environment conservation and the economic potential of some species of local plants.





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Sleep is one of the basics of a normal daily routine. Experts say that a person must sleep six to eight hours a day so that he can regain his activity and strength for the continuity of life. However, there are some people who suffer from insomnia, or sleep for fewer hours, which affects their health.

According to the Ministry of Health, failure to adhere to the normal sleeping hours causes several health problems, including: poor decision-making and slow reaction, hallucinations, memory problems, increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and heart disease, getting wrinkles and dark circles around the eyes, weak immune system, and increased feeling of pain and fatigue.

Recent studies have shown that staying up late and being sleep deprived can cause long-term brain damage. Those who face sleep problems three times a week for a month are advised to go to the doctor immediately.

Lack of sleep is one of the problems of the modern era, and it is more common in developed countries, where work pressures are more severe compared to other societies. The spread of smartphones too has, in turn, affected the quality of sleep at a global level and they are considered “disruptive” factors for healthy sleep, due to the rate of blue light that negatively affects the secretion of the hormone melatonin responsible for sleep, according to doctors.

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Besides the technology, there are reasons behind the lack of enough sleep at night, which maybe taking a nap during the day, going to sleep on a full stomach, dirty pillow and sheets, not getting enough exercise, tension and excessive worry, drinking caffeinated stimulants, and it could be because of health problems related to age or diseases.

However, there are psychological and behavioural techniques that can be useful for treating insomnia, such as relaxation techniques like breathing exercises, mindfulness exercises, meditation techniques, guiding images and listening to audio recordings. These practices can help one fall asleep and also fall back asleep in the middle of the night.

One of the techniques is the use of sleep stimulants which help build a relationship between the bedroom and sleep. This is done by arranging the room, using a comfortable bed and room lighting control.

The other technique is cognitive behavioural therapy, which includes behavioural changes such as maintaining a consistent bedtime routine (bedtime and wake time, and no afternoon naps), as well as cognitive changes aimed at modifying unhealthy beliefs and fears about sleep and teaching rational and positive thinking.

Moreover, the Ministry of Health noted that sleeping pills can be used under the supervision of a specialist doctor to treat acute insomnia for a temporary period not exceeding two weeks, due to the danger of dependence on this type of medication.



KABEER YOUSUF
 @kabeeryousef

The festival also aims at raising the aesthetic sense through film making which is the most powerful mode of communicating with the society,



The festival which is held online through digital cinema platform Racoda, which was founded and headed by film critic and screenwriter Imad al Nuwairi, with the support of Media Du company in Kuwait.

The registration for the competition began on March 16 and continued until August 6. The final qualifiers will take place in the month of November, during which prizes will be awarded to the top three from each level of the competition and 134 consolation prizes. — **ONA**

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

A total number of eighteen schools have registered with around 400 participants for various events.

Invitation and Agenda to the Extraordinary General Meeting of Taageer Finance Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the Shareholders of the Company to the Extraordinary General Meeting to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 7 September 2022 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through MCDG website (www.mcdg.gov.om).

Failing quorum of Extraordinary General Meeting, a second Extraordinary General Meeting shall be convened at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 13 September 2022 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which you may access through MCDG website (www.mcdg.gov.om) to discuss and consider the following agenda:

Agenda for the Extraordinary General Meeting

1. To consider and approve issuance of unsecured and unconvertible secondary bonds (hereinafter referred to as Bonds) upto RO 7,500,000 (Rials Omani Seven Million & Five Hundred Thousand only) with a green shoe option for an amount upto RO 7,500,000 (Rials Omani Seven Million Five Hundred Thousand only) by way of a private placement at the nominal value of RO 1 (Rial Omani One) for each bond, in addition to issue expenses in accordance with the regulatory approval. The bonds shall be valid for two (2) years and shall be listed on the Bonds section of Muscat Stock Exchange.
2. To authorize the Board of Directors to take all necessary actions to complete the aforesaid transaction, including approving the interest rate, issue price, names and numbers of investors, and determining the amount to be allocated to each investor, and other terms and conditions. Furthermore, the Board shall be authorize to sign the Prospectus and other required documents and instruments to complete this transaction, and to appoint an issue manager, a legal advisor, a trustee, and other advisors for the transactions.

For more information, please contact Mr. Mustafa Al Lawati of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, on telephone no. (+968) 24839810.

Chairman	Auditor	Legal Adviser
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Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Economy

TENDER NOTICE

**The Ministry of Economy
Announces the following tender:**

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2022/5	Cleaning Services For The Offices Of The Ministry Of Economy To 2023	25 Omani Rials	2/10/2022

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender Board can participate and collect the specifications and conditions of the tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om. The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website and attach an electronic copy of the temporary insurance in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate with a value of (1%) of the value of the tender submitted and valid for (90) days from the last date of submission of bids. It has to be addressed to HE Chairman of the Tender Committee of the Ministry of Economy.

Second ● Priority in awarding the tender shall be given to companies that have an Entrepreneur Card.

Third ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system; <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@ita.gov.om

+ 968 24402200

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of tender document	Last date for tender submission	Tender Document Price (non- refundable)
95/2022 (re- announces)	Providing maintenance technicians for the buildings affiliated to the Ministry in North Al Batinah Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of industrial workshop services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Thursday 8-9-2022 02:00 PM	Wednesday 28-9-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=
136/2022	Supply and installation of a cooling system for the building of the General Directorate of Social Development in Dhofar Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of industrial workshop services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent or first degree	Sunday 04-09-2022 02:00 PM	Monday 19-9-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=
137/2022	General maintenance work for the investment building in the new green square, phase one, plot number (318) of the Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Al Buraimi Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the second degree	Thursday 8-9-2022 02:00 PM	Wednesday 28-9-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (**<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>**). On Monday 22/8/2022.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (**reg@tenderboard.gov.om**) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "



Somalia hotel siege ends, toll climbs to 21

MOGADISHU: Somali forces have ended a siege at a hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, police and the military said on Sunday, adding that they had rescued 106 hostages including women and children.

At least 12 people, mostly civilians, were killed as Somalia's elite armed forces battled Al Qaeda-linked fighters for 30 hours after they blasted and shot their way into the Hayat Hotel on Friday evening.

Dozens of hostages were freed during the course of the siege, a senior police commander said, without providing more details.

Another official had earlier said that mop-up operations were still going on at the building, which suffered extensive damage.

"We are still investigating the explosions of many plastic bags that have been scattered around the hotel," said Mohamed Ali, a military officer at the scene.

The French news agency AFP earlier reported that all the gunmen had been killed, citing a security commander.

Friday's attack was the first such major incident since President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud took office in May.

The Al Qaeda-linked Al Shabaab group claimed



Media report in front of destroyed building after a deadly 30-hour siege by Al Shabaab fighters at Hayat Hotel in Mogadishu. — AFP

responsibility for the attack.

Al Shabaab has been fighting to topple the Somali government for more than a decade. It wants to establish its own rule. The Hayat is a hotel popular with lawmakers and other government officials.

Meanwhile, the death toll from a devastating 30-hour siege has climbed to 21, Health Minister Ali Haji Adan said on Sunday, as anxious citizens awaited news

Friday's attack was the first such major incident since President Hassan took office in May

of missing relatives. Emergency workers have been trying to clear the debris of a gun and bomb attack by the Al-Qaeda-linked

group on the popular Hayat hotel which left parts of the building in ruins, with many feared trapped inside.

"The ministry of health has so far confirmed the deaths of 21 people and 117 people wounded" in the assault that began on Friday evening and lasted over a day, Adan said.

On Sunday morning, the area surrounding the hotel was under



Somali Police Commissioner General Abdi Hassan Hajar

tight security, with the roads blocked as emergency workers and bomb disposal experts sought to clear any explosives and remove rubble.

The hotel sustained heavy damage during the gunfight between Somali forces and the insurgents.

Parts of the building collapsed, leaving many people frantically searching for their loved ones who were inside when the attack began.

Police commissioner Abdi Hassan Mohamed Hajar told reporters on Sunday that "106 people including children and women" were rescued during the siege which ended around midnight.

— Reuters/AFP

ICC chief prosecutor arrives in Sudan

KHARTOUM: The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan has arrived in Sudan, state media reported in the country still wracked by unrest since the 2019 ouster of its leader.

"The ICC prosecutor and a court delegation will hold a number of meetings with senior officials and he will be visiting the Darfur region," the state news agency SUNA said on Saturday.

Khan's visit will continue until August 25, SUNA said, a year after he visited the country for talks on outstanding arrest warrants over crimes committed during the 2003 Darfur war.

Khan's predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, held talks in Sudan in May 2021, bringing the strife-hit country's former leaders one step closer to being tried at The Hague for war crimes. —AFP

Floods, landslides kill dozens as heavy monsoon lashes India

LUCKNOW/HUBANESHWAR: Floods and landslides triggered by intense monsoon rains killed at least 50 people in northern and eastern India over the last three days, officials said on Sunday.

The rains overwhelmed hundreds of villages, sweeping away houses and leaving residents stranded as rescue crews have been racing to evacuate survivors.

Earlier this month the federal weather office had predicted that India was likely to receive an average amount of rain in August and September, pointing to overall good crop yields in Asia's third-biggest economy that relies on farming to boost growth and generate jobs.

Farming contributes around 15 per cent to India's \$2.7 trillion economy while sustaining more than half the population of 1.3 billion.

Heavy showers followed by landslides and flooding in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh over the past three days killed at least 36 people, a state



A general view of a flooded bridge following heavy rains in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. — Reuters

government official said. In the neighbouring mountainous state of Uttarakhand, an official government release said that four were dead and 13 were missing due to continuous rainfall.

"We have deployed choppers to rescue people who are stuck in remote areas due to rain related

incidents. The rescue operation is happening on full swing," said Ranjit Kumar Sinha, an official in Uttarakhand's disaster management department.

In the eastern state of Odisha, at least six people were dead amid ongoing torrential rains, a state official said. Floods have

affected nearly 800,000 people and displaced thousands from their homes in Odisha, with rains disrupting electricity and water supply, and damaging road infrastructure.

The state has evacuated 120,000 people so far from the affected areas. —Reuters



Iraqi rescue workers search for survivors trapped under the rubble of the Qattarat al Imam Ali shrine following a landslide, on the outskirts of Karbala. — AFP

Iraq keeps up search from collapsed shrine

KARBALA: Iraqi rescue workers on Sunday were desperately searching for survivors trapped under rubble after a landslide hit a shrine, killing at least four people. "We have found four bodies, including of a woman" at the site near Karbala, central Iraq, civil defence official Abdelrahman Jawdat said.

Between six and eight pilgrims had been reported trapped under the debris of the shrine, known as Qattarat al Imam Ali, civil defence spokesman Nawas Sabah Shaker had said earlier.

Three children have been rescued following Saturday's disaster, emergency services

said, adding that they were in "good condition" and being monitored in a hospital. Rescue teams working through the night were able to provide supplies of oxygen, as well as food and water to some of those trapped through gaps in the rubble, state news agency INA said.

Iraqi President Barham Saleh on Twitter called on the "heroic" rescue workers to "mobilise all efforts to save the trapped people".

The emergency responders said earlier they were maintaining verbal contact with the victims "to reassure them".

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

KABUL

Flash floods kill 20 in eastern Afghan province

Heavy rains triggered flash floods in the eastern Afghan province of Logar, killing at least 20 people and destroying more than 3,000 homes, officials said. The rains lashed several areas of the province on Saturday, injuring more than 30 people in addition to those killed, the provincial governor's office said.

The floods also destroyed dozens of canals and about 5,000 acres of agricultural land, mainly orchards, the statement said, with about 2,000 livestock also killed.



Scores of Afghans die every year from floods and torrential downpours, particularly in impoverished rural areas where poorly built homes are often at risk of collapse. —AFP

TOKYO

Japan PM is Covid positive, cancels African trip

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has tested positive for Covid-19, forcing him to cancel a planned trip to Tunisia to attend a key conference on African development, a person close to him said.

Kishida, who has just returned from a week-long vacation, will work from his residence and will join the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) online, the source said, asking not to be identified.



