

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth, on the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best sentiments to the monarch, wishing her good health, happiness and success in leading the British people towards wider horizons of progress and prosperity. His Majesty hoped that the strong ties of friendship between the two countries will continue to grow and prosper. – ONA



HM PRESIDES OVER COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING

RO 130m initiatives announced



- SUPREME COMMITTEE COMMENDED FOR TACKLING COVID-19 PANDEMIC
- TO WRITE OFF OUTSTANDING LOAN DUES OF CITIZENS WITH RO 450 SALARY
- RO 70 MILLION FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME
- 15% ADDITIONAL ELECTRICITY SUBSIDY FOR SOME SUBSCRIBERS
- OCCUPATIONAL SECURITY BENEFIT FOR CITIZENS TILL DECEMBER 2022
- ADDITIONAL PACKAGE OF SUBSIDIES FOR SMES AND INSOLVENT PERSONS
- CONTINUE CHANNELLING FINANCIAL SURPLUS TOWARDS GROWTH
- PRIORITY TO ALL MATTERS OF RELEVANCE TO FOOD SECURITY
- INTEGRATED EXECUTIVE PLAN TO DEVELOP EDUCATION SECTOR
- OMANI MEDIA TOLD TO RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS AMONG THE SOCIETY



الأكاديمية السلطانية للإدارة
ROYAL ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

To become a beacon for executive leadership and management fulfilling Oman's vision for the future.

Oman's present... For Oman's future

”

Over the next stage of the Renewed Renaissance, we will take action to transform government performance from the level of emergency solutions to a more sustainable level having a set of lasting and comprehensive solutions that place economic growth, fiscal sustainability and social welfare at the forefront of its priorities.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik

ram.gov.om | [@RoyalAcademy_OM](https://www.instagram.com/RoyalAcademy_OM)



HM presides over Council of Ministers meeting

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the riches with which He endowed Oman and its noble people. His Majesty the Sultan also thanked the Almighty for the mercy He bestowed on humanity through the improvement in the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic situation.

He prayed to Allah “to vest all in garments of health” and to have mercy on the departed souls of those who succumbed to the disease.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan commended the efforts undertaken by the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from Covid-19 pandemic. He lauded the committee’s good planning and mechanisms that, he said, helped curb the pandemic.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to end the mission of the committee and instructed the Ministry of Health to take appropriate measures to



address the lingering disease in coordination with the authorities concerned.

In this context, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his deep appreciation for the self-denial shown by medical and paramedical teams, as well as all health workers and staff of other establishments (including civil, military and security establishments), public institutions, private sector establishments and agencies of the media.

His Majesty the Sultan valued the cooperation of citizens and residents and their prompt response to health instructions and precautionary measures to address the pandemic. He, in particular, praised citizens’ and residents’ fortitude as they endured the “exceptional conditions”, noting that “this stance played a great role in the success of the disease containment procedures and in the stability of the health situation”.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed local conditions.

CONTINUED ON P3

Tender Announcement

E-Tender 08/2022/OPAZ

الهيئة العامة للمناطق الاقتصادية الخاصة والمناطق الحرة
Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones
Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عمان

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) invites the reputable and experienced local and international (including GCC) Companies/Bidders to participate in the following road construction tender in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) through E-Tendering System (ESNAD).

CONSTRUCTION OF COASTAL ROAD AT DUQM

Purchasing, participating and collecting/downloading softcopy of the Tender Documents:	Through E-Tendering System https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
Start of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	Tuesday, 31 st May 2022 (8.00 AM, Muscat Time) onwards
End of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	Tuesday, 21 st June 2022 (03:00 PM, Muscat Time)
Site showround / Visit (for all bidders):	Tuesday, 21 st June 2022 (9:30 AM, Muscat Time) At SEZAD/TATWEER HQ Office at DUQM.
Tender Closing (Submission) and Opening of Technical Bids Date:	Sunday, 7 th August 2022 (3:00 PM, Muscat Time)
Cost of Tender Documents (payable and non-refundable; unless cancelled):	OMR. 3,000 (Omani Rial THREE THOUSAND only).

- Interested companies that are (already) registered with the Oman Tender Board (TB) are invited to participate to obtain details, the specification and terms of conditions from the following website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Participants from International companies or interested companies who are not registered with the Oman Tender Board (TB) are required to have registered for Tender participation; website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Bidders MUST submit their bids through online only on the given website with sealed and signed and as per instructions given in the E-tendering uploading page, on or before the end date submission.
- Bidders MUST enclose Electronic Guarantee/Bid Bond through online only on the given website; value of not less than (1%) of the Tender Value and valid for (180) days from the Proposals' submission date; addressed to H. E. The Chairman, OPAZ Tender Committee (OTC).
- Any queries related to submission of bids or obtaining and submission of Electronic bid bond through online shall contact ITA e-tendering team.
- Tender will be subject to reject if the tenderer does not submit the valid Electronic Bid bond on time.
- OPAZ is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bid and reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.

FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATIONS, YOU MAY CONTACT VIA
Registration Helpdesk: +968-24402222,330 (7:30AM-2:30PM)
Tendering Helpdesk: +968-24402200 (8:00AM-4:00PM)
Email: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

PUBLIC AUTHORITY
FOR SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES
AND FREE ZONES (OPAZ)

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www.opaz.gov.om





His Majesty announces relief package

FROM PAGE 2

As per His Majesty the Sultan's Royal directives to alleviate the direct impact on citizens from financial policies undertaken to run the State's Fiscal Sustainability Scheme and, in pursuance of support for small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs and, to mitigate the economic impacts of Covid-19, the Council of Ministers presented a number of initiatives and economic and social procedures to the tune of **RO 130 million to meet the following objectives:**

- To provide RO 70 million to enhance financial allocations earmarked for the Housing Assistance Programme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning during the current Five-Year Plan.
- To write off outstanding dues of all beneficiaries of the Housing Loans Programme who receive RO 450 monthly salaries (waiver applicable to Omani citizens).
- To provide 15% additional electricity consumption subsidy for subscribers who have two or less accounts during the summer months from May to August 2022.
- To extend the dispensation of the Occupational Security Benefit till the end of December 2022 for citizens whose services are terminated within the Sultanate of Oman.
- To provide an additional



package of subsidies in support of small and medium enterprises, entrepreneurs and insolvent persons.

To alleviate the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the package includes a number of subsidies and payment of overdues of entrepreneurs as follows:

- Waivers for borrowers from Oman Housing Bank's "Emergency Loans Portfolio".
 - Waivers for entrepreneurs who are holders of Riyadh Card — for beneficiaries of Emergency Loans — issued by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises.
 - Waivers for SMEs from fees and fines payable against delays in loans payable to the Lender Portfolio (Al Rafd Fund earlier) until the end of this year (2022).
 - Waiver for all vehicles (private and commercial) from payment of fines and renewal fees for the years 2020 and 2021.
 - Payment of overdues of entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs who face prison charges, following persecutions on account of bad cheques (cheques drawn on insufficient funds).
 - Postponement of lawsuits against individuals/establishments not abiding by provisions of loan agreements signed with the Lenders Portfolio (Al Rafd Fund earlier) until the end of this year (2022).
- The departments concerned



will draft the mechanisms regulating the above-mentioned procedures in a manner that reflects positively on citizens.

After reviewing the results of the State Budget over the past four months of this year and the Closing Account of the Fiscal Year 2021, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to continue channelling the financial surplus (resulting from returns of oil prices) towards growth and economic recovery. This involves increasing spending on priority development projects and cutting down the volume of the State's Indebtedness.

His Majesty the Sultan also hailed the efforts undertaken by the authorities concerned to contain the probable fallbacks of staple food supplies due to the political situations in the world.

His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to sustain efforts and give priority to all matters of relevance to food security.

In light of results of Assessment of Performance Indicators for the first quarter of this year (and streamlining of procedures) which covered all government establishments and the governorates, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to government departments to continue this scheme in order to promote performance and

achieve high levels of satisfaction among beneficiaries from public services.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan spoke about the role of the sector of education and

His Majesty the Sultan extolled the role of Omani media and Omani media personnel in raising public awareness among segments of society. He also affirmed his support for the media and media personnel as they perform their noble mission to contribute to the achievement of the supreme national objectives

vocational training in supplying the labour market with skilled national workers. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to devise an integrated

executive plan to develop this sector in cooperation with international institutions. He also called for the development of the Technical Education sector to help provide the labour market with technical expertise.