The prime minister developed a cough and fever on Saturday and took a PCR test on Sunday morning, which confirmed the positive result in the afternoon.

— Reuters

ISTANBUL

34 dead in two Turkey road accidents

At least 34 people were killed and dozens injured in two separate road accidents on Saturday, each in places where collisions had taken place shortly before.

A first crash involving a bus and an ambulance killed 15 people and injured 31 more on a motorway in Gaziantep province, said local officials, revising an earlier toll of 16.

Governor Davut Gul said earlier the accident had involved "a bus, an emergency team and an ambulance" on the route



between Gaziantep and Nizip.

The DHA news agency said a passenger bus had crashed into an ambulance, a truck and a vehicle carrying journalists at the site of a previous crash. — AFP



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MONDAY | AUGUST 22 | 2022

7

In brief

■ MOSCOW



CAR BOMB KILLS DAUGHTER OF KREMLIN IDEOLOGUE

The daughter of Alexander Dugin, a hardline Russian ideologue close to President Vladimir Putin, has been killed in a car bombing on Moscow's outskirts, authorities said. According to family members quoted by Russian media, Dugin — a vocal supporter of Kremlin's offensive in Ukraine — was the likely target of the blast as his daughter borrowed his car at the last minute.

Daria Dugina was killed when a bomb placed in the Toyota Land Cruiser went off as she drove on a highway near the village of Bolshie Vyzomy, some 40 kilometres outside Moscow, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement. — AFP

■ VOLGA



15 DEAD IN RUSSIA CRASH BETWEEN MINIBUS, LORRIES

Fifteen people were killed on Sunday when a minibus collided with two trucks in Russia's southern Ulyanovsk region, news agencies reported. According to witnesses, a truck veered off the road when it collided with a minibus travelling in the opposite direction near the village of Nikolayevka. At the time of the accident, the minibus was also hit from behind by another truck. According to footage broadcast by Russian television channel Ren TV, the minibus was almost completely flattened by the two trucks. The accident left 15 dead, all Kazakh citizens, rescue services quoted by the RIA Novosti said. — AFP

■ LONDON



BRITISH DOCK WORKERS LATEST TO JOIN STRIKES

Workers at Britain's biggest container port, Felixstowe, began an eight-day strike over pay, in the latest industrial action as decades-high inflation intensifies the country's cost-of-living crisis. Nearly 2,000 unionised employees at the port in eastern England, including crane drivers, machine operators and stevedores, started their walkout Sunday morning in the first strike at Felixstowe since 1989. It comes amid stoppages over pay and working conditions across various UK industries, with railway workers just the latest to strike on Thursday and Saturday this week. —AFP

Palestinians strike over demand for bank accounts

TULKARM, West Bank: Tens of thousands of Palestinians employed in Israel staged a one-day strike on Sunday in protest at a decision to pay their salaries into bank accounts rather than in cash.

The new payment method was agreed between Palestinian and Israeli authorities looking for a more efficient and secure way to pay salaries, but workers fear that hidden fees and new taxes will cut into their wages.

About 200,000 Palestinians cross each day into Israel or Jewish settlements for work, earning on average more than twice as much as those employed by Palestinian state bodies and businesses.

Most of the workers do not have bank accounts and putting their salaries on the books would create a new revenue source for the financially-strapped Palestinian Authority (PA), while bringing a windfall in service fees for Palestinian banks.

Under the arrangement, salaries will be paid weekly with bank fees set at \$1 per transfer, according to a number of workers who spoke to Reuters.

Palestinian Labour Minister Nasri Abu Jeish said the new arrangement was meant to protect workers' rights and that there was no plan to impose new

taxes. No immediate comment was available from COGAT, Israel's military liaison to the Palestinians.

The PA, which has limited autonomy in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, is responsible for roughly 150,000 public sector jobs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its budget was \$330 million for 2021 and it relies heavily on foreign donors.

Mohammad Khaseeb, 43, who works at an aluminium factory in Israel, said he and thousands of others were protesting at a decision which he said was reached without taking workers' views into account.

"They decided without consulting the workers' union. Either a worker agrees or he loses his work permit," Khaseeb said.

Bassim Al Waheidi, a 55-year-old construction worker, said that beyond losing money to bank fees and taxes, there was concern about other deductions being made.

"We reject having our salaries transferred to Palestinian Authority banks because we are afraid of the future and there is a crisis of trust," Waheidi said.

Workers' representatives said if the decision was not cancelled they would escalate their protest and might declare an open-ended strike. — Reuters



Palestinian workers in Israel strike against Israel and Palestinian Authority's recent agreement to have their wages transferred to bank accounts, at an Israeli checkpoint in Tulkarm. — Reuters



A man looks at destroyed Russian military equipment at Khreshchatyk street in Kyiv. — AFP

Russian missiles strike Ukraine's Odesa region

ODESA: Artillery shells rained down on a city close to Europe's biggest nuclear plant overnight and Russian missiles hit targets near Odesa, a Ukrainian Black Sea port and a grain export hub, as the war headed for its six-month milestone on Wednesday.

August 24 will also mark 31 years of Ukraine's independence from Soviet rule and President Volodymyr Zelensky in a nightly video address called for vigilance, saying Moscow could try "something particularly ugly".

Russian authorities said on Sunday they were investigating a suspected car bomb attack outside Moscow which killed the daughter of Alexander Dugin, an ultra-nationalist Russian ideologue who advocates Russia absorbing Ukraine.

While the investigators said they were considering "all versions" when it came to working out who was responsible, the Russian Foreign Ministry speculated there could be a link to Ukraine, something Zelensky's adviser quickly dismissed.

"Ukraine, of course, had nothing to do with this because we are not a criminal state, like the Russian Federation, and moreover we are not a terrorist state," Mykhailo Podolyak said on Ukrainian television, suggesting the incident was a "Karmic" payback for supporters of Moscow's attack.

As Ukraine prepared to mark

Ukraine says Russia could do something 'particularly ugly', as Ukraine independence day marks six months since war began

its Independence Day embroiled in a war that has flattened towns and cities, killed thousands and forced millions to flee, military and regional officials reported more Russian strikes on targets in the east and south of the country.

Of particular concern was the shelling of Nikopol, a city which lies across the Dnipro river from Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine's and Europe's biggest nuclear plant. It has been held by Russian forces since March.

Nikopol was shelled on five different occasions overnight, regional governor Valentyn Reznichenko wrote on Telegram. He said 25 artillery shells hit the city, causing a fire at an industrial premises and cutting power to 3,000 residents.

The fighting in the proximity of Zaporizhzhia and Saturday's missile strike on the southern Ukrainian town of Voznesensk, which is not far from Ukraine's second-largest atomic plant, has spurred fears of a nuclear accident.

Local authorities also reported overnight missile attacks in the Odesa region, home to Black

Sea ports critical to a UN-brokered plan to help Ukrainian agricultural exports, key for global food supplies, reach world markets again.

Five Russian Kalibr cruise missiles were fired from the Black Sea at the region overnight, the regional administration spokesperson said, citing information from the southern military command.

Two were shot down by Ukrainian air defences while three hit agricultural targets, but there were no casualties.

Russia said on Sunday the missiles had destroyed an ammunition depot containing missiles for US-made HIMARS rockets, while Kyiv said a granary had been hit. There were no fresh reports of incidents in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, after a series of explosions made headlines in recent weeks.

In his speech, Zelensky referred obliquely to the blasts, for which Ukraine has not claimed responsibility, but analysts have said at least some have been made possible by new equipment used by its forces.

In the latest incident, a drone attack on the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea fleet was thwarted on Saturday morning, according to a Telegram post by Mikhail Razvozhayev, Crimea's Russian-appointed governor, who is not recognised by the West. — Reuters

N Zealand faces 'big task' in recovering from floods

WELLINGTON: New Zealand retained a state of emergency in parts of its flood-battered South Island on Sunday as authorities weighed damage in the region hardest hit by four days of torrential rain.

Last week's rains in northern and central areas forced more than 500 people from their homes, making some uninhabitable.

The South Island city of Nelson has been worst affected, but towns in the North Island have also been cut off by floods that swamped roads and homes.

Authorities in the region around Nelson said there had been no serious weather incidents or evacuations overnight, however.

"We are working as quickly as we can to get people home safely," emergency management officials said adding that while they had looked at about half the affected

The South Island city of Nelson has been worst affected, but towns in the North Island have also been cut off by floods that swamped roads and homes

properties, detailed inspections could need days, depending on the weather. "We have a big task, and inspecting for land instability is more complex than for flooding."

While the extreme weather has eased, warnings against heavy rain stay in western Tasman and Fiordland on the South Island, forecaster Metservice said. A state of emergency continues in the regions of Marlborough, West Coast and Nelson-Tasman, national emergency officials have



Water is seen on the sidewalks after the Maitai river burst in Nelson as the city experienced flash floods caused by a storm. — AFP

said.

"Listen to local authorities and follow any instructions to evacuate," the agency said on its

website. "If you feel unsafe, you should self-evacuate."

On Saturday, Kieran McNulty, the emergency

management minister, thanked rescuers but added that recovery would be a "long and difficult" process. — Reuters

Creating magical moments of togetherness



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician health and wellness advisor

In today’s hustled life, each one of us longs for serene tranquillity. Salalah in Dhofar Governorate is the right location where nature is generous enough to enthrall everyone with its resplendent reserves of beauty.

Over and above that is the warm and benevolent culture of Dhofaris which is an influential and impressive add-on that is worth cherishing even after one has left Salalah.

Be it at the wadis or at the beaches they are always there to offer and share their tea or scrumptious meals, an example of next-level hospitality; something which has lost its meaning in an otherwise ruthless world.

But are we doing our part fair enough not to cause any disturbance in the lives of locals out there?

Salalah in Dhofar hosts a copious number of tourists during the khareef season but with tourism come manifold responsibilities on the administration in the wake of numerous visitors and their needs.

The stuffed cars on the roads, the beaches, and wadis spurting with a plethora of people demand a fine sense of vigilance from the authorities which they do applaudingly well. From litter pickers to rescue workers, no one is leaving any stone unturned to make your stay a pleasant one. As

LET’S BE NOT HARSH ON LITTER PICKERS AND RESCUE WORKERS. BE CAUTIOUS NOT TO GO BEYOND SAFETY SIGNS ENDANGERING YOUR LIFE AS WELL AS OF OTHERS. WHILE CLICKING SELFIES OR MAKING REELS ALWAYS PUT FORTH YOUR SAFETY

as a visitor, it is on our part too not to cause unnecessary trouble for the locals as well as for the authorities who are already overwhelmed with

added responsibilities.

When outdoors make sure we are not littering now and then as littering is the chief aftermath that locals have to deal with once the khareef is over. Yes, we have litter pickers but let’s not make their job into a tedious one that they go awry picking every peck of litter from one end of the Ginormous Mountain to another.

No one opts for such a job out of choice but out of sheer necessity to run a household back home. Let’s be not harsh on them. The same goes on for rescue workers. Be cautious not to go beyond safety signs endangering your life as well as of others. While clicking selfies

or making reels always put forth your safety.

When the rest of the world is facing environmental crisis and global warming issues; Dhofar offers a place of respite to take off your weariness and rekindle the lost vibe, it is incumbent on us too to keep the region spick-and-span. As hospitality is a vital pillar of Dhofar culture, we should also be that guests who don’t trouble the host with our negligent behaviour.

It’s up to us to be that guest who leaves the host’s space into a mess which is a daunting task to take care of later. Or the one who is longed and awaited to create the magical moments of togetherness?

Fear for future after mass die off of fish in Poland’s Oder river

AGNIESZKA PIKULICKA-WILCZEWSKA AND KUBA STEZYCKI

As thousands of dead fish neared the banks of the Oder River in the village of Widuchowa in western Poland on August 11, local people realised an ecological disaster that started in late July in the country’s south-west was heading towards the Baltic Sea.

As Widuchowa’s residents searched for tools to remove the lifeless bodies from the the river, the government began crisis response that many scientists say came too late.

“It’s been the hardest five days of my life,” said Pawel Wrobel, the mayor of Widuchowa, which is around 400 kilometres from the town where dead fish had first been spotted. “I’d never imagined experiencing such a catastrophe, it is something you see in disaster movies.”

With the help of the local community, he gathered dozens of pitchforks, used to lift potatoes, to remove dead fish from the river, which marks part of the Polish-German border.

“We don’t know how to do it and what tools to use, we learn from our mistakes,” Wrobel said.

On August 12, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki fired the head of Poland’s national water management authority and the head of the general environmental inspectorate, saying that their institutions should have reacted earlier.

Despite numerous tests of fish and water samples conducted by Polish and foreign laboratories, and a 1-million-zloty (\$211,775) reward for information on the source of contamination, it is still unclear what poisoned the Oder, Poland’s second largest river.

“We are focused on, on the one hand, stopping what is happening, and on the other hand, finding the reason for this situation,” said climate ministry spokesman Aleksander Brzozka.

Researchers in Germany and Poland’s climate ministry have pointed to a large overgrowth of toxic algae as a possible cause for the mass die-off.

“The most likely hypothesis is that it was a combination of various natural factors,” said Brzozka.

Local people said that firefighters and territorial defence forces deployed by the government to remove tonnes of dead fish were not prepared for what awaited them in the river.

The stench around the waters was so bad that most of them vomited during their work, according to residents of the village.

Local businesses have also been hit.

When Piotr Bugaj, a passionate angler and owner of boats, a slip and rooms to rent on the Oder heard what was coming, he knew that it was time to put his business on hold.

—Reuters

What Joe Biden has — and hasn’t — accomplished as president



Paul Krugman

The writer is an opinion columnist with NYT

There’s something strange in the DC air these days. It smells a bit like... competence.

Seriously, it has been amazing to watch the media narrative on the Biden administration change. Just a few weeks ago President Joe Biden was portrayed as hapless, on the edge of presiding over a failed presidency. Then came the Inflation Reduction Act, a big employment report and some good news on inflation, and suddenly we’re hearing a lot about his accomplishments.

But I still don’t think the media narrative gets it quite right. Biden has indeed accomplished a lot — in some ways more than he’s getting credit for, even now.

On the other hand, America is a huge nation with a huge economy, and his policies don’t look as impressive when you compare them with the scale of the nation’s problems.

Furthermore, at this point Biden is arguably benefiting from the soft bigotry of low expectations.

His policy achievements are big by modern standards, but they wouldn’t have seemed astounding in an earlier era — the era before the radicalisation of the Republican Party made it almost impossible to pursue real solutions to real problems.

So, what has Biden accomplished?

As I see it, he came into office with three main domestic policy goals: investing in America’s fraying infrastructure, taking serious action against climate change and expanding the social safety net, especially for families with children. He got most of

BIDEN IS ARGUABLY BENEFITTING FROM THE SOFT BIGOTRY OF LOW EXPECTATIONS. HIS POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS ARE BIG BY MODERN STANDARDS, BUT THEY WOULDN’T HAVE SEEMED ASTOUNDING IN AN EARLIER ERA

two and a bit of the third.

Last year’s infrastructure bill gets remarkably little media attention; only about one-quarter of voters even know that it passed.

But we should remember that Barack Obama wanted to invest in infrastructure but couldn’t; Donald Trump promised to do it but didn’t; then Biden got it done.

By contrast, the Inflation Reduction Act, which is mainly a climate law, has received a lot of attention, and deservedly so.

America is finally taking action against the biggest existential threat of our times.

Energy experts believe that it will have large direct effects in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

These are significant achievements, and a big contrast with the last administration, whose only major

domestic policy change was a tax cut that had almost no visible positive effects.

But when I see news reports describe these laws as “massive” or huge, I wonder whether the writers have done the math.

The infrastructure law will add roughly \$500 billion in spending over the next decade.

The Inflation Reduction Act will increase spending by roughly an additional half trillion. A law to promote US semiconductor production will add around \$50 billion more.

Overall, then, we’re talking about a bit more than \$1 trillion in public investment over 10 years.

To put this in perspective, the Congressional Budget Office expects cumulative gross domestic product to be more than \$300 trillion over the next decade.

So the Biden agenda will amount to around one-third of 1 per cent of GDP. Massive it isn’t.

True, some of what Biden has done may have effects much bigger than the dollar sums might suggest.

There are reasons to hope that the climate law will have a sort of catalytic effect in promoting a transition to clean energy.

And some economists believe that boosting the budget of the resource-starved IRS will greatly reduce tax evasion and hence increase revenue.

And can we say a word about foreign policy? Biden got immense flak over the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan, although the critics offered few suggestions about what he should have done differently.

But the narrative on foreign affairs has changed, too; I’m no expert, but it looks to me as if the Biden administration has done a remarkable job assembling and holding together a coalition to help Ukraine resist Russian aggression.

OK, I can already hear people yelling in response to any citation of Biden’s achievements, what about inflation? Indeed, the Biden administration failed to appreciate the risks of an inflation surge.

However, so did many others, including the Federal Reserve (and yours truly). — *The New York Times*



A state trooper keeps watch as US President Joe Biden arrives aboard Marine One for his vacation in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.—Reuters

Fruitful gambling on ideas!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

During the holiday season, families are struggling with every possibility to beat the heat and enjoy summer! It is time for people to have a long refreshing break with family. All have been impatiently awaiting for the summer break to have a break in between the year-end and new school year. Such a break would always be needed to refresh memories, recharge power your body and stimulate interests.

Though summer holidays are winding up, few weeks ahead some are still planning to enjoy till last minute. As summer is always associated with tourism and travelling, people's holiday plans differ based on their interests to enjoy their time. Spending time and having good moments with family, friends and loved ones depends on the place, its attractions and facilities too. Hence, heading to a place with no sightseeing or any enjoyable facilities is simply a waste of time indeed.

Blessing any tourist landmark is all what makes it a destination or an abandoned place. That is what people, adults and others alike, are looking for when trying to enjoy their holiday. In other words, it is all about finding what really entertains people and attracts their interests. However, many local

tourist places are lacking fun and enjoyment and what they need to give to tourists and visitors. For that reason, why families would spend their money and time on such sights?! Except the natural sightseeing and historical landmarks, there is nothing else that can attract people's interest and kid's enjoyment. Likewise, some of those attractions, wherever they are, are not well maintained and equipped to fascinate or even welcome tourists and visitors. Hence, there should be a reform in the overall tourism sectors and they should think for

out of the box concepts. Accordingly, both individuals and families tend to spend their holidays overseas! Although the expenses are a burden on families, but travelling in summer is becoming a priority that shouldn't be missed by them. They prefer to be out of country exploring cultures and nature of other nations as well as meeting other people. Such an out-of-country experience could be more enjoyable, fruitful investment and serves a reviving break for all.

There is no wonder why people spend their time and money overseas and not in the country instead! Basically, the local tourist places are not matching their interests, perhaps neither serving the demand for entertainment nor the needed staycation facilities. To them, domestic tourism is not serving the purpose, not attractive enough to spend time here.

What requires is to make these places wonderful tourist destinations is a little bit of thinking out of the box. Sometimes only simple ideas could change a place and turn it into a tourist hub not only for locals, but others from outside the country too.

A recent case in a point is Salalah, which is regarded a worldwide tourist destination for hundreds of thousands of people. Other than the greenery and refreshing weather, usually there is nothing to entertain people there.

However, what people have observed this year with the different entertainment activities, especially in Darbat area could be the start for a better experience next year. Out of public observation, all that was a fruitful outcome of simple ideas delivered by Omani youth. The recreation activities and staycation options of tent houses, for instance, have undoubtedly made a difference to visitors' experience.

More creative and attractive ideas could make an impact on tourism if youth are given the chance to gamble on their ideas. Such an experience is a testimony for the capabilities of Omanis to bring remarkable tourist attractions. Rather, it is an opportunity to play their role and support the government to boost domestic tourism. All they look for is confidence and an opportunity to invest in the sector and turn their ideas into reality.



RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

Palestinian youth practice parkour amid the rubble of buildings destroyed by Israeli airstrikes in the latest round of fighting between Israel and Palestinians, in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on Sunday. — AFP

As Iraqi protesters rally, deadlock leaves families without cash

AMINA ISMAIL

Sabreen Khalil lost her husband to Covid last year, leaving her to raise seven children alone, but Iraqi government funding to help her and hundreds of thousands of families in poverty is blocked by political stalemate.

With politicians deadlocked over forming a new government since an election in October, rival factions in Baghdad continued their weeks-long protests which have prevented parliament from meeting. The standoff has raised fears of renewed unrest in a country where militias wield significant power and is already taking a toll on the most vulnerable.

"I am a woman and all of a sudden I had to take the responsibility of seven children alone...it broke my back," Khalil said, speaking of the impact of her husband's death.

Sitting on the floor in her one-bedroom brick house in the village of Saada on the outskirts of Baghdad, she said she cannot afford treatment for her chronic illness and that her children have to skip some meals as food prices soar.

Nine months after applying for a government pension, she has received nothing from the ministry of labour and social affairs. "Every time we go they tell us 'We are waiting for a budget,'" she said.

An official at the ministry said Khalil qualifies for support but confirmed there is no funding to provide it. "Our hands are tied because there is no budget," the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said.

Her family is one of about 370,000 families who qualify for the pension but are not receiving it because of the political deadlock, the official said.

Iraq's 10-month standoff since the election is the longest stretch without a fully functioning government in the

WITH POLITICIANS DEADLOCKED OVER FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT SINCE AN ELECTION IN OCTOBER, RIVAL FACTIONS IN BAGHDAD CONTINUED THEIR WEEKS-LONG PROTESTS WHICH HAVE PREVENTED PARLIAMENT FROM MEETING

nearly two decades since Saddam Hussein was removed in a US-led invasion in 2003.

Rival groups want to see a new government formed, but disagree on the steps to achieve it.

Supporters of the powerful cleric Moqtada al Sadr, who fought US occupation forces before emerging as the main opponent of militias and their political leaders, has demanded fresh elections.

Sadr was the biggest winner of last year's election but was unable to form a government along with Kurdish and Arab parties, excluding his rivals. Those rivals, known collectively as the Coordination Framework, say an election can only take place after a government is formed to lead a transition period during which legislation including a new election law should be passed.

"There is consensus over dissolving parliament and holding early elections, the issue is with the mechanism," a source in the caretaker government said, adding that talks were ongoing.

Last Wednesday, caretaker Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhim met political leaders and called on Sadr's supporters to join a national dialogue. He also called on all sides to suspend any political

escalation. Sadr did not attend the meeting, and his supporters have shown little public enthusiasm for the initiative.

"These dialogues do not serve the interest of the country... They serve your interests and your parties' interests and to keep you in power," an imam told hundreds of Sadr's followers who gathered to protest outside parliament on Friday. Some carried portraits of Sadr and his late father, also a prominent cleric, as well as Iraqi flags.

Dozens of supporters of the Coordination Framework also protested outside the heavily protected Green Zone.

Hamdi Malik, an associate fellow at the Washington Institute and a specialist on militias, said that despite some efforts to bridge the differences there appeared to be little prospect of swift results.

"The division is so wide that I can't see any solution and the possibility of clashes is actually increasing," Malik said.

Parliament did pass an emergency bill in June allocating billions of dollars to buy wheat, rice and gas and to pay salaries, but other government business has stalled.

A prominent Iraqi rights activist said the political factions were all responsible for the deadlock and ordinary Iraqis were paying the price.

"Anger is rising up among the people. Economic conditions have worsened and unemployment is on the rise," said Hanaa Edwar. Leaders are "holding dialogues to redistribute the spoils amongst politicians", she said.

Khalil meanwhile is still waiting in Saada, which means "happiness" in Arabic, for the government to come to her aid. She said the political process was not working. "They say it's wrong if we don't vote," she said. "But elections didn't change anything" — Reuters



Supporters of the Coordination Framework, a group of parties, gather during a sit-in, amid a political crisis, near the Green Zone, in Baghdad, Iraq. — Reuters

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SEEB OVERWHELM AL BASHAYER

D H O F A R A N D A L N A H D A S H A R E P O I N T S I N O P E N E R

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

Defending champions Seeb began their campaign at the 2022-23 Omantel League strongly as they edged newcomers Al Bashayer 3-0 in the opening round. Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Ksmoos Dawoda and Marwan al Siyabi scored for Seeb to deliver the first winning points for their team.