His Majesty the Sultan also extolled the role of Omani media and Omani media personnel in raising public awareness among segments of society, besides documenting elements of Omani culture. His Majesty the Sultan affirmed his support for the media and media personnel as they perform their noble mission to contribute to the achievement of the supreme national objectives and consolidate the concepts of tolerance and harmony.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed Oman's bilateral relations with Arab and friendly countries. He affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's continued cooperation with all countries in a manner that achieves the interests of the Sultanate of Oman and the common interests of all.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan touched on other aspects of concern to the Sultanate of Oman and its citizens, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant success to all and realise further progress and prosperity to this dear homeland. — ONA



دِيْوَانُ الْمَلِكِ السَّلْطَانِي

DIWAN OF ROYAL COURT

Tender Notice (1)

Diwan of Royal Court sultanate of Oman, Muscat, announces the following Tenders for Annual requirements of medicines and medical supplies for 2023:

Tender No.	Tender Name:	Tender Document Value	Last Date of Purchasing Tenders	Last date of Submitting Tenders
3/2022	Annual Requirements for Pharmaceutical Items	140	5/7/2022	11/7/2022
4/2022	Annual Requirements for Dental Items	25	5/7/2022	11/7/2022
5/2022	Annual Requirements for Surgical, Medical and X ray	25	5/7/2022	11/7/2022
6/2022	Annual Requirements for Laboratories Items	25	5/7/2022	11/7/2022

- Qualified Companies with previous experience in similar works can obtain the Tender Documents from the Directorate General of Administrative , Financial Affairs and Human Resources (Treasury Department), Diwan of Royal Court, AlKhuwair, ground Floor, from 7:30 am till 12:00 pm right from the date of post by paying the document value.
- Each company's tender should be accompanied by a Tender Bond in the form of bank guarantee or certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount of (1%) of the Tender Value valid for (90) days from the date of submission. Any Bid not accompanied with the full Tender Bond will be excluded.
- The Tender Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers.
- Bids must be submitted in an envelope sealed with red wax addressed to His Excellency, the Chairman of the Tender Committee. The Tender name and number should be written on the envelope. Nothing should be written on the envelope to display the identity of the bidder or what refers to him.
- The bids should be deposited in the Tender Box, Seventh floor, Diwan of Royal Court (Purchases Department), Ghala and no bids will be accepted after 12:00pm.
- No Bids will be accepted after the last date of submission shown in the above table.
- The Tender Committee will award the tender to the company that has the largest percentage of Omanisation and possible purchases of national products.

Diwan of Royal Court is not obliged to award the tender to the lowest or any other offer.

For any further clarification and assistance, you may contact the following numbers:

24026307 - 24026308 - 24026309 - 99878715 - 99360608



OMAN MEDIA HAS EVOLVED OVER PAST DECADE: SAYYID ASAAD

350 MEDIA PERSONNEL FROM 120 COUNTRIES ATTEND IFJ CONFERENCE



KABEER YOUSUF
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His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, praised Oman media, appreciating it to have evolved over the past decade in terms of content and coverage.

In a statement issued at the General Conference of the 31st meeting of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Tuesday, he said that Oman media has been keeping pace with the global developments.

"Oman media has witnessed great transformations and has been able, with the support and care provided to it, to keep pace with all the developments and changes that the media is witnessing in the world," he said.



The congress that began by paying homage to Shereen Abu Aqleh, the Palestinian journalist who was killed while on duty, is hosting nearly 350 journalists and other media people from 100 countries who are attending the 4-day conference which is the final in 100 years after the IFJ was formed in 1926.

This is the first time that a GCC country is hosting the IFJ conference and Oman is the second country in the Middle East region after Tunisia which hosted the 30th edition of the



conference. "The 31st World Media Congress is an opportunity to learn about the Renewed Renaissance of the Sultanate of Oman in all



economic, cultural, tourism and development fields, and the belief that the Sultanate of Oman has reposed in the media and its role

in the renaissance and progress of nations is awe-inspiring," he added. During the four days of the media congress, the Press Photo Award for Journalists, first time in the region, which is given every three years will be announced. Besides, close association with the Asia Pacific Association for Press which is present in Oman for the conference is another milestone of the conference which is expected to give a fillip to the tourism sector.

The conference's agenda

cover a spectrum of topics, particularly discussing various social phenomena and holding the constitutive meeting of the Asia and Pacific Federation of Journalists (APFJ).

The APFJ comprises representatives of journalism of unions from Asia and the Pacific.

The Sultanate of Oman proposed to the IFJ in 2019 to establish a federation for journalists that represents journalism unions of Asian and Pacific countries.

The event also included several presentations given by regional representatives on the effects of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on journalism and newsrooms.

Meanwhile, the IFJ Gender Council also held its meeting on Tuesday. This meeting reviewed the council's initiatives throughout the last three years.

It is worth noting that this event receives wide international coverage.

SALIM AL JAHWARI ELECTED APFJ VICE-PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: As part of the 31st IFJ Congress which began on Tuesday, the Asia and Pacific Federation of Journalists (APFJ) was announced and its executive office elected.

India's Sabina Inderjit was elected APFJ's president while Oman's Salim bin Hamad al Jahwari was elected vice-president with overwhelming majority.

— ONA





HM sends condolences to Brazil and Albania

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Jair Bolsonaro of the Federative Republic of Brazil on victims of the floods that

swept Brazil's northeastern state of Pernambuco. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Bolsonaro, families of the victims and the Brazilian people,

wishing the injured a quick recovery.

His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of condolences to President Ilir Meta of the Republic of Albania on the death of

former Albanian president, Bujar Nishani. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Meta, the deceased's family and the people of Albania. — ONA



SAF Chief receives Nigerian delegation, visits MSC

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday a delegation from the Nigerian National Defence College.

Al Raisi welcomed the Nigerian delegation as the two sides exchanged

views about various topics of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Brig Hassan bin Ali al Mujaini, Head of SAF Morale Guidance and Military Protocols and senior SAF officers.

The Nigerian delegation also visited the Maritime Security Centre, (MSC).

Govt Treasury Bills worth RO 30 million issued

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 560, worth RO 30 million was issued this week.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are as follows: The total value of the allotted Treasury Bills amounted to RO 30 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from Wednesday, June 1, 2022 until 31 August 2022. The average accepted price reached RO 99.610 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 99.610 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 1.56429 per cent and 1.57041 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 1.50 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 2.00 per cent.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

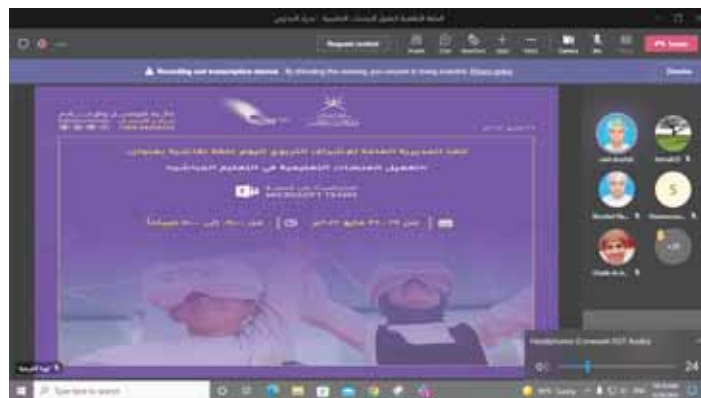
— ONA

Seminar on activating educational platforms

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, concluded on Tuesday activities of the seminar on 'Activating Educational Platforms in Direct Education' held virtually via Microsoft Teams programme.

The 3-day seminar targeted more than 300 participants including school principals, educational supervisors, first teachers and teachers from the various educational directorates in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

During the opening of the seminar, Dr Khadija al Balushi, Assistant Director of Applied Science Supervision Department, Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, said: "We witnessed a rapid transformation in activating e-learning in general during the period of pandemic, and activating educational platforms and various technological applications in particular in providing education to students, which



has become an integral part of their life and scientific interaction."

She further said that like other educational systems around the world even if education is transformed into direct or integrated to benefit from the experiences gained in the e-learning system in the process of employing educational platforms in direct learning and teaching."

The ministry is in the process of preparing a guide to activate educational platforms in public schools and researchers interested in activating e-learning, as it remains an important part of the educational process.

She also pointed out the seminar topics in which the participants discussed to benefit from their experiences and developmental visions. The participants are divided into three categories namely school principals, educational supervisors, and teachers over the three-day seminar, and each category will discuss the four topics, namely: the mechanism of employing educational platforms in direct education, experiences and expertise in employing educational platforms in direct education, following up on the activation of platforms in direct education, and developmental ideas in employing platforms in direct education."

Banking summit explores financial transformations

MUSCAT: The 7th edition of New Age Banking Summit Oman explored transformations in the financial economic system during the digital era and amid new strategies and innovative products and

services to reach clients through digital platforms.