The triumph kept the Super Cup champions on the top of the league table order. Seeb will meet Al Musannah in the second round on Thursday.

At Sur Sports Complex, hosts Sur registered the first surprise in the top-flight league after beating Al Musannah 1-0 earlier on Thursday. Khalid al Alawi's goal in the 28th minute ensured Sur's victory in the fixture. Al Suwaiq

made a positive start as they edged past Al Oruba 2-1 on Thursday in the same venue.

Eleven-time champions Dhofar shared one point as they were held to a goalless draw by current runners-up Al Nahda at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The top clash of the first week did not register any goals from both teams. The Al Buraimi representatives will face Oman club while Dhofar will host

Sur in the next week's matches.

On Friday, Al Rustaq recorded an essential 2-0 win over hosts Bahla at Nizwa Sports Complex to snatch the first three winning points. Al Ettihad's Ahmed Mustahil's goal in the second half assisted to force a 1-1 draw with Oman club at the former's home in Al Saada Sports Complex on Saturday. Sohar's Ali al Hashmi scored the winner against Al Nasr

to deliver a crucial three points for his team in the opener on Saturday at Sohar Sports Complex.

Five wins and two draws were the outcome of the opening round in Omantel league.

The round featured scoring 11 goals with an average of 1.5 goals in each match. This rate of the goals indicate more tough matches in the forthcoming rounds. Head coach of the national football

team, Branko Ivankovic, and his coaching staff were keen to attend different matches in the first week of Omantel league. The Croatian coach ensured on following up the technical level of players and their physical readiness for the new season. It is expected the national team will have an internal camp soon and the squad will be announced during the coming few weeks.

Taekwondo team all set for Asian Championship in Vietnam

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

Oman national taekwondo team will take part in the Asian Junior and Youth Championships, which will be held in Vietnam from Monday until August 29. As many as 350 players representing 35 countries will attend this major Asian taekwondo event and the championship is considered as one of the strongest tournaments at the international level. The even acts as golden opportunity for the national players to gain the more ranking points to qualify for the Youth Olympic Games.



During the last period, the players of the Oman team were under preparation programme through some local and external camps.

Oman team will be led by national head coach Adil bin Khalifa al Wahaibi, in the junior category, Al Muhannad bin

Tawfiq al Balushi will participate in the 41kg weight category, while Al Mutasim bin Ali al Maskari will participate in the 49kg weight category. In the youth category Hafez bin Salem al Maskari will join in the 49kg weight category, Omar bin Mahmoud al Sinani in the 59kg weight category, and Mohammed bin Rashid al Hajri will compete in the 63kg weight category.

The domestic taekwondo players will eye on registering top show in the Asian tourney and claim more medals to raise the national flag high in this tournament.



OOC Board of Directors to discuss progress of sub-committees

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will hold the 3rd meeting this year on "Tuesday" at OOC headquarters.

The meeting will be chaired by Khalid bin Mohammad al Zubair, OOC Chairman, where many topics will be addressed, foremost of which is the discussion of the draft basic axes of OOC for the

next phase. Also, the meeting will review minutes of the meetings of sub-committees represented by High Level Sports and Olympic Planning Committee, Oman Sports and Active Society Committee and Oman Sports Medicine and Anti-Doping Committee, in addition to many topics included in Other Business Item.



Modric pulls the strings as Real Madrid breeze past Celta Vigo

VIGO, Spain: Champions Real Madrid got their second consecutive win of the new LaLiga season with a comfortable 4-1 victory at Celta Vigo on Saturday.

Croatia midfielder Luka Modric, 36, showed his everlasting value on the pitch by scoring a brilliant goal and assisting Vinicius for another.

Karim Benzema opened the scoring from the spot in the 14th minute after the VAR spotted a handball inside the box but Celta equalised nine minutes later with a penalty of their own from Iago Aspas, after another handball.

Celta looked to be in control, however, in the 41st minute Luka Modric worked his magic by

curling a shot from just outside the box into the upper left corner.

After the break, Modric teed up Vinicius to score the third in a lightning fast counter-attack in the 56th minute.

After shining in Real's come from behind win at Almeria last week, Vinicius had another brilliant performance as he was a constant threat to Celta's defence with his speed and talent.

Ten minutes after scoring the third, he created another clinical counter-attack that Federico Valverde finished to wrap up the points for Real.

Modric was substituted eleven minutes later and received a

standing ovation by Celta's fans, who applauded the 2018 Ballon D'Or winner.

"It's beautiful when your rival's fans acknowledge the work that you put in," Modric told DAZN.

"It's special, I'm touched and have no words to thank their gesture.

"We played a great game, mainly starting from the end of the first half. It's great to start the season with two wins and playing well."

Modric played alongside youngsters Aurelien Tchouameni and Eduardo Camavinga in what was Real's first game without Casemiro, who joined Manchester United on Friday.

The French duo were solid as they alternated in the defensive midfielder role, but they also added an extra gear and quality that Carlo Ancelotti's team didn't seem to have with the Brazilian.

"Casemiro made history at the club and we will miss him, but now we need to move on and we all have to put an extra effort trying to replace him in what was his role. I think we have what it takes," Modric said.

Substitute Eden Hazard had a chance to score with another penalty kick, given for a foul on Benzema, but goalkeeper Agustin Marchesin saved the Belgium forward's effort. — Reuters

Struggling Crawley likely to retain place after McCullum backing

LONDON: England are likely to persist with opener Zak Crawley in the second test against South Africa after coach Brendon McCullum threw his weight behind the struggling opener.

Crawley managed scores of nine and 13 in the series opener at Lord's, in which South Africa triumphed inside three days by an innings and 12 runs.

The 24-year-old, who averages 26 after 26 tests, is now without a half-century in his last 14 innings, which has prompted calls for him to be dropped.

McCullum dismissed suggestions that the Kent batsman could benefit from a break.

"That's not how I think," McCullum, whose coaching philosophy, dubbed 'Bazball', includes steadfast backing of the players, was quoted as saying by the BBC.

"We want to keep giving guys opportunities, then their skill and talent can come out.

"We have to be really positive around the language we use with him and be really consistent with the selections around that, to keep giving guys opportunities."

Despite the deflating loss at Lord's, England's first under McCullum, the coach said "selection loyalty" was crucial for him.

"Not only does it build loyalty from guys in the side, it also builds loyalty from guys on the outside, because they know when their opportunity does come they will be afforded the same loyalty."

Crawley smashed a career-best 267 against Pakistan at Southampton in 2020 but has yet to cross 50 since his century against West Indies in March this year.

McCullum put Crawley's match-winning ability over consistency to justify his faith in the batsman.

"We have some players that have been put in those positions because they have certain skillsets," said the former New Zealand captain.

"I look at a guy like Zak and his skillset is not to be a consistent cricketer.

"He's not that type of player. He's put in that situation because he has a game which, when he gets going, he can win matches for England."

The second test in Manchester begins on Thursday. — Reuters



Tanak leads in Belgium after Neuville crashes



BRUSSELS: Estonian Ott Tanak inherited the lead of Ypres Rally Belgium on Saturday after Hyundai team mate Thierry Neuville crashed out of his home event.

Tanak, winner in Finland earlier this month, led Toyota's Elfyn Evans by 8.2 seconds going into Sunday's final four stages with the Welshman's team mate Esapekka Lappi in third place, a minute and nine seconds off the pace.

"Tomorrow will be far from easy. I think it will be a big push in the morning," said Tanak.

Toyota's world championship leader Kalle Rovanpera is out of contention for victory after crashing on Friday but he returned on Saturday after repairs to the car and can still pick up points in Sunday's final Power stage.

Neuville pitched into a ditch on the penultimate stage of the day but will also return on Sunday in the hope of salvaging bonus points.

"I came to a slow left-hand corner (in stage 15), on quite slippery Tarmac, and it was full of dirt from the cars in front," said the Belgian.

"There was nothing in our pace notes and we weren't aware it could be that tricky.

"We were just caught by surprise. Nothing we could do, I just understeered into a ditch. The car didn't have much damage but unfortunately, we couldn't make it to the end and had to retire there."

A total of 51.34 km of competitive action remains on Sunday.

Rovanpera leads closest rival Tanak by 94 points after eight of 13 rallies. — Reuters

Boost for Big Bash as Warner returns after nine-year absence

SYDNEY: David Warner will play in the Big Bash League (BBL) for the first time in 10 seasons around the new year in a major coup for the Australian competition in an increasingly crowded Twenty20 marketplace.

The 35-year-old Australia opener had been linked to the new International League T20 (ILT20) in the United Arab Emirates which, along with another new competition in South Africa, will go head-to-head with the BBL early next year.

Warner will bring his star power to the Sydney Thunder at the conclusion of the test series against South Africa in early January and could play as many as five matches, the team said in a news release on Sunday.

"I'm really excited to get back to the Big Bash with the club where I started," said Warner, who played one game for the Thunder in each of the first and third seasons of BBL.

"I care deeply about the game, and I am conscious that the conditions that I enjoy as a professional cricketer have largely come from other senior players who have come before me.

"That is how the game is structured and I understand that my contribution to the future of



the BBL will hopefully benefit the next generation of players long after I am retired."

The Thunder said they had not yet appointed a new captain for the season after the departure of Usman Khawaja to the Brisbane Heat.

Although Warner would be a natural choice, he is currently ineligible under the terms of the lifetime ban from leadership positions in Australian cricket imposed on him for his part in the 2018 Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

With Indian Premier League (IPL) millions backing the leagues in the UAE and South Africa, Cricket Australia face far more competition for marquee names than they have in past years.

A number of top players have nominated for the BBL's inaugural draft on Aug. 28, however, including Afghan spinner Rashid Khan and West Indian T20 stalwarts Kieron Pollard and Dwayne Bravo.

The 12th edition of the BBL will run from December 13 to February 4.

— Reuters



SWEDEN’S DUPLANTIS RETAINS EUROPEAN POLE VAULT TITLE

MUNICH, Germany: Sweden’s Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis retained his European pole vault title in comprehensive fashion in Munich on Saturday.

Duplantis, fresh from breaking his own world record in Eugene as he clinched world gold with 6.21 metres last month, set a championship record of 6.06 metres for victory at the Olympic Stadium.

Germany’s Bo Kanda Lita Baehre claimed silver with a best of 5.85m, while Norway’s Pal Haugen Lillefosse took bronze (5.75).

Coming into the continental showpiece, Duplantis was on an 18-competition winning streak and was once again a class apart from a field that struggled throughout in cool, damp conditions.