The summit also touched on efforts against cyber dangers.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Tahir bin

Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Al Amri said that the CBO is working to issue its own Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

Work is also under way to open banking API services and overcoming challenges that face the digitisation sector, he added. — ONA

ROHM's Music Library, Exhibition of Musical Arts open today

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will open the doors of a brand-new Music Library and Exhibition of Musical Arts today.

The exhibition is titled: "Oman and the World: A Musical Journey". The House of Musical Arts aims to provide an extensive resource for educational enrichment.

The Exhibition of Musical Arts explores the unique story of music across the world. Told from the perspective of Oman's musical traditions, it has been specially curated as the first of its kind, an incredible immersive and interactive audio and visual experience.



Visitors of the exhibition can discover how music brings people together, how it developed around the world and what it means to all people.

The exhibition comprises six sections on music's history, namely Nature, Science, Instruments, Community,

Connections and Performance. The visitors can delve deeper into the unifying language of music and discover more about great artists from Oman and the region.

Oman and the World reflects how the arts enable people to celebrate shared

heritage to consolidate the principles of love, peace and tolerance among the world's peoples.

The newly created Music Library allows visitors to browse music scores from across the globe.

Music and opera are the core of the collection, but information on stage design, costume design and other stagecraft subjects is also available, along with children's books on artistic topics.

The opening of the Exhibition of Musical Arts and Music Library marks another landmark moment in the history of the ROHM. — ONA

Madayn signs cooperation protocol

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) signed a cooperation protocol (programme) with the Secretariat General of the Tender Board to study and analyse the Bill of Quantities for a number of government tenders.

In its first stage, the programme provides for the establishment a link with locally made products and eventually develop a database of products and services of companies

and production units (factories) based in industrial cities, after checking their adherence to quality standards.

The linking task will be undertaken by Madayn through its Industrial Innovation Academy.

The cooperation protocol was signed by Eng Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board and Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn. — ONA



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (15/2022)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/014	2022/MM/QS-8	RFP for Application and DBA Support for Orack EBS CRM (Re Call) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	09/06/2022	16/06/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/026	2022/MM/QS-16	RFP for Renewal of AMC for Muscat Municipality IT Infrastructure (Re Call) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/046	2022/MM/QS-24	Construction of Proposed Solutions for Water Stagnation in different locations at Bausher (E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	First
PRE/22/036	2022/MM/QS-25	Construction of Proposed Solution for Water Stagnation at Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	26/06/2022	17/07/2022	First

Tender Conditions :-

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



New revised visa fees effective from today

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The new revised fees for renewal and issue of expatriate work permits will come into effect from June 1.

Considering that new work fees will come into effect from today, the Ministry of Labour has waived off penalties for delay in the renewal of their work permits, provided that the process is completed before September 1 this year.

At the same time, the private sector has been urged to take advantage of the situation. It stipulates efforts to revitalise the global economy.

A 30-per cent discount will be granted to companies that abide by the Omanisation percentage.

“The commercial fees of RO 201-301 have been divided into three categories, and Omanisation percentage will be determined for each of these categories.” The ministry said that RO 301 would be levied for senior and supervisory professions (managers, presidents, specialists and consultants, while a discount



of 30 per cent (RO 201) would be granted to companies that abide by the Omanisation percentage. For technical and specialist jobs, RO 201 will be levied, while a 30-per cent discount (RO 176) will be granted to companies that maintain the Omanisation

percentage. In a statement, the Ministry of Labour said that fee reduction would reduce the burdens of commercial activities due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“It will help expand commercial activities and facilitate investment

and provide accurate knowledge of the types of professions and specialisations required for the labour market. In addition, it will increase the number of generic jobs suitable for job-seekers and provide incentives.”The Oman Chamber of Commerce and

A 30-per cent discount will be granted to companies that abide by the Omanisation percentage

Industry (OCCI) has said that it will positively affect the country as an attractive destination.

Speaking exclusively to the Observer, Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of OCCI, said that the government is not looking to raise revenues from these fees, but it wants more investors to invest and bring business to the country.

“This revision of fees will only help businesses here, and it will encourage speeding up the process of providing more jobs to citizens. There have been no changes to the current Omanisation percentage targets as economies grow, it will also generate more jobs for citizens.”

MoL announces new part-time opportunities

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour has announced the availability of 309,778 hours of part-time work to the benefit of 644 job-seekers as part of an initiative that aims to provide a million hours of part-time work.

The ministry will open registration to the announced opportunities for two weeks.

The announced part-time hours are intended for various qualifications from the doctorate degree down to the pre-GED qualification. This includes 1 doctoral degree holder, 150 bachelor's degree holders, 137 holders of post-GED certificate, 334 GED certificate holders and 22 literates.

This is the second such announcement for this year and the 5th in a series of job announcements at the state's administrative apparatus to be issued by the Ministry of Labour in accordance with a well-studied plan that takes into account the actual needs of the public sector. — ONA

Business community hails decision

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

MUSCAT: Private sector companies, corporates and other firms employing expatriate manpower have expressed joy over the Royal decision to revise the charges of resident permits taking effect from today, which is expected to help recruit foreign workforce in some sectors while fulfilling the Omanisation quotas.

The Ministry of Labour has exempted companies and individuals from renewal penalties provided that the renewal is completed before September 1, 2022, while the new discounted fees will be effective from June 1.

In line with the Royal directives for the work permit discounted fees, the Ministry of Labour announced the new fees for expatriates according to the type of profession.

Speaking to *Observer*, business houses as well as owners of various businesses acknowledged their gratitude over the new move that aimed at retaining skilled workforce and nurture Oman's labour sector.

They unanimously admit that this announcement has given them new energy, purpose and confidence in bringing up the business to the next level.

“We, the Board of Directors

“
This decision will be a milestone in the path of development of the country's SME sector business

SHAFEEQ AHAMMED,

CEO,
Zay Detergent Industry

of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, acknowledge the private sector's gratitude for the noble directives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to improve the business environment and raise the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman in the field of attracting investments by reducing the fees for the recruitment of non-Omani workers,” says Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in a statement.

He added that this is because the role of lower resident permit fee is quite big in reducing the costs for companies and institutions, and it comes from the premise of achieving the main

objectives of the Oman Vision 2040, which requires the creation of an empowered private sector that leads a competitive and integrated economy at par with the global economy.

Shafeeq Ahammed, CEO, Zay Detergent Industry LLC, called the decision to bring back the rates ‘a very noble decision’. “As an entrepreneur in Oman, this announcement is a great comfort and joy to us during such a pandemic situation and this decision will be a milestone in the path of development of the country's SME sector business,” he said, adding that the business community is expecting more such business friendly announcements from the country.

This ‘multi-dimensional decision’ comes with a bag of benefits to the local workforce as well because with this, any company which meets the Omanisation targets will have a better rates in the visa charges.

“This sounds very good and is highly favourable for the nationals too,” adds Riyaz Ahamad, a travel agent in Suhar.

“There have been many companies in Oman the owners of which were really worried of renewing the expat visa at a premium price and some where in fact thinking of winding up their operations,” he added.

Local cloud formation seen in some areas

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The weather forecast from Wednesday till the weekend shows rain clouds activity over the Al Hajar Mountains and the adjacent areas and the mountains of Dhofar Governorate.

Partly cloudy skies along the coastal areas of Dhofar and mainly clear skies over the rest of the governorates with chances of convective clouds development and isolated thunder rain over Al Hajar Mountains towards afternoon are expected. Chances of late night to early morning low-

level clouds patches over parts of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar and over parts of the coastal areas of the Oman Sea are expected.

According to Oman Met Office, there are chances of clouds resulting in scattered rain on the coasts of Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates. There is also the possibility of low clouds and fog forming on the coasts of North and South Al Batinah governorates.

Along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea, winds will be southwesterly moderate to fresh, and along the coastal areas of the Oman Sea, it will be northeasterly

light to moderate, occasionally fresh during the day, becoming variable light at night, while over the rest of the governorates, it will be southerly to southwesterly light to moderate and occasionally fresh over the desert and open areas. The moderate sea is expected along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea with a maximum wave height of 2.0 metres and slight to moderate along the rest of the coasts with a maximum wave height of 1.5 metres.

Quiet - medium waves (1.5 metres) are expected on the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the coasts of Musandam.

226 students undergo talent identification programme

AMAL AL RIYAMI

NIZWA: The General Directorate of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate implemented a programme called ‘Tharwa’, to identify talented students.

About 226 students, from the sixth grade and distributed in ten schools, were finally identified.