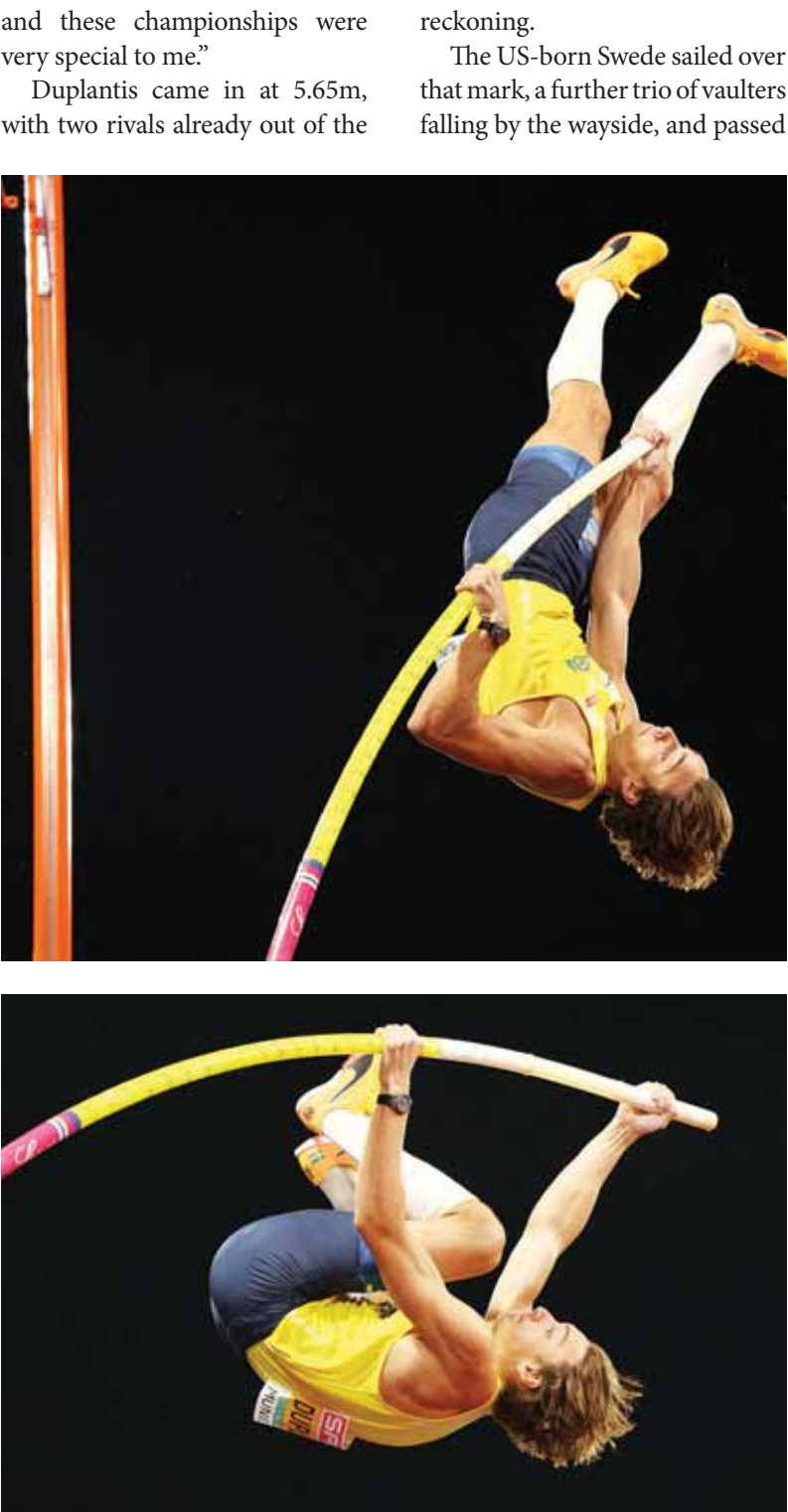
“Honestly, it was a great evening. Considering the situation and circumstances, I cannot complain,” said Duplantis.

“I just focused on winning. Sometimes you have to get over the bar first and then you can celebrate and not before. I take everything step by step and I take whatever comes.

“You need the things to really go your way to have things to work out the way they should.

“Sometimes you can get very unlucky with all kinds of things but I am just glad that everything worked out the way as it did tonight.

“I think this season, I have experienced all kind of situations



and these championships were very special to me.”

Duplantis came in at 5.65m, with two rivals already out of the reckoning.

The US-born Swede sailed over that mark, a further trio of vaulters falling by the wayside, and passed

at 5.75m, as did France’s three-time European champion and former Olympic gold medallist Renaud Lavillenie.

The Frenchman faltered three times at 5.85m, however, while Duplantis flew over at that mark. Similar successes came at 5.90 and 5.95m.

Lita Baehre was by that stage out of the competition, so Duplantis had the bar raised to 6.06m.

The Swede readied himself, launching down the runway and propelling himself well clear to better by 1cm the previous championship best he set when winning gold in Berlin the 2018 championships.

“That was the cherry on the top,” Duplantis said.

Any thoughts of a fresh bid at bettering his own world record were short-lived, however, Duplantis quickly telling officials he’d had enough.

“It didn’t seem like it was really on the cards today. Sometimes it’s like that, it’s not for every day. I feel like I jumped really well, I can’t complain,” he said.

Lita Baehre hailed the presence of Duplantis.

“Having Mondo, the best of all time, in this competition is a blessing because when you beat him you are the best of all time,” the German said.

“He is a blessing and I am thankful for this. I have not yet planned on how I will celebrate. Let us see, it will rather be with wine than with beer.” — AFP

Sam Bennett wins sprint to take Vuelta’s second stage

MADRID: Irishman Sam Bennett won Stage 2 of the 2022 Vuelta a España after edging out his rivals in a closely contested sprint finish in Utrecht on Saturday.

Bora Hansgrohe’s sprint specialist rediscovered his speed of old, bursting ahead of a speeding pack in a ferocious sprint in front of a fired-up crowd to claim the victory after a 175.1 km run between the Dutch towns of ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Utrecht.

Alpecin-Deceuninck’s Tim Merlier had been the favourite for the day, but some tussling in the bunch put him out of position and he could not get on terms with Bennett in the end.

Mads Pedersen from Trek-Segafredo finished between them for second on the stage.

Race leader Robert Gesink (Jumbo-Visma) did not finish in the main peloton, which became chopped up in the final few kilometres, and so the red jersey passes over to his teammate Mike Teunissen, who



placed fourth on the stage.

Competition continues on Sunday for a third and final stage on Dutch soil, a 193.5 km trek that both starts and ends in Breda, before the peloton transfers to Spain on Monday.

The following six stages before the next rest day will be raced in medium or high mountains of northern Spain, in the Basque Country and Asturias. — Reuters

Bagnaia wins Austrian GP, Quartararo storms to second

VIENNA: Ducati’s Francesco Bagnaia produced a solid performance to win the Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday, while world championship leader Fabio Quartararo stormed to second on his Yamaha with a late surge.

It was the third consecutive race win for Bagnaia following his victories at the British GP and the Dutch GP. The Italian finished 0.492 seconds ahead of Quartararo, while Jack Miller completed the podium.

Starting second on the grid, Bagnaia made a lightning start at the Red Bull Ring in Spielberg as he overtook pole sitter Enea Bastianini of Gresini Racing on

the opening lap.

Bastianini dropped further down to fourth on the sixth lap when Bagnaia’s team-mate Miller and Jorge Martin moved up before he was forced to end his race due to a deflating front tyre after running his bike into the gravel.

Martin had looked set for a podium finish but he ran wide at the chicane on the 17th lap, surrendering third spot to Yamaha rider Quartararo.

Quartararo then piled pressure on Miller for second and succeeded with less than three laps to go after pulling off a stunning move in the middle of the chicane. — Reuters







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450 square kms of land in Dhofar under study for green projects

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning is weighing approvals for land covering an estimated 450 million square metres (approx. 450 square kilometres) to be earmarked for renewables and green hydrogen projects in the Governorate of Dhofar.

According to Sultan al Ghafri, Director General of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in Governorate of Dhofar, the process is being facilitated in coordinated with a number of concerned ministries and government agencies.

The entire effort, he noted, is being pursued in a transparent and efficient manner with the goal of attracting, on the one land, local and foreign investment in green energy projects, and on the other,



upgrading housing services and urban planning to meet stipulated benchmarks.

In other developments, the Directorate General has also allocated a large number of plots have for food security projects within the Najd Agricultural Development Area in cooperation with the concerned authorities, he said.

Additionally, around 1,400 citizens who met eligibility conditions were granted the opportunity to select their choice of residential lands in the various wilayats of Dhofar Governorate through the ‘Choose Your Land’ portal of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning during the first half of this year.

Efforts are also ongoing to

provide housing assistance to a number of beneficiaries. A total amount of RO 2.025 million has so far been disbursed under this programme out of an allocation of RO 3 million earmarked for this year.

Besides, the Directorate-General has granted 8 land plots the Ministry’s usufruct system, in addition to 12 plots under the bidding system via the ‘Development’ platform.

Furthermore, the Directorate General has completed the procedures for distributing 250 housing units in the centre of the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna at the end of last year. This is in line with the Ministry’s keenness to support the wilayat’s development, enable sustainable urban development, raising the standard of living of the community and provide decent and suitable housing for citizens.

Oman now exports LNG to 20 countries

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Amid record production, Oman now exports liquefied natural gas (LNG) to around 20 countries globally, having added Greece to its list of importers most recently.

Earlier this week, Reuters reported that Britain has joined the list of countries importing Omani LNG. Britain will receive a rare shipment of Omani liquefied natural gas this month, as European countries seek to secure sufficient supplies of gas before winter. The growing list of destinations for Oman LNG also includes China, Japan, India, South Korea, Philippines, Pakistan, Singapore, US, Sri Lanka, Puerto Rico, Thailand, Bangladesh, UAE and Kuwait among others.

According to the latest statistics of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Oman’s total exports to

countries grew by 16.2 per cent by the end of June 2022. Despite an increase of only 6.3 per cent, China topped the list of Oman’s oil importing countries by the end of June 2022 with 123.10 million barrels. With a massive rise of 334.9 per cent, Japan recorded the highest increase in importing crude oil from Oman. This was followed by the India with a rise of 76.1 per cent, followed by South Korea at 50.6 per cent.

The NCSI statistics also pointed to the increase of average oil price till the end of June by 60.9 per cent at \$90.4 per barrel compared to the same period in 2021. The Sultanate’s daily average production of crude oil rose by 9.7 per cent with 1.047 million barrels by end of June 2022 compared to 954,00 barrels in the same period in 2021. Nevertheless, condensate production fell by 2.1 per cent during this period.

Oman targets completion of Direct Power Sales Framework by year-end

‘Bilaterals’: New legal and regulatory framework seen as key enabler in the growth of a future green hydrogen industry in the country

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 21



THE AUTHORITY PLANS TO UNDERTAKE A CONTINUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT WITH A VIEW TO ENSURING ITS “ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY AND FULFILMENT OF THE REGULATORY AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS”.

Work on a legal and regulatory framework underpinning this new initiative began last year following its green-lighting by the Council of Ministers.

Its actual implementation is envisaged in phases with the Authority planning to undertake a continual assessment of the project with a view to ensuring its “economic feasibility and fulfilment of the regulatory and technical requirements”.

According to the Authority, customers eligible for direct

sales of wholesale electricity are typically large industrial customers.

“In the first phase, the eligible participants include generators with expired PPA (Power Purchase Agreements) and industrial customers with existing captive production. The group of eligible participants may be extended in due course,” the Authority said.

“The Direct Sales Framework has to account for technical aspects – mainly to ensure that physical connections, dispatch implications, metering data, and settlement implications are all catered for. However, there are also complex commercial and economic implications related to the price signals existing power system users and customers eligible for direct sales perceive,” it further explained. **TURN TO P15**



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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the Tendering process for the below:

Particulars	Tender (1)	Tender (2)
Tender Name	E-Concierge	Logistic Services
Tender No.	NTO/T/2022/04	OCEC/T/2022/10
Experience	Experience in App Development	Experience in Logistic Services
Companies Grade	Local / International	SMEs/Local
Tender Document Sale Start Date	22-08-2022	22-08-2022
Tender Document Sale End Date	29-08-2022	29-08-2022
Last date of seeking clarification	05-09-2022	29-08-2022
Tender Closing Date	22-09-2022	05-09-2022
Method of Payment	Beneficiary: Oman Convention and Exhibition Center Bank: Sohar International Branch: Qurum - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 005020045872 Swift Code: BSHROMRU Finance Code: 609109900 Electronic payment receipt must be send to the e-mail : yalrashdi@ocec.om	
Tender Document Collection	Tender documents can be obtained by e-mail after sending the electronic payment receipt during working hours: Sunday – Thursday 8:30am – 3:00pm. Email : yalrashdi@ocec.om Tel.no. 99010829/24233821	
Tender Submission	All bidders must submit their offers with the terms and conditions of the tender by sending their bids to the e-mail: yalrashdi@ocec.om	
Impotent Notes	- OCEC is not bound to award the contract to the lowest bid or any other bidder. - Each Bidder must provide a valid contact details for required tender communication (company name, contact name, telephone and email) - All tender communication will be emailed to this contact person and email address yalrashdi@ocec.om - Tender fee and tender bond NOT required for Bidders holding Riyada card issued by Public Authority for SME Development (Riyada).	