These are Bahla School for Basic Education, Murtafaat Izki School for Basic Education, Abdullah bin Rawaha School for Basic Education, Moosa bin Ali School for Basic Education, Fatima bint Al Khattab School for Basic Education, Safia Umm Al Muminoon School for Basic Education, Bessia School for Basic Education, Nizwa School for Basic Education and Manah School for Basic Education.

The national programme aims to lay practical foundations for discovering and nurture talented students in schools to identify gifted students and raise the local community's awareness. The qualities of students relate to high mental abilities, creativity, innovation and determining IQ scores. During 2021-2022 in



The qualities of students relate to high mental abilities, creativity, innovation and determining IQ scores



The programme seeks to unify efforts between the ministry and educational directorates in promoting the talent sector and nurturing it in school education. About 178 directors, heads of departments, supervisors and teachers from different governorates were trained in the methods of applying detection tests from May 16 to 18.

Under the supervision of the Specialised Institute for Teachers, the programme is considered one of the most important in talent and its development in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is hoped the programme will continue towards providing society with a distinguished elite of talented children.

Oman attends UN environment forum



STOCKHOLM: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, took part on Tuesday in the 4th UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the

Environment (UN-SPBF) held in Sweden. The two-day forum discussed a range of topics, namely the role of science, technology and policies in solving issues related to

the environment and the climate. Oman's delegation to the forum is led by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.



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7

In brief

■ COLOMBO



SRI LANKA COURT SUSPENDS PARDON FOR RAJAPAKSA LOYALIST

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court suspended a presidential pardon for a murderer associated with the ruling Rajapaksa family, ordering his immediate return to jail in a landmark decision. A three-judge bench asked the police to arrest Duminda Silva, who was facing the death penalty for a 2011 murder but was freed in June after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa granted him an amnesty. "The court fixed a further hearing for September 1, but wanted the police to carry out the interim order of arresting Duminda and return him to jail." He said the decision was given following a challenge to the presidential pardon. — AFP

■ KATHMANDU



ALL PASSENGERS, CREW CONFIRMED DEAD IN NEPAL PLANE CRASH

Nepalese officials confirmed all 22 people on board a plane that crashed two days earlier were killed after rescuers found and recovered the final body from the wreckage. All bodies have been transported to Kathmandu by helicopter from the crash site in the Himalayas, local media reported. The bodies were to be identified and then handed over to relatives. The black box was found and is now being evaluated, a member of the recovery team said. The plane's wreckage was found at an altitude of almost 4,500 metres in Sanosware, north-west of Kathmandu, more than 20 hours after it was first reported missing. — dpa

■ SHANGHAI



SHANGHAI PREPARES TO LIFT MORE COVID CURBS

Shanghai authorities said they will lift more restrictions in steps to return the Covid-hit city to normality, after two months of heavy-handed restrictions that throttled businesses and locked down residents. The commercial hub of 25 million was shuttered in sections from late March, when the spread of the Omicron variant prompted China's worst outbreak since the virus first emerged in the country in late 2019. China is wedded to a zero-Covid strategy of hard lockdowns, mass testing and long quarantine periods to wipe out clusters. — AFP

Russians capture half of key Ukraine city

KIEV/MOSCOW: The humanitarian crisis in Severodonetsk, which has been the scene of weeks of fighting, is growing more dire by the day, officials said on Tuesday, as Russia intensified its efforts to capture the key eastern Ukrainian city.

"We fear that up to 12,000 civilians remain caught in the crossfire in the city, without sufficient access to water, food, medicine or electricity", Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), said in a statement.

The twin cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, located just across the river, were home to 380,000 people before the war. Severodonetsk, in particular, has been devastated by Russian aerial and artillery bombardments.

Some 90 per cent of homes have been damaged and more than two-thirds totally destroyed, according to President Volodymyr Zelensky. The NRC said it, along with local partners, distributed food and hygiene items to civilians remaining in the area last week, but that the escalating fighting now made such deliveries impossible.

The continuous shelling was forcing civilians to seek refuge in bomb shelters and basements, while there were few escape routes left out of the city, Egeland said.

"We cannot save lives under the hail of grenades", he said. Kiev said on Tuesday that the battle



An explosion in the city of Severodonetsk during heavy fighting between Ukrainian and Russian troops at eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on the 96th day of the Russian attack on Ukraine. — AFP

Pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk region have seized several merchant cargo ships docked in the port of Mariupol

for control of Severodonetsk has entered its decisive phase as Russian forces focused on outlying areas of the city.

Severodonetsk is the largest city in the Donbass region still under

Ukrainian control, but Kiev's grip appears to be loosening.

Leonid Pasechnik, the head of pro-Russian separatists forces in the Luhansk region, was quoted by Russia's TASS news agency as saying that one-third of the city was under their control. The BBC quoted Oleksandr Stryuk, the head of the city's administration, as telling Ukrainian TV: "The frontline has cut the city into two halves, but the city is still defending (itself), the city is still Ukrainian." Further Russian ground assaults were reported from the region of Bakhmut to

the west, with Russian forces attacking the villages of Zolote, Komyshevukha, Berestove, Pokrovske and Dolomitne.

The attacks around Bakhmut were apparently intended to cut off Severodonetsk and Lysychansk from supply lines. Russia has been aiming to encircle Ukrainian forces for days now.

Meanwhile, pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine said they have seized several merchant cargo ships docked in the port of Mariupol.

"Some of the ships will come

under the jurisdiction of the Donetsk People's Republic", separatist leader Denis Pushilin said on Tuesday, according to the Interfax news agency. The ships would be renamed and become part of an emerging merchant fleet operated by the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic."

Before the war, Mariupol was Ukraine's largest port city on the Sea of Azov, with a population of more than 400,000, and also a centre of the steel industry. It has now been 90 per cent destroyed by months of Russian bombardment.

According to Pushilin, mines and other explosive devices that were placed in the approach canals and waterways of the port have been totally cleared.

The first ship to leave the city since Russia took control was now headed to the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. It was carrying 2,500 tonnes of metal, Pushilin said.

Ukraine calls the shipment of metal "looting", saying Moscow and its allied separatists were stealing strategically important goods. As much as 500,000 tonnes of grain from occupied territories in Ukraine are also said to have been shipped to Russia.

Elsewhere in Mariupol, the Russian military said it found the bodies of 152 Ukrainian fighters in the underground bunkers of the Azovstal steelworks it captured earlier this month after a protracted siege. — dpa

Monkeypox cases 'could amplify' during festival season, says WHO

LONDON: The outbreak of monkeypox cases in Europe could be "amplified" during the festival season in the summer, health officials have said. Many of the cases in the current outbreak have been linked to "large events or parties", according to the European office of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The regional arm of the global health body said Europe is at the 'epicentre' of the "largest and most geographically widespread monkeypox outbreak ever reported" outside of western and central Africa. It comes as British health officials confirmed the number of cases in Britain has risen to 190.

The recent surge in cases in Europe has occurred in "the context of the recent lifting of pandemic restrictions on international travel and events", the WHO said. It warned that the potential for further cases in Europe and elsewhere over the summer is "high."

WHO Europe Regional Director Hans Henri Kluge said in a statement: "The WHO European region remains at the epicentre of the largest and most geographically widespread monkeypox outbreak ever reported outside of endemic areas in western and central Africa."

"Even as new patients present everyday, investigations into past cases show that the outbreak in our region was certainly under way as early as mid-April."

He added: "Based on the case reports to date, this outbreak is currently being transmitted through social networks

connected largely through sexual activity, primarily involving men who have with men.

"Many — but not all cases — report fleeting and/or multiple partners, sometimes associated with large events or parties."

"Rapid, amplified transmission has occurred in the context of the recent lifting of pandemic restrictions on international travel and events."

"The potential for further transmission in Europe and elsewhere over the summer is high. "Monkeypox has already spread against the backdrop of several mass gatherings in the region."

"Over the coming months, many of the dozens of festivals and large parties planned provide further contexts where amplification may occur."

"But they also provide powerful opportunities to engage with young, sexually active and globally mobile persons to raise awareness and strengthen individual and protection."

He said that responding to the outbreak will not require the same measures needed for the Covid-19 pandemic, but he warned that it is not yet known whether it will be possible to contain the spread of the virus completely. — dpa



Lebanon re-elects Berri as speaker for seventh term



Lebanon's parliament speaker Nabih Berri presides over the first session of the newly-elected assembly at its headquarters in Beirut. — AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese lawmakers re-elected Nabih Berri as parliament speaker on Tuesday for a seventh consecutive term, cementing his reputation as an immovable centrepiece of the country's political landscape.