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OETC hosts delegates from China’s State Grid



MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) — a member of Nama group — hosted a Chinese delegation consisted of 13 representatives from the State Grid Corporation of China (SGCC). The visit of the Chinese delegation came in cooperation with the strategic partner SGCC, and the visit programme included field visits to some of the company’s sites, in addition to getting acquainted closely with the company’s departments and the daily work. The visit was for 10 consecutive days and included bilateral meetings between the delegation members and their counterparts concerned in the electricity sector in the Sultanate of Oman. On this visit, Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, Chief Executive Officer in OETC, pointed out the importance of these mutual visits between the

two parties due to their role in promoting and developing technical aspects, transferring international expertise and new strategies, raising employee’s performance and production efficiency, increasing their knowledge of everything new in the field of energy, especially the electricity transmission system, and that the company spares no effort in supporting and implementing comprehensive development plans for the electricity transmission network in the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, Eng Saleh al Rumhi added “We strive to keep abreast of the latest development in the technical arena and develop our systems to keep pace with the current developments, and this cooperation between the company and other international institutions will ensure achieving the company’s vision to be as a World Class Smart Transmission Grid”.

ahlibank completes issuance of RO 75m AT1 capital instruments

MUSCAT: ahlibank has announced the successful issuance of its RO 75 million Additional Tier 1 (AT1) capital instrument, which concluded on a private placement basis, recently. Approved at the Extraordinary General Meeting in July 2022, the successful issuance of 75,000,000 Perpetual AT1 bonds, comprising 50,000,000 bonds, with a Green shoe option of up to 25,000,000 additional bonds, will boost the bank’s capital adequacy and supports its Tier 1 capital ratio. Owing to the strong demand from investors, the bank exercised the green-shoe option of RO 25 million in full. The order book was also very well diversified across high-quality pension funds, sovereign funds, insurance companies, corporates, family offices and high net worth individuals. Expressing gratitude to all the patrons who have partnered with the bank in meeting its set objectives, Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Chief Executive Officer, ahlibank, said, “On behalf of my team, I would like to thank our investors for the trust and confidence they have bestowed on the bank and the issuance of our new bonds. Moving forward, this will enhance and strengthen our



capital adequacy, while meeting other business requirements.” “This successful transaction reflects the faith and confidence that investors have reposed in the bank’s robust credit and business model; and an assurance of the long-term support from our investors. We are also buoyed by the fact that the issue, was oversubscribed, proving to us, yet again, that we at ahlibank are on the right growth trajectory. Our sustainable growth and our market recognition as the fastest growing bank in the country, has been further

bolstered by this successful transaction. As such, would like to thank the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange and Muscat Clearing and Depository for their guidance and support extended to us in the issuance”. On the sidelines of the announcement of successful issuance, ahlibank has reaffirmed its commitment to manage its capital base effectively and judiciously. With favourable market conditions and positive changes in the general social and economic conditions of the

country and the region, ahlibank is poised to lead the way forward for investors and patrons who have, time and again, espoused the bank’s cause. The new AT1 securities are listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange with a fixed coupon of 7.50% per annum and traded on its regulated market. Ahli Investment Banking acted as the sole issue manager for the issuance continuing its reputation as one of the leading investment banks in Oman with Said Al Shahry & Partners acting as the legal advisers for the issue.

Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up with exclusive summer thrills campaign

MUSCAT: Toyota’s powerful and fun Land Cruiser is now available with exclusive benefit with service — 2 years/ 20,000 kms (whichever is earlier). The campaign is valid until September 15, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.) The powerful Land Cruiser Pick-up has always stood out and made a lasting mark of any terrain. Doubling up as a reliable workhorse and a perfect off-road companion, the Land Cruiser always impresses on every opportunity. The Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up’s large wheels and stable footprint allow it to offer good control. Carrying forward the Land Cruiser’s proven legacy, the Land Cruiser Pick-up is built to take-on any hurdle with ease. A heady blend of rugged functionality, dynamic handling and all-out reliability, the Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up is truly built to last. The Toyota Land Cruiser Pick-up is packed with many features that include an Advanced 7” Navigation System with DVD Player featuring AUX, USB and Bluetooth, Stylish Radiator Grille in addition to Daytime Running Lights (DRL) and



side protection moulding with chrome inserts. The Land Cruiser Pick-up is well-detailed and has Classy Silver Garnish on AC Vents, Keyless Entry System, Fog Lamps, Power Windows, Woodgrain Panelling, Wood Finish Steering Wheel, Chrome Outer Mirrors with Turn Signals, Front Bumper Guard and much more. The pick-up’s Spacious Cabin is not only inviting, it is also equipped with Supportive & Comfortable Seats — with Ample Legroom & Headroom. This feature allows the driver to drive comfortably with maximum control. A Rugged and Practical Deck ensures that the pick-up can transport heavy loads with ease and stability. Land Cruiser Pick-up is a Part-time 4WD with easy switching between 4WD and 2WD mode — it is powered

by a mighty 4.0L, V6, VVT-i Engine generating 228 HP. The Land Cruiser Pick-up handles brilliantly, responds quickly and is sensitive to the driver’s demands. There are many proven safety features in the pick-up. Its Crushable Body absorbs and Disperses Impact Energy, helping to maintain the High Integrity Cabin. Carefully designed Ergonomic Features such as the Location of Switches, Steering System and exceptionally good Front and Rear Visibility complement this. The Land Cruiser Pick-up offers reassuring levels of protection thanks to many Safety Features such as Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Active Traction Control (ATRC), Hill Assist Control (HAC), Brake Assist (BA), Electrical Winch,

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Bank Muscat launches soft token app to authenticate Internet banking transactions

MUSCAT: In line with the bank’s vision “To serve you better, everyday”, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched the Bank Muscat Soft Token App, an innovative mobile application that enables Bank Muscat individual customers to authenticate their Internet Banking transactions anytime and from anywhere. The application, which can be easily downloaded from Google Play store and installed on Android phones and Apple App Store on iPhone, eliminates the need for a hardware token to enable the completion of transactions on the Internet banking platform. Using the Bank Muscat Soft Token App, customers can approve financial transactions by tapping on push notifications received on their registered mobile device and authenticate non-financial transactions through One-Time Passwords (OTPs). There is also provision for fallback authentication through attention-grabbing coloured QR codes in case a push notification is not received. Retail banking customers can register themselves at <https://www.bankmuscatonline.com> for Internet banking in case they are not yet registered for it. The highly secure app is available for download from Google Play and Apple app store, and is featured in both Arabic and English. Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili (pictured), Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “In line with our customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat is on a constant mission to add more features to its innovative and advanced digital payment channels and continues to launch new features to further



THE HIGHLY SECURE APP IS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD FROM GOOGLE PLAY AND APPLE APP STORE, AND IS FEATURED IN BOTH ARABIC AND ENGLISH. enhance banking convenience for its customers. The consistent rise in active customers on our e-channels is a reflection of the growing popularity of digital banking channels. In conformity with international standards, the soft token app provides security and convenience for Internet banking transactions and reflects the bank’s commitment to implement cutting-edge financial infrastructure in the country that will benefit all. The bank works under the guidance of the regulator in implementing measures to align the banking sector with the government’s ambitious eGovernment project and we thank all our valued customers for their confidence in our state-of-the-art services and products.” Bank Muscat offers innovative banking services and products that meet the requirements of customers. The technology-driven products and services are important, especially electronic payment and web-based services, in tune with Oman moving towards a cashless society. The bank’s online and mobile banking platforms have been upgraded significantly over the recent past, resulting in a rapid increase in registered users.



Play the long game with energy security



HATEM AL MOSA

Talk of oil potentially reaching \$300/bl and heightened power outages in news headlines reflects how geopolitics are rapidly reshaping energy security – and energy stakeholders’ intensifying juggling act in the Middle East and beyond. Energy markets are a cornerstone of our civilisation; we cannot afford to be bad managers.

With just three months until COP27, the world’s biggest annual climate gathering, the pressure to build a far more diverse and green energy basket is ramping up. It is certainly something we support, as does the UAE, targeting Net-Zero by 2050 — a bold and admirable target. But that is only half of the story for energy security, especially amid today’s turbulence.

The daily twists and turns of the energy squeeze, largely driven by the Russia-Ukraine war since February, highlights how clean energy needs time to mature before it can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with fossil fuels.

That is not necessarily a bad thing; we can still dramatically enlarge the renewable energy market, reduce CO2 emissions, and create green jobs in the meantime – all key goals for the UAE and wider Middle East.

But it does mean accepting that fossil fuels and renewables are one and the same parachute that we



need to land safely — both today and for the rest of the 2020s — in these turbulent geopolitical winds.

Russia’s domino effect.

If Russia decides to completely stop energy flows to Europe as part of its strategy against Ukraine, there will be severe consequences for the rest of the world.

For one, it would mean Europe, home to 800 million people, would not be able to put enough gas in their storage for the upcoming winter. We are already seeing the economies of several countries elsewhere — Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and many African countries, for example — truly struggling due to these extraordinarily high energy prices.

The geopolitical unrest is triggering other pressures too, including the soaring cost of wheat; noteworthy considering the UAE imports 90 per cent of its food. Plus, Europe has made it very clear that it does not want to depend on Russian energy supplies in the future.

WITH JUST THREE MONTHS UNTIL COP27, THE WORLD’S BIGGEST ANNUAL CLIMATE GATHERING, THE PRESSURE TO BUILD A FAR MORE DIVERSE AND GREEN ENERGY BASKET IS RAMPING UP. IT IS CERTAINLY SOMETHING WE SUPPORT, AS DOES THE UAE, TARGETING NET-ZERO BY 2050 — A BOLD AND ADMIRABLE TARGET. BUT THAT IS ONLY HALF OF THE STORY FOR ENERGY SECURITY, ESPECIALLY AMID TODAY’S TURBULENCE.

This heralds a major change in strategy; 45 per cent of Europe’s gas came from Russia in 2021, showed data from the International Energy Agency (IEA).

European infrastructure and global supply have coped with a 60 per cent drop in Russian gas deliveries since June 2021, according to the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), but strain is undeniably emerging.

As this transition to independence continues, I would expect the situation to become more difficult before it improves. While thousands of kilometres separate Europe and the Middle East on the map, these major developments to our north inevitably impact our energy partnerships, prices, and security. We must be as alert and proactive as possible.

Fossil fuels’ crunch point

Most oil and gas companies across the globe are at their maximum rate of production, which is not a helpful dynamic. We will see this continue until supply starts exceeding demand, which I think could happen by the end of the second quarter of 2023 as the huge amount of investment in the oil and gas market filters through.

Global investments in these sectors have been steadily rising since 2020 and will hit \$628 billion this year, led by upstream gas

and liquefied natural gas (LNG), forecast Rystad Energy. This year’s investment growth is very much pre-programmed by the \$150 billion worth of greenfield projects sanctioned in 2021, nearly double that of 2020. Overall, investments in the Middle East could rise by 22 per cent this year.

Plus, I expect the US rig count will recover to the levels seen before Covid-19 imminently and US shale production volumes have climbed by 1 million barrels a day over the last year, to 12 million barrels a day.

When supply does start exceeding demand, OPEC+ must be ready with an internal management model. The organisation is a very important stabilising entity in the fossil fuel market and indeed, the global economy. It needs to remain intact, encompassing Russia.

High or low fossil fuel prices are not as bad as an unstable market, because the latter makes it hard for companies and countries to set budgets and growth targets. For now, there are only two countries in the world with remaining spare capacity for fossil fuel production – the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

But that does not mean we can keep pushing them to use 100 per cent of their supply, squeezing every last drop. We need a cushion of supply to help safeguard energy stability, especially as the next nine months are going to be tough no matter what.

The more we work together across all energy markets to bolster security, the sooner we improve our environmental journey and achieve commercial growth. Keeping our sights on the long game is the best game plan.