Berri's candidacy went largely unchallenged but the 84-year-old clinched only the bare minimum number of votes needed for a win — one of his lowest counts since he first rose to the helm of parliament 30 years ago.

Some lawmakers spoil their ballots by writing slogans blaming the ruling class that Berri embodies for the successive crises that have hit Lebanon, from the 2020 Beirut port explosion to political assassinations and an ongoing economic meltdown.

"I will put the insults behind

me... and approach blank ballots with a blank heart", Berri said after his victory, in one of his trademark quips. He said he would extend his hand to all lawmakers so that, together, they can streamline overdue reforms and facilitate the appointment of a prime minister and a new president.

"The Lebanese, and the rest of world, are looking to you as a beacon of hope, possibly the only one", Berri told lawmakers. "We all live if Lebanon lives." Aged 84, the warlord-turned-politician is one of the longest-serving chiefs of any parliament in the world.

An ally of the powerful Hizbullah, Berri has weathered decades of turbulence and shifting political tides, including the current economic crisis

and a 2019 protest movement demanding wholesale political reform.

Even after parliamentary elections in May yielded modest but unprecedented gains for independent candidates, Berri's position remained largely unchallenged.

He clinched a new four-year term during parliament's opening session on Tuesday with the votes of just 65 of parliament's 128 members.

That was down from the 98 votes he secured in 2018. Opponents spoil their ballots with a variety of political slogans. "Justice for the victims of the Beirut blast", read one ballot, referring to a 2020 explosion at the capital's port that killed more than 200 people. — AFP

SME – Small business is big business



Dr Anchan C K

The writer is an international advisor

According World Bank estimation 600 million jobs will be needed by 2030 to absorb the growing global workforce, which makes SME development a high priority for many governments around the world.

In emerging markets, most formal jobs are generated by SMEs, which create 7 out of 10 jobs.

SMEs are responsible for introducing most of today’s products and services on the markets and are typically much better at identifying and adopting new trends than larger, established corporations. Small businesses

are vital to the success of the economy. Not only as they provide the success stories of the future, but also because they meet local needs namely hairdresser, financial consultant and emergency plumber.

They serve the requirements of larger businesses namely for photography services, printed stationery, catering and routine maintenance. Of course, you don’t have to set up your own enterprise to be enterprising.

Small businesses tend to attract talent who invent new products or implement new solutions for existing ideas. Larger businesses also

SMEs ARE THE BUSINESSES THAT ARE GENERATING GROWTH, CREATING JOBS, GROWING FASTER AND INNOVATING MORE

often benefit from small businesses within the same local community, as many large corporations depend on small businesses for the completion of various business

functions through outsourcing. Small business is – quite frankly – big business. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of the world’s businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Do not be surprised. SMEs are, on average, the businesses that are generating growth, creating jobs, growing faster and innovating more. But most of all, they are a good deal less complicated (structurally) and more efficient and flexible than are large firms SMEs have diverse needs, they need support. Private-sector companies, for instance, can not only lend their expertise to

SMEs by acting as advisers; they can also potentially provide them with access to larger clients and investors and help them build capacity. Small businesses do not always stay small. Large corporations, such as Microsoft, Nike, KFC, Toyota and many others started off as small businesses that grew to become major players in the national and international marketplace.

Many computer-industry leaders began small working on hand-assembled machines out of their garages. Microsoft is a prime example of how a small business idea can change the world.

Trash of the rich becomes lifeline for the poor

OPHELIE LAMARD

They appear at nightfall, dragging heavy carts from dustbin to dustbin in the affluent northern suburbs of the Colombian capital Bogota.

Informal recyclers, they rifle through the trash of the rich looking for waste plastic, glass bottles and cardboard they can sell for a handful of pesos.

It is back-breaking work for little reward, but a salvation for thousands in a country where one in eight city dwellers is unemployed, and the poverty rate approaches 40 per cent. “This life is hard, but it is my only option to survive,” Jesus Maria Perez, 52, said.

Men, women and even children: these waste pickers are the face of the misery that candidate after candidate for Sunday’s first round of presidential elections has vowed to eradicate.

Many, Perez included, are among the estimated 1.8 million migrants to have fled neighbouring Venezuela in search of a better life in Colombia -- Latin America’s fourth-largest economy but one of the world’s most unequal.

In 2020, according to the Bogota city council, 25,000 of the capital’s eight million inhabitants worked as informal rubbish recyclers.

On average, each earns between 12,000 and 18,000 pesos (\$3 to \$4.50) daily for their efforts, according to Alvaro Nocua of the “Give Me Your Hand” association set up to help this community.

For Perez, who used to be a cook in Venezuela, it is a struggle to meet his daily goal of 40,000 pesos — about \$10 — to cover his one meal a day, a bed for the night and parking for his wooden cart.

He has no horse or donkey to pull the heavy burden: the Bogota municipality banned the practice eight years ago to combat animal abuse.

And as few can afford a self-propelled vehicle, it is people who do the heavy lifting, pulling their carts for kilometres everyday. Whole families take part in the endeavour; the parents wading through the garbage as little ones wait in the cart, playing among the rubbish.

Bogota produces nearly 7,500 tonnes of waste everyday, of which as much as 16 per cent, municipal data shows, is recycled by people like Perez.

Nearly 80 per cent of Colombian households did not recycle or even separate their waste at home, according to 2019 figures.

Martha Munoz, 45, runs a small recycling station where she buys waste from the informal collectors before reselling it to one of 15 large centres in Bogota.

“Many of those who come here live on the street; this allows them to have a small income,” she said.

Munoz said she raised her seven children with her recycling income — one is a lawyer today and another an engineer. Perez’s expectations are shorter term.

On the day we met him, he had managed to earn only 25,000 pesos, just over half of what he needs.

—AFP

As Ukraine fights, does the EU owe it membership?



Steven Erlanger

The writer is an American journalist who has reported from more than 120 countries

With Ukraine defending European values and security against a Russian assault, what obligation does the European Union and Nato have toward Ukraine?

The moral answer may be obvious, as European and American governments vow support for Kyiv and are pouring money and arms into Ukraine.

But the practical answers are complicated, as ever, and are dividing Europe. Defying expectations, the EU has provided significant military aid to Ukraine and inflicted enormous sanctions on Russia, acting with speed and authority.

But now it is confronting a more difficult problem: how to bind vulnerable countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to Europe in a way that helps them and does not create a further security risk down the road.

It is a question that will hang over a summit meeting of EU leaders, and one made more urgent by Ukraine’s demand for fast-track accession talks to join the bloc, which may not be decided before another meeting in late June.

Despite pressure to fast-track Ukraine, full membership for it or the other countries on Europe’s periphery in either Nato or the EU is unlikely for many years. But European leaders have already begun discussing ways to slowly integrate them and protect them. French President Emmanuel

FULL MEMBERSHIP FOR UKRAINE OR OTHER COUNTRIES ON EUROPE’S PERIPHERY IN EITHER NATO OR THE EU IS UNLIKELY FOR MANY YEARS

Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi have in recent weeks both talked of a new confederation with the EU, as opposed to the old notion of a core group and a periphery, or a “two-speed Europe,” which newer members reject as creating a second-class status.

In his speech on “Europe Day,” May 9, to the European Parliament, Macron floated a more formed, if still vague, proposal for a new kind of arrangement.

“The war in Ukraine and the legitimate aspiration of its people, just like that of Moldova and Georgia, to join the European Union encourages us to rethink our geography and the organisation of our continent,” he said.

Macron offered a sweeping vision of a new European Political Community — an outer circle of European states, including Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Britain — that would be linked

to the EU but not be part of it. Such a wider circle of European states would allow Brussels to bring vulnerable countries along Russia’s border into the European fold more rapidly than full EU membership, which “would in reality take several years, and most likely several decades,” Macron said.

Such a “political community” would, he said, “allow democratic European countries that believe in our core values a new space for political cooperation on security, energy, transport, infrastructure investment and free movement of people, especially our young people.”

The idea of concentric rings or “tiers” of European states, of a “multispeed Europe,” has been suggested several times before, including by then-French President François Mitterrand in 1989.

Then, though, the idea included Russia; it went nowhere.

Macron has brought it up before. But now, with Russia on the march, it is the time to make it real, he said.

In late February, four days after the Russian attack, Ukraine formally applied to join the bloc, and in March, EU leaders “acknowledged the European aspirations and the European choice of Ukraine.”

But even if European leaders decide to open negotiations with Ukraine, the process will be long, despite support for immediate membership from countries such as Poland and the Baltic states.

— New York Times



Downtown Skopje, the capital of North Macedonia and Albania are the farthest along as full-fledged candidates for EU membership.

Plastic bags still continue to be an option!



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttivp

The writer is a journalist and author

Since the dawn of January 1, 2021, your trip to a supermarket in Oman has ended with two options either to take a bag with you or buy one at a small cost. This followed a decision by the Environment Authority banning single-use plastic shopping bags in the country. The ban applied to thin plastic bags from restaurants, supermarkets and retailers whether they are large and small. The order stipulates that violators face a fine starting from a minimum of RO 100 to a maximum of RO 2,000, which will double if the violation is repeated. The law in Oman forbids all the outlets from providing single-use plastic bags to customers, even if they sold it for a fee. Instead, stores can sell thicker-skinned bags.

Even as supermarkets and other outlets have adopted all kinds of seemingly sustainable swaps from paper to reusable alternatives, some of these options might not be eco-friendly after all.

Although the bags being used by many outlets are different from the ones we were used to seeing, they still look like plastic bags and continue to be an option at some stores. The single-use plastics, in a different form, remain a ubiquitous part of retail!

TRUE, THE DECISION HAS FORCED MANY OF US TO MAKE MINOR LIFESTYLE ADJUSTMENTS TO CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER ENVIRONMENT BY LIMITING THE USE OF PLASTIC BAGS

and has pushed people to examine their plastic consumption habits.

True, the decision has forced many of us to make minor lifestyle adjustments to contribute to a better environment by limiting the use of plastic bags. With time, I believe many, including me, have become better eco-friendly citizens!

Often described as the world's number one consumer product, as well as the most ubiquitous, single-use plastic bags are among the world's most-banned product. The United Nations has so far counted 130 nations that have banned these bags as they pose "a serious threat to the well-being of humans and animals alike."

Every year, about eight million metric tonnes of it ends up in the ocean, where it can harm fish and wildlife, and, once it enters the food chain, threaten human health. Plastic can enter the food chain in many ways; for example, plastic is broken down and ends up in the ocean and marine animals we eat. Yet the ban on single-use bags is expected to spread around the globe, its effectiveness remains an unanswered question. Bag bans have spawned bans of other plastic products, including plates, cups, cutlery, straws and bottles, as part of an expanding effort to reduce single-use plastics, which make up about 40 per cent of the plastics manufactured worldwide.

But whether bans can significantly reduce plastic waste remains to be seen, especially when considering that plastic production is forecast to double by 2040, and may account for 20 per cent of the world's oil production by 2050.

By enacting plastic bag bans at the governmental level, it is not left up to average citizens to shoulder the weight of environmental damage from plastic pollution. Producers of plastic products would need to adjust their production to replace hard to recycle soft-film plastic and start producing sturdier reusable bag alternatives or at least not producing bags using virgin plastic.

As plastic production has doubled in recent years and is expected to continue to increase, the world urgently needs to reduce its use of single-use plastic bags. Very few countries regulate the entire lifecycle of plastic bags from its manufacturing and production, use and distribution, to trade and disposal. What the governments must remember while banning single-use plastic bags is in terms of reducing it as a source, otherwise it is not going to change the world! And the fact is that the new types of plastic packaging continue to pile up in our homes and later filling the trash bins!



THE VICTIMS

A combination of pictures shows photos of 19 children and 2 teachers who died in the mass shooting are displayed at a makeshift memorial at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Grieving families held the first funerals on Tuesday for the victims one week after a school massacre. – AFP

The decline and fall of ‘Davos Man’



Mark Leonard

The writer is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, is the author of The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict (Bantam Press, 2021)

“Davos Man” has had a grim 14 years. The late Harvard University political scientist Samuel P Huntington popularised the term in 2004 to describe a new overclass of evangelists for globalisation. Davos Man, he claimed, wanted to see national borders disappear and the logic of politics superseded by that of the market.

But since the 2008 global financial crisis, politics has increasingly trumped economics, a trend that reached its apotheosis in 2016 with Donald Trump’s election in the United States and the Brexit referendum. Both events represented a backlash against Davos Man’s vision of a frictionless world governed (not run) as efficiently as possible by “multi-stakeholder processes.”

Moreover, at this year’s annual gathering in Davos, attendees had to confront an even bigger challenge than national politics:

The return of geopolitics. The World Economic Forum’s theme was “History at a Turning Point”, in recognition of the fact that we have reached the end of the “end of history.”

Although the WEF’s ethos is to promote cooperation in the pursuit of “one world”, the new agenda is necessarily focused on conflict and division.

Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war of aggression on Ukraine obviously loomed large at this year’s meeting. To open the event, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky — appearing virtually in his now familiar military fatigues — spoke of a world split along the fault lines of fundamental values. And Russia House, the facility where Russian delegations hosted parties and networking events in years past, was transformed by Ukrainian activists and donors into the Russian War Crimes House, with an exhibition calling attention to Russian war in Ukraine.

After browsing this year’s programme, it soon became clear that not a single aspect of globalisation has been spared from the fallout of new geopolitical conflicts — between Russia and the West, China and the West, China and its neighbours, and so forth. Instead of

RUSSIA’S WAR IN UKRAINE LOOMED LARGE AT THIS YEAR’S ANNUAL WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM MEETING IN DAVOS, WHERE POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LEADERS ONCE GATHERED TO CELEBRATE GLOBALISATION AND PURSUE MORE OF IT. NOW, THE WORLD HAS ENTERED A NEW PHASE OF HISTORY IN WHICH GEOPOLITICS WILL PREDOMINATE

panels discussing free-trade agreements, there were multiple sessions on economic warfare.

Political and business leaders grappled with the fact that we now live in a world where central-bank reserves can be confiscated, commercial banks can be summarily disconnected from the SWIFT international payments system and private assets can potentially be seized to pay for a country’s reconstruction.

The sessions on climate change, meanwhile, looked beyond the Paris climate agreement’s decarbonisation targets to focus on the links between the war in Ukraine, the current global energy crisis, food shortages and inflation. For example, German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck held a panel with India’s petroleum and gas minister and the CEO of an oil company to discuss whether Europe and India can end their use of Russian oil and gas without setting back their economic goals.

A panel on migration dealt not with the question of skills training — as would have been the case in previous years — but rather with the weaponisation of refugees. As a Ukrainian MP warned, Putin is aiming to “turn migration into a ‘hybrid war 2.0’, in the hope that driving millions of Ukrainians from their homes

could lead to the collapse of Europe.” At a panel on the future of technology, a senior Japanese policymaker discussed how geopolitics is transforming the relationship between the market and the state. In the old days, innovations like the Internet were initially developed by the state and then picked up by private companies. But today, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, drones and other technologies are being developed by the private sector and then weaponised by the state. Export controls and restrictions on technology transfers thus have become essential elements of national security.

But the most anxious of all sessions were those focusing on the fear of a new cold war, which would spell the end of the globalised world. Many leaders from outside Europe and North America sympathised with Ukraine but refused to see the war as a global conflict about values. They worried that Putin’s war, and the countermeasures taken against Russia, would accelerate the fragmentation of an already divided world through rising energy prices, mass starvation and the politicisation of markets.

Moreover, they did not buy into the notion, heavily promoted by the Biden administration, that we are in a battle between democracy and autocracy. That framing, they feared, would lead to a world even more deeply divided along ideological lines. Representatives from the Middle East, Africa and Asia repeatedly expressed fears of having to choose between China and America, describing that prospect as an “existential threat.”

This year’s Davos gathering was totally unrecognisable from the conference I started attending 15 years ago. It is now clear that while Davos Man was not interested in geopolitics, geopolitics has become very interested in him. The weaponisation of interdependence has reshaped every aspect of his life. The geopolitical takeover of globalisation is almost complete, and its primacy will almost certainly outlast the war in Ukraine. © Project Syndicate 2021



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky - appearing virtually in his now familiar military fatigues - spoke of a world split along the fault lines of fundamental values.

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Oman earn 33 medals as GCC Games conclude

HOSTS KUWAIT EMERGE OVERALL CHAMPIONS

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 31

Oman national teams concluded their participation in the third GCC Games in Kuwait with 33 medals on Tuesday.

Oman won 12 gold, five silver and 16 bronze medals in the May 16 to 31 Games to end sixth and last in the medals tally.

Hosts Kuwait clinched the overall championship with 35 gold and total 94 medals. Bahrain were second with 20 gold and total 63 medals, while the UAE claimed third with 18 gold and total 50 medals. Saudi Arabia were fourth with 16 gold and total 66 medals and Qatar finished fifth with 15 gold and total 50 medals.

However, Oman send the least number of athletes for the Games. Oman competed in only 9 out of 16 games with a contingent of 130 men and women athletes.