(The writer is CEO of Sharjah National Oil Corporation)

Russia holds spot as China’s top oil supplier



A man walks past oil tanks at a Sinopec refinery in Wuhan, Hubei province. — Reuters

MOSCOW: Russia held its spot as China’s top oil supplier for a third month in July, data showed on Saturday, as independent refiners stepped up purchases of discounted supplies while cutting shipments from rival suppliers such as Angola and Brazil.

Imports of Russian oil, including supplies pumped via the East Siberia Pacific Ocean pipeline and seaborne shipments from Russia’s European and Far Eastern ports, totalled 7.15 million tonnes, up 7.6 per cent from a year ago, data from the Chinese General Administration of Customs showed.

Still, Russian supplies in July, equivalent to about 1.68 million barrels per day (bpd), were below May’s record of close to 2 million bpd. China is Russia’s largest oil buyer.

Imports from second-ranking Saudi Arabia rebounded last month from June, which was the lowest in more than three years, to 6.56 million tonnes, or 1.54 million bpd, but still slightly below year-age level. — Reuters

Oman targets completion of Direct Power Sales Framework by year-end

FROM PAGE 13

Besides contributing to system cost savings, the Direct Sales Legal Framework is expected to incentivise investments in large-scale renewable and green hydrogen projects, which the Omani government is banking on to support its transition away from hydrocarbons as the principal engine of the country’s economic development.

A pipeline of green energy projects, underpinned by renewable energy capacity aggregating a world-scale 30 gigawatts (GW), is envisaged for implementation in the Sultanate

of Oman over the coming years and decades. While part of the green hydrogen and green ammonia output from these multibillion-dollar investments is proposed to be exported to international markets, the rest is expected to be utilised locally as a planet-friendly fuel resource to support an array of green industries, as well as zero-carbon transportation and mobility solutions.

The Direct Sales Framework is seen as a key enabler in realising the Omani government’s vision to ignite the growth of a future zero-carbon economy in the country.

Turkey takes steps to address credit availability

ANKARA: Turkey’s central bank unveiled new measures on Saturday meant to address credit availability including higher reserve requirement collateral for lenders, days after it shocked markets with a 100 basis-point interest rate cut to 13 per cent.

It said the steps were meant to support financial stability and strengthen the monetary transmission mechanism after citing the need to address the widening gap between its policy rate and lending rates when it cut rates on Thursday. The central bank replaced an existing 20 per cent reserve requirement ratio for credits with



A woman is seen in front of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey’s headquarters in Ankara. — Reuters

a higher 30 per cent treasury bond collateral requirement.

Turkish authorities including the central bank and BDDK

banking regulator have previously taken steps to limit loans to companies except those that are net exporters, as part of an economic plan that seeks to flip the big current account deficit to a surplus.

Last month, business groups complained over regulations and said manufacturing firms are not able to access financing with low rates.

As part of the central bank’s new measures, the banks need to keep 20 per cent in securities for commercial loans extended with an interest rate over 1.4 times the current reference rate of 16.32 per cent. — Reuters

British energy prices to soar threefold from record level

LONDON: The price that you pay for your gas and electricity is set to soar by more than threefold from an already record level, according to a forecast that will worry millions of families throughout Britain.

Energy prices could spike at as much as £6,000 per year for the average household from next April, experts warned. The cost-of-living crisis is only set to get worse between now and next summer, as consultancy Auxilione predicted that the price cap on bills will gradually rise by

more than £4,000 in the next eight months.

They said that the cap is expected to reach £3,576 in October, rising to £4,799 in January, and finally hitting £6,089 in April.

The new forecast is an increase of £96 in January and £233 in April compared to the last one. The cap is currently at £1,971 for the average household. Households who consume more than the average pay more for their energy bills.

The forecasts, based on Friday’s gas price, are another major blow



A man fills a petrol car at a BP filling station in Hersham, Britain. — Reuters

for families around Britain and will put extra pressure on the Government to act.

Around 45 million people are forecast to be thrown into energy poverty this winter. Millions of homes are likely to be kept very cold as people try to save what little they can on their energy bills.

The rising cap is due to the runaway price of gas on European markets. This was set off about a year ago as demand for gas soared when economies emerged from Covid-19 lockdowns.

But then came the war in Ukraine.

Since then Russian gas supplies into Europe have been severely slashed. It has caused the gas price to spike to levels never seen before. The energy price cap, which is set by Ofgem, only limits the profits that energy suppliers can take.

It does not protect customers from runaway wholesale energy prices. The consultants forecast that bills will slowly drop in the second half of next year, to £5,486 in July and £5,160 in October 2023. — dpa

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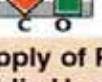
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#Living_with_COVID19



Unearthing 'incredible' artistic talents

'The Adwin' is primarily an African male name which means 'artist, intellectual.' The famed Nehru Centre Art Gallery, Mumbai, was the venue for 'Adwin Petals', an exhibition which saw artists from the Sultanate of Oman, India, and Sudan take part. Mona Rathod, founder of Incredible Talents, the organisers, who curated the exhibition plans to hold similar events in the GCC region. Check what the artists had to say as they showcased their works with a focus on Oman... **P20**

'Spanish Stonehenge' emerges from drought-hit dam

A BRUTAL SUMMER has caused havoc for many in rural Spain, but one unexpected side-effect of the country's worst drought in decades has delighted archaeologists – the emergence of a prehistoric stone circle in a dam whose waterline has receded. Officially known as the Dolmen of Guadalperal but dubbed the Spanish Stonehenge, the circle of dozens of

megalithic stones is believed to date back to 5,000 BC. It currently sits fully exposed in one corner of the Valdecana reservoir, in the central province of Caceres, where authorities say the water level has dropped to 28% of capacity. "It's a surprise, it's a rare opportunity to be able to access it," said



archaeologist Enrique Cedillo from Madrid's Complutense University, one of the experts racing to study the circle before it gets submerged again. It was discovered by German archaeologist Hugo Obermaier in 1926, but the area was flooded in 1963

in a rural development project under Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Since then it has only become fully visible four times. Dolmens are vertically arranged stones usually supporting a flat boulder. Although there are many scat-

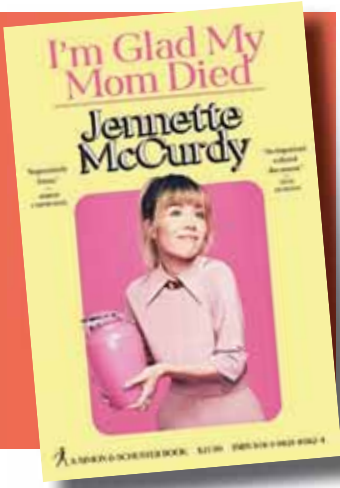
tered across Western Europe, little is known about who erected them. Human remains found in or near many have led to an often-cited theory that they are tombs. Local historical and tourism associations have advocated moving the Guadalperal stones to a museum or elsewhere on dry land. Their presence is also good news for Ruben Argentas, who owns a small boat tours business. "The dolmen emerges and the dolmen tourism begins," he told Reuters after a busy day spent shuttling tourists to the site and back. But there is no silver lining for local farmers. "There hasn't been enough rain since the spring... There is no water for the livestock and we have to transport it in," said Jose Manuel Comendador. Another, Rufino Guinea, said his sweet pepper crop had been ravaged. Climate change has left the Iberian peninsula at its driest in 1,200 years, and winter rains are expected to diminish further, a study published by the Nature Geoscience journal showed. — Reuters

READ

I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED

BY JENNETTE MCCURDY

The actress and film-maker describes her eating disorders and difficult relationship with her mother.



SERVICE TO THE LESS ABLED

Vladimir Bezruk, 65, serves food to Victor Solovyanenko, 54, who is visually impaired, at a hostel for the blind, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Kharkiv, Ukraine. — AFP



FOOD SCENE

Parwati Sunar, 27, and her sons, Resham Sunar, 11, and Arjun Sunar, 7, buy food at a market in Punarbas, Kanchanpur district, southwest Nepal. — AFP





Hanae Mori: grande dame of Japanese fashion

JAPANESE DESIGNER Hanae Mori, who cracked the Parisian haute couture world and was dubbed “Madame Butterfly” for her signature motif, has died in Tokyo aged 96, her office said.

Over the decades Mori’s luxurious creations were worn by Nancy Reagan, Grace Kelly and countless members of high society.

But she was also a pioneer for Japanese women, one of a tiny number to head an international corporation.

An employee at Mori’s office said on Thursday that she died at home “of old age” on August 11, and that a private funeral had taken place.

The designer’s trailblazing career took her from Tokyo, where she started out making costumes for cinema, to New York and Paris — and in 1977 her label became the first Asian fashion house to join the rarefied ranks of haute couture.

The exclusive French club sets exacting standards for their hand-crafted, and extremely expensive, garments.

“When humans work with their hands, their creativity expands,” Mori said during a 2006 retrospective in Tokyo, where a robot modelled a replica of her classic “Chrysanthemum Pyjamas” — a kimono-like robe made from hot-pink chiffon and silk.

In January, the designer summed up her feelings toward the industry in a special column for Japan’s *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily.

“Fashion is something that pushes you, gives you courage to spread your wings and allows you to have adventures,” she said.

ENCOUNTER WITH CHANEL

Born in 1926 in a rural corner of western Japan, Mori studied literature at Tokyo Women’s Christian University before turning her hand to design.

She opened her first atelier above a noodle shop in Tokyo, and came to specialise in dressing the stars of the silver screen.

As Japan’s postwar economy grew, so did her business, which she ran with her husband — a textile executive who encouraged her to visit Paris and New York when the arrival of televi-

sion made the film industry less profitable. “This was a kind of turning point for me,” she once said of the trips in the early 1960s, during which she met Coco Chanel in Paris.

It turned out to be an inspirational encounter.

When she stepped into Chanel’s

to Paris in the late 1970s and was quickly embraced by fashion insiders.

She saw a distinction between herself and her Japanese peers who later made a global name for themselves — such as Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons fame.

WANTED TO BE DIFFERENT

Mori designed the gown worn by princess Masako — now empress — at her 1993 wedding, as well as uniforms for Japan Airlines flight attendants.

And in 1985, she created stage costumes for, appropriately, “Madame



studio the iconic designer suggested she wear something in bright orange to contrast with her black hair.

Taken aback, it got Mori thinking.

“The whole Japanese concept of beauty is based on concealment... I suddenly realised that I should change my approach and make my dresses help a woman stand out,” she said, according to the *Washington Post*.

EAST MEETS WEST

In 1965, Mori unveiled her first collection abroad, in New York, under the theme “East Meets West”.

Her designs combined traditional patterns like cranes and cherry blossoms — and her trademark butterflies — with Western styles, from woollen suits to sharp satin tailoring.

Mori moved her brand from Tokyo

“The young Japanese designers who live in Paris are passionately avant-garde,” she told the *Washington Post*. “I am not. I love to follow the traditional way.”

Mori built her brand into a business empire, which in its heyday occupied a whole building in Tokyo designed by the architect Kenzo Tange — later torn down and replaced with another structure at typical Japanese speed.

From the loss of the building to the retirement of her fashion house from haute couture, “not everything was positive”, she reflected in her *Yomiuri* column.

“It was like my butterfly wings were torn off. But this butterfly was able to fly all over the world for 70 years, because I loved making clothes.”

Butterfly” performed at La Scala in Milan.

But with growing losses in the early 2000s, her empire was largely sold off and she shuttered her Paris atelier in 2004 after her last couture show there.

Hanae Mori boutiques remain open in Tokyo and her fragrances are still sold worldwide.

As a powerful businesswoman, Mori was a rarity in Japan, where boardrooms are still heavily male-dominated.

Speaking of her early married life, she once remarked that she was never invited out with her husband’s friends.

At that time “Japan was a gentlemen’s country”, she said, but “I wanted to be different”. — AFP

CULTURE

Ancient Indian sport builds bridges across cultures in Hong Kong



OVERLOOKED BY high-rises on the outskirts of Hong Kong, a group of students practise body-slam tackles and vicious ankle-wrenches at weekly training for an unlikely sport: the ancient Indian game of kabaddi.