Hosts Kuwait participated with 394 athletes and Bahrain participated with 360 athletes and they participated in all 16 games individually and team wise.

The highlights of Oman medals were the seven gold and two bronze won by the shooting team. The gold medals were achieved by Salim bin Ali al Naabi in the 10m air rifle category, Moaz bin Darwish al Balushi (25m rapid pistol) and Issam bin Badr al Balushi in the 50m rifle competition. Oman won team gold in the 10m air pistol competition. The team consisted Saif al Shukaili, Suleiman al Rahbi and Ismail al Abri. Oman clinched gold in the 50m rifle competition by the team consisting of Issam al Balushi, Dilham al Harrasi and Ali al Saeedi. The gold-winning Oman team in 10m air rifle included Issam al Balushi, Mohammed al Hajri and Salim al Naabi. Also, Oman bagged the gold in 25m rapid pistol with shooters Moaz al Balushi, Sultan al Hajri and Jamal al Hatali. The bronze medals came through Suleiman bin Abdullah al Rahbi in 10m air pistol and Issam bin Badr al Balushi in the 10m air rifle competition.

Oman women's padel team

MEDALS TABLE				
RANK	COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE, TOTAL
1.	Kuwait	35	28	31 94
2.	Bahrain	20	22	21 63
3.	UAE	18	16	16 50
4.	Saudi Arabia	16	22	28 66
5.	Qatar	15	20	15 50
6.	Oman	12	5	16 33

claimed the inaugural padel gold in the GCC Games.

In the athletics competitions, Oman men's and women's team achieved 11 medals, including 4 gold, 3 silver and 4 bronze. The women's team achieved three gold medals, through Mazoon al Alawi in the 100m race, Heba al Asmi in the javelin throwing competition, and Hana al Tawqi in the hammer throw competition.

Mazoon al Alawi won the silver in the 100m hurdles, and Heba al Asmi won the bronze medal in the high jump competition.

Salim al Yaroubi won the men's long jump gold. Salim al Rawahi won a silver in the triple jump. Other men's athletics medals were three bronze medals achieved by Salim al Yaroubi in triple jump, Barakat al Harthy in 100m race and Khalfan al Jabri in 110m hurdles.

In swimming, Oman won two silver and three bronze medals. The silver medals were won by Issa al Adawi in the 800m freestyle and 400m freestyle. The bronze medals came through Issa al Adawi (200m freestyle), Oman team in 4x100m freestyle relay and in the 4x200 metres freestyle relay.

Oman national electronic team won two bronze medals. Sarah al Amri won the first bronze in 'Fifa 22' game and the team consisting of Saleh al Ghassani and Fahd al Hasani won the second bronze medal.

Oman volleyball team achieved the bronze medal for the third time in GCC Games.

The karate team concluded their participation by winning three bronze medals. Mohammed al Hajri (55 kg), Saeed al Shabibi (60 kg) and Mohammed al Kindi (75 kg) were the medal winners for Oman.





Pandya tipped as future India captain after IPL triumph

AHMEDABAD, India: All-rounder Hardik Pandya is being tipped as a future India captain after leading an unfancied debut team to victory in the world's most valuable cricket tournament.

Pandya's Gujarat Titans thrashed Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets in the Indian Premier League final on Sunday, with the skipper taking three wickets and scoring 34 runs in front of nearly 105,000 fans in the world's biggest cricket stadium.

It was the culmination of an extraordinary season that began with pundits lashing the side's purchases in the player auction, questioning Pandya's appointment as captain and predicting a dire outcome for the expansion franchise's first season.

But the 28-year-old — a flamboyant cricketer who loves his tattoos and expensive watches, and was once suspended for sexist comments on a TV show — has proved a revelation in his first leadership role.

Commentators have lauded the precision of his decision-making and field-setting in the Twenty20 format.

In the wake of the Titans' triumph at their home ground in Ahmedabad, former India captain Sunil Gavaskar said

Pandya would be a worthy choice to follow in his footsteps.

"When you have leadership qualities, it automatically opens the door for honours at the national level to be able to captain the Indian national team in the near future," the batting great said. "The way he has led the team, the way he has got them together, the way he has got them to gel together means he has got leadership qualities," he told Star Sports.

Pundits have lauded the precision of his decision-making and field-setting in the T20 format

FIRST TASTE
A hard-hitting middle-order batsman and a fast bowler, Pandya has played 11 Tests, 63 ODIs and 54 T20 matches for India.

A back injury kept him out after the T20 World Cup last year but he proved his fitness with 487 runs and eight wickets in 15 IPL matches to earn a recall for the five-match Twenty20 series against South Africa beginning on June 9. He could be given his first taste of national leadership in two T20s in Ireland in June, according to media reports.

Pandya said he had "always enjoyed responsibility" and "it kind of gets the best out of me".

His next goal, he told reporters after the IPL victory, was "absolutely to win the World Cup for India no matter what happens."

— AFP

GAUFF, TREVISAN MAKE FIRST GRAND SLAM SEMIS

PARIS: Coco Gauff reached her first Grand Slam semifinal at the French Open on Tuesday when she defeated fellow American Sloane Stephens.

Gauff, 18 years old and ranked 23 in the world, triumphed 7-5, 6-2.

She will face Italy's 59th-ranked Martina Trevisan for a place in Saturday's championship match.

Victory avenged her defeat to Stephens at the US Open and helped erase the memory of her quarterfinal defeat last year to eventual champion Barbora Krejickova in Paris.

"I feel so happy," said Gauff. "Last year was a tough loss for me but I believe that match made me stronger."

"Last time I played Sloane I lost. Today was different. I stayed mentally strong as she is the kind of player who can make shots others can't do."

On Tuesday, Gauff broke in the second game of the match to lead 3-0 before 2018 runner-up Stephens levelled with a break and hold for 5-5.

However, clean, precise hitting allowed Gauff to dominate the 12th game to clinch the opener.

Stephens, playing in her first Slam quarterfinal in three years, and Gauff traded breaks at the start of the second set before the teenager again pounced for 3-1.

Gauff held for 5-1, was broken for 5-2 before Stephens dropped serve for the fourth time in the set to hand her compatriot victory.

Gauff was junior champion at Roland Garros in 2018 and then burst into the public consciousness when just 15, she became the youngest woman to qualify for Wimbledon.

Her profile rocketed when she went all the way to the fourth round at the All England Club, knocking out Venus Williams on the way.

While in the French capital, Gauff has graduated high school, marking the occasion on Instagram with a family photo in front of the Eiffel Tower.

"Getting my diploma meant a lot to me," she said on Tuesday.



Coco Gauff of the US reacts after winning against US' Sloane Stephens. — AFP



Italy's Martina Trevisan celebrates after victory over Canada's Leylah Fernandez.

TREVISAN IN LAST FOUR

Earlier, Trevisan reached her first Grand Slam semifinal with victory over Canada's Leylah Fernandez. World number 59 Trevisan downed the 17th seeded Canadian, a fellow left-hander, 6-2, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

Trevisan was a shock quarterfinalist at Roland Garros as a qualifier in 2020.

Despite her lowly ranking this year, she returned to the tournament with a maiden WTA title under her belt in Rabat and went into Tuesday's tie on a nine-

match winning streak.

She made that 10 when she claimed victory on a second match point having wasted one in the second set with Fernandez left to rue her 44 unforced errors.

"I was very nervous on that first match point, I thought I was already in the semi-final," said Trevisan, the first Italian woman to make the last four since Sara Errani in 2013.

"That's normal so I readjusted. I came here from Rabat with a lot of energy. It was my first title and it was a very emotional moment

for me."

Trevisan, now guaranteed a place in the top 30 at least, said Grand Slam titles by fellow Italians Francesca Schiavone in Paris in 2010 and Flavia Pennetta at the 2015 US Open were her influences.

"The other quarterfinals take place on Wednesday when world number one Iga Swiatek looks for a 33rd successive win when she faces Jessica Pegula of the United States.

Daria Kasatkina and Veronika Kudermetova meet in the other quarterfinal. — AFP

Oman women's futsal team to train with Genoa FC

MUSCAT: Oman's women's futsal team has received an exclusive invitation to train and enhance its skills with Genoa FC in Italy, reflecting the Oman Football Association's (OFA) Board of Directors' resolve to strengthen partnerships that will advance opportunities for the national team.

The team is currently preparing for the West Asian Championship, and this invitation follows the visit from officials of Genoa FC to the Sultanate last March. During this time, representatives discussed cooperation opportunities across sports and culture, youth exchange programmes, women's sports development programmes and other sports-related programmes, in coordination with the Omani-Italian Friendship Association and the



Embassy of Italy in the Sultanate of Oman. This invitation to host the women's team camp is an outcome of this visit and the efforts of the OFA to promote the national sports.