Though its professional league has a huge following in India and surrounding nations, kabaddi — a highly physical game where the object is to tag the rival team, often by brute force — is relatively unknown outside the region.

But eight years ago two Chinese anthropologists set up a Hong Kong team to encourage integration in a city which, despite its status as an international hub, can be less than inclusive, especially when it comes to non-white and non-Chinese residents.

“We often hear Hong Kong is Asia’s world city but we really don’t have much chance to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds,” Wyman Tang, one of the anthropologists, said.

“We live in the same neighbourhood, but it’s like

But the 22-year-old said that off the pitch, ethnic minorities in Hong Kong have to fight to be recognised as “local”.

He is no stranger to blatant discrimination.

“When I arrived in Hong Kong, whenever I would travel on public buses or public transport, and when I’d try to sit down, the person next to the seat would just move away,” he said.

COLOUR SENSITIVE

Advocacy groups say his experience is the norm.

“I think there are significant issues in Hong Kong related to race,” said Shalini Mahtani, the CEO of one such group, the Zubin Foundation.

She said South Asians face daily discrimination in Hong Kong, giving examples of people being told their skin is too dark at job interviews or being blocked from renting apartments.

“They are the wrong colour in a place that is very colour sensitive,” she added.

The coronavirus pandemic has deepened dis-



we are living in a parallel world.”

Their project — Kabaddi United Hong Kong (KUHK) — began as a one-off workshop at a local university. It has now spread to nearly 80 schools and social organisations and has had more than 8,000 participants.

Royal Sunar, a coach at KUHK, was shocked to find the game of his childhood being taught in Hong Kong.

“Kabaddi was one of my interests,” said the Hong Kong-born Nepali.

“Somehow local Chinese people also like the sport.”

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Kabaddi is said to date back 5,000 years with roots in Indian mythology, although similar versions of the game have appeared throughout Asia over the centuries, including in Iran, which also claims to be its birthplace.

Teams collect points by sending a “raider” to the rival side, who tries to quickly tag an opponent and then run back to their own half.

Defending teams try to prevent the raider escaping, which often involves full-team pile-ons.

Nepali immigrant Rojit Sharma joined KUHK in 2019.

For him, kabaddi offered a gateway to making Chinese friends for the first time, and to practise Cantonese.

“There is an emotional connection in kabaddi because we hold hands and then we know more about each other,” he said.

crimination.

When an area of the city home to many South Asians was one of the first to go into lockdown, a senior health official sparked anger by suggesting ethnic minority residents might be spreading the virus because “they like to share food, smoke, drink alcohol and chat together”.

Critics pointed out that the same could easily be said of Cantonese culture — or the many raucous bars filled with white-collar “expat” foreign workers.

Mahtani partly blames the issue on the education system.

“The truth is many Hong Kong Chinese will never have had the experience of engaging with ethnic minorities,” she said.

Team spirit

That was true for Christy Tai, a final-year university student, until she joined her kabaddi group after trying it out and liking its “team spirit”.

She said sport is a good way to get over language barriers.

“We need to talk to each member in the team... When we talk, we cannot only talk about a sport, but we talk about our life, our habits, or whatever,” she said.

Hong Kong still has a long way to go to begin a professional kabaddi league, but founder Tang is pleased how much the game has caught on in the city.

“As long as you follow the same sets of rules, then you can enjoy the game,” Tang said. — AFP



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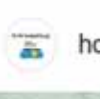


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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

J Lo and Ben Affleck hold lavish estate wedding



CELEBRITY COUPLE Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck tied the knot on Saturday — for the second time in just over a month — in a lavish ceremony at the “Good Will Hunting” star’s estate, US media reported.

The A-list lovebirds already wed in Las Vegas in mid-July, but made it official again, this time in front of friends and family at Affleck’s 87-acre (35-hectare) waterfront compound in the southeastern US state of Georgia.

Among the Hollywood types in attendance at the three-day affair were longtime Affleck pal Matt Damon and director Kevin Smith, *People* magazine reported.

Guests were all-white while Lopez donned a Ralph Lauren dress made in Italy, according to Fox News. Images posted by celebrity gossip site TMZ ahead of the wedding showed dinner seating being arranged on what appeared to be a large, covered dock, with a substantial barge for pyrotechnics floating nearby.

The pair — he is 50 and she is 53 — first met on the set of the widely panned movie “Gigli” in 2002.

They became a media sensation as they dated but postponed their planned 2003 nuptials, then announced their relationship was over in early 2004.

“Bennifer” — the couple’s public nickname from their first highly publicised relationship — set the Internet alight last year when photos of them together again began circulating.

Lopez and Affleck announced their engagement in April.

Lopez posted a video of herself appearing emotional and admiring a green ring in her newsletter, “On The JLo.” US media reported that the ring was an emerald-cut pale green diamond.

This is the fourth marriage for Lopez and the second for Affleck.

Lopez discussed her renewed relationship with Affleck in an interview with *People* in February.

“It’s a beautiful love story that we got a second chance,” she said. — **AFP**

CINEMA

Face paint and folklore transform Chicago bride for traditional wedding in Kosovo



LONG BEFORE Denzel Washington, Spike Lee or even Sidney Poitier, generations of pioneering and revolutionary Black US film-makers played a key role in shaping early American cinema and dispelling pejorative stereotypes, a major new Hollywood exhibition argues.

“Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898-1971,” opening at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles on Sunday, charts key moments in Black film history that were either ignored by mainstream Hollywood studios and audiences in their day, or have been long forgotten.

Starting with a recently re-discovered 1898 reel of two Black vaudeville performers embracing, the exhibition tells the largely unknown history of “race films” — hundreds of pre-1960s independent movies made with Black casts specifically for Black audiences, at a time when theaters were racially segregated.

“Are you ready for the secret? That we Black folks have always been present in American film, right from the start,” said Oscar-nominated film-maker Ava DuVernay, at a press preview this week.

“Present not as caricatures and stereotypes, but as creators and producers and innovators and eager audiences.”

She added: “We should have seen it long before now. But this is the day it begins.”

“Regeneration” is only the second major temporary exhibit to be presented at the Academy Museum, which was opened by the organisation behind the Oscars last September after years of delays.

It displays Poitier’s historic Oscar — loaned by his widow, from his 1964 best actor win for “Lilies of the Field” — as well as tap shoes worn by the Nicholas Brothers, a trumpet played by Louis Armstrong, and a costume

worn by Sammy Davis Jr in “Porgy and Bess.”

Planning for the exhibition began back in 2016, as curators delved into the Academy’s extensive archives, and found early promotional posters for movies with blurbs boasting of “An All-Negro Cast” and a “Stupendous All-Star Negro Motion Picture.”

“I was surprised because I did not know about these films before we started to work on this exhibition,” co-curator Doris Berger told AFP.

“I asked myself ‘why don’t we know about this? We should know about this!’

“They are really exciting films and great proof that African-American performers had roles in all characters, and there were many story lines.

“And plus, they just look really cool!”

‘HARLEM ON THE PRAIRIE’

Audiences can watch carefully restored footage of these movies, now known as “race films,” including a Western-musical called “Harlem on the Prairie,” gangster flick “Dark Manhattan,” and horror-comedy “Mr Washington Goes To Town.”

Many others have been lost forever, though their posters serve as “a sort of an imprint that they existed,” said co-curator Rhea Combs.

While mainstream Hollywood cast Black actors at the time as “butlers and mammies, in supporting roles,” this independent genre saw minority performers play “lawyers, and doctors, and nurses, and cowboys,” said

Berger.

“So this is proof that (Hollywood) could have been so much richer and more exciting.”

The gallery ends with the early 1970s rise of the Blaxploitation genre, pioneered by Melvin Van Peebles who, like Poitier, died months before the exhibition could open.

“I hope that they would be very proud of this exhibition,” Combs told AFP.

‘OVERDUE’

The exhibition is a major event for the Academy, which in recent years has had to navigate accusations of a lack of racial diversity in its ranks.

The group was also pummeled with criticism for a dearth of Black Oscar nominees during the #OscarsSoWhite movement, which emerged in 2015.

It has since fulfilled a pledge to double the number of women and minority members by 2020.

In addition to educating the public at large, the works unearthed by “Regeneration” have even surprised leading contemporary Black film-makers.

“I was more than surprised... I didn’t know about this,” said director Charles Burnett.

“If I knew about this — about the actresses, and things like that — I would have had a different whole notion and probably approach to film.”

DuVernay added: “This work had to happen. It’s overdue. It’s important, it’s crucial work. “This exhibition showcases the generations of Black artists [on] whose shoulders we stand.” — **AFP**

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Stories from the Book of Misers (4)

16) THERE WAS a man who owned a date shop in the city of Al-Mada’in near Baghdad. He had a young assistant who sometimes locked himself in the shop. The owner suspected that he’d be eating dates during that time. He asked for a white cotton and made the assistant chew it. The cotton came out sticky and yellowish. The owner said: “Is that what you do every day behind my back? Get out and never return!”

17) Abu Al-Huthail was a known miser who gifted Moes a chicken. Knowing that gifting never came naturally to Abu Al-Huthail, Moes expressed a great joy when receiving the gift and went on describing the great meat and fat it had. He even called it a marvel to which Abu Al-Huthail answered proudly: “Have you heard of its breed and age? As chicken only gets better with those aspects! And do you know what we fed it and how we fattened it up?” which made Moes laugh. Abu Al-Hathael never realised that Moes was making fun of him. Since then, whenever chicken was mentioned, Abu Al-Huthail would boast: “It’s nothing compared to that chicken. Tell them Moes!” And when other meats were mentioned Abu Al-Huthail would argue: “The best fat is in meat and duck. While the best part of fish and chicken is the stomach. Especially if it was the same breed of chicken that I gifted Moes!” Even better, when people or birthdays were mentioned Abu Al-Huthail would refer to the dates as: “It was a year after I gifted the chicken” or “There was only a day between him coming and me gifting the chicken.” Hence, the chicken became a reference in every conversation he had.

18) A miser asked his wife about a piece of meat that went missing. She claimed that it was eaten by their cat. The miser picked up the cat and weighed it saying: “This the weight of the meat. So where is the cat?” In another incident, a piece of watermelon went missing. This time, the wife said that it was eaten by the neighbour’s cats. To verify her story, he threw the rest of the watermelon in front of the cats who naturally didn’t eat it. Nevertheless, the miser made the neighbours pay for the whole watermelon, even though they claimed that their cats were full at the time and hence failed his test.

21) A miser called Ibn Habbar was criticised by a poet who wrote: “If a cauldron cried for how long it’s been locked away from fat it would be that of Ibn Habbar/ It never touched fat since it was made and never saw fire other than the smith’s!”

Hope you enjoyed the misers’ stories!

19) Asad ibn Abdullah scolded his cook for overcooking the meat, accusing him of using the excess fat for his own benefit. When Asad’s brother heard the story, he said: “Of ignorance better than knowledge!”

20) Bilal ibn Abi Burda was the governor of Basra at the time of the leprosy outbreak. People advised him of soaking in ghee to ward it off. Whenever he finished his baths, he’d order for the leftover ghee to be sold in the market. That year, people stopped eating ghee. Bilal also fed locals during the month of Ramadan. People would sit in groups and food would be served. After the call for prayers, Bilal would leave the table without eating and people would follow suit, feeling embarrassed to eat while their host is praying. Once everyone was busy praying, the servants would come and clear the tables.

21) A miser called Ibn Habbar was criticised by a poet who wrote: “If a cauldron cried for how long it’s been locked away from fat it would be that of Ibn Habbar/ It never touched fat since it was made and never saw fire other than the smith’s!”

Hope you enjoyed the misers’ stories!

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MONDAY | AUGUST 22 | 2022



were privileged to present Omani culture in their artwork whereas artists from India presented their own cultural art and another artist from Sudan presented his works. So these mixed cultural varieties made this event successful," she adds.

As an artist herself, Mona wishes to provide a platform to struggling co-artists to get their artwork recognised.

though they are from the 19th century and they tell tales of everyday

nature done in the Thangka painting style from the Himalayan region, an ancient Tibetan art form preserved in India.