The Italian Serie A club will provide training grounds and professional training tools and in addition to organising friendly matches, it will support technical aspects of the women's

national team to ensure optimal preparation for the next stage of its development.

The women's futsal team has also received financial support for this training opportunity from Al

Mouj Muscat. This reflects Oman's premier lifestyle destination's ongoing commitment to social responsibility, especially with regard to developing youth through sports. Sport a key

theme for Al Mouj as it continues to contribute to sustainability and a positive social impact in the Sultanate of Oman.

The OFA expressed its sincere thanks and appreciation for the efforts of the Omani-Italian Friendship Association for its coordination efforts. Its thanks also go to Federica Favi, Italian Ambassador to Oman, and her team for supporting this opportunity along with other various initiatives in the field of cultural and sports exchange between Oman and Italy.

The OFA is deeply grateful for the support provided by Al Mouj Muscat, ensuring that the team will compete in the upcoming tournament. The organisation also appreciated the invitation extended by Genoa FC, and is confident that this cooperation will yield positive mutual results.

El Moutaraji powers Wydad to CAF title

CASABLANCA, MOROCCO: Zouhair el Moutaraji was the two-goal star as Wydad Casablanca defeated Egyptian outfit Al Ahly 2-0 on Monday to win the CAF Champions League and complete a Moroccan club double in Africa this season.

Renaissance Berkane won the second-tier CAF Confederation Cup on May 20 and will face Wydad for the CAF Super Cup.

Wydad coach Walid Regragui promoted El Moutaraji from the bench for the title decider and it proved a masterstroke as he netted after 15 minutes with a brilliant strike and again on 48 minutes in Casablanca.

It was the third time Wydad have conquered Africa in the premier competition, lifting the trophy in 1992 and 2017 as well, and the second triumph also came against Ahly.

Record 10-time champions Ahly, seeking a record third straight title, had plenty of possession but were undone by clinical finishing.

It was also a disappointing outcome for South Africa-born Ahly coach Pitso Mosimane, who had hoped to become the first coach to win the premier African club competition three consecutive times.

Both Wydad and Ahly showed one change to the sides that drew semifinal second legs against Petro Luanda of Angola and Entente Setif of Algeria respectively to reach the final.

France-born Regragui preferred El Moutaraji to Badie Aouk in midfield, with the latter among nine substitutes.

A groin injury sidelined Ahly centre-back Mohamed Abdelmonem and Mosimane promoted another Egyptian international, experienced Ayman Ashraf. Close to 40,000 singing, dancing, cheering, flag-waving Wydad supporters greeted the teams as they entered the pitch, with Fifa President Gianni Infantino among those looking on.

Ahly were allocated 10,000 tickets, but only a couple of thousand supporters flew across north Africa to attend the highlight of the club season.

CONTROVERSIAL VENUE
The Stade Mohammed V —



home ground of Wydad — was a controversial choice of venue with Ahly making a failed appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) to have it changed to a neutral one.

Morocco were the lone bidders to host the final after Senegal withdrew, and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) said the rules did not permit a change.

Wydad attacked from the kick-off and after rattling the woodwork, went ahead as El Moutaraji justified his promotion.

Earlier, Congo Brazzaville-born Guy Mbenza was foiled by the crossbar after his shot from just outside the box beat Ahly captain and goalkeeper Mohamed



Wydad's forward Zouhair el Moutaraji (L) celebrates with team-mates after scoring during the CAF Champions League final between Egypt's Al Ahly and Morocco's Wydad AC in the Moroccan city of Casablanca. — AFP

el Shenawy. But the Moroccans went ahead four minutes later as El Moutaraji unleashed a swerving thunderbolt which flew over El Shenawy and into the net.

Ahly clawed their way back into the match and came close to levelling midway through the half when a Yasser Ibrahim header off a corner was just too high.

Ahly were dangerous from set pieces and Hussein el Shahat nodded narrowly wide off another corner.

The visitors came close again with Wydad goalkeeper Ahmed Tagnaouti dashing from his goalmouth to head the ball clear as South African Percy Tau threatened to equalise.

Wydad doubled the lead early in the second half and once again El Moutaraji was the executioner, after a sweeping move.

His first shot from close range was parried by El Shenawy, but the Moroccan reacted quickest to push the rebound into the net.

Mosimane rang the changes, including introducing leading scorer Mohamed Sherif, but the Cairo club could not find a way through the Wydad defence.

Sherif came tantalisingly close to adding to his six Champions League goals this season with eight minutes remaining, but Tagnaouti parried his close-range poke and the ball was hastily cleared. — AFP

WC-bound France set to defend Nations League crown

PARIS: Real Madrid's victory in the Champions League final on Saturday did not quite bring the curtain down on the football season in Europe, with the action continuing into June as France begin their defence of the Uefa Nations League title.

The decision to move the World Cup in Qatar to the end of the year could have provided an opportunity for players to have an extended off-season break, but instead international action will go on until the middle of the month with teams playing up to four matches each.

Concerns about burnout are already high up the agenda, with global players' union FIFPro last week wounding the alarm and saying that professionals should not play more than 55 matches in a season.

Liverpool and Scotland defender Andy Robertson has already played that number before

joining up with his country for Wednesday's World Cup qualifying play-off against Ukraine.

If Scotland win that, they will face Wales in Cardiff on Sunday for a place in Qatar, but they are still due to play three more Nations League matches after that, two against Armenia and one versus the Republic of Ireland in Group B1. "It's a lot after an intense season for everyone," Robertson said recently. "You are asking boys to have eight or nine days' holiday, which I don't think is fair."

Fresh from winning the Champions League, Karim Benzema joins up with the France squad as they prepare to play four matches in League A, Group 1.

The World Cup holders entertain Denmark on Friday before a double-header against Croatia either side of a trip to Austria. Didier Deschamps' side will be preparing for their defence of the World Cup but they are also

defending the Nations League crown they won last October, when they defeated Spain in the final in Milan. Benzema scored in that game having recently returned to the international fold after an exile of over five years.

The favourite to win this year's Ballon d'Or, his relationship with Kylian Mbappe in the French attack will be closely monitored.

European champions Italy, Germany and England are all together in Group A3 along with Hungary, and Gareth Southgate's team will play matches away to Germany in Munich and at home to Italy in Wolverhampton.

The latter match, on June 11, will be behind closed doors as a punishment after the fan unrest that marred last year's European Championship final at Wembley.

Either side of those matches England play two games against Hungary, the first of which will be in Budapest on Saturday. — AFP

Notable Uefa Nations League matches this week (kick-offs 1845 GMT unless stated)

Wednesday
Group A4
Poland v Wales (1600)

Thursday
Group A2
Spain v Portugal
Czech Republic v Switzerland

Friday
Group A1
France v Denmark
Croatia v Austria
Group A4
Belgium v Netherlands

Saturday
Group A3
Hungary v England (1600)
Italy v Germany

Sunday
Group A2
Portugal v Switzerland
Czech Republic v Spain



France's head coach Didier Deschamps (L) chats with France's forward Kylian Mbappe during a training session in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines as part of the team's preparation for the upcoming Uefa Nations League. — AFP

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QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 31

Well-known Omani ceramics manufacturer Al Maha Ceramics Company SAOG has announced in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that it has signed a Sales & Purchase Agreement (SPA) to acquire 45 per cent of Al Hael Ceramics Company LLC — one of the largest companies of its kind in the Middle East.

Under the deal, Al Maha Ceramics will manage and operate Al Hael's ceramics plant for a term of five years. Additionally, Al Maha will use its brand for Al Hael products during this period.

The production capacity of Al Hael's factory is 55 thousand square metres per day of ceramics and porcelain tiles. The factory can also produce large sizes of porcelain plates, and it is hoped that the factory's production will cover a large percentage of the local market's need of high-quality ceramic and porcelain tiles.

Al Hael's factory, one of the largest in the Middle East, is equipped with the latest Italian technologies in tiles manufacture from SACMI.

Masoud bin Humaid al Harthy, Chairman — Al Maha Ceramics, said: “We would like to point out that the completion of the acquisition process is subject to approval of the competent authorities.

The Company shall keep the shareholders apprised of further developments concerning the purchase of Al Hael Ceramics shares through further disclosures.”

Central Bank Digital Currency, Open Banking and Digital Onboarding on anvil in Oman

Key trend: Strong uptake of digital payment options

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has announced that it has embarked on a number of far-reaching initiatives that will add new momentum to the pace of digitalisation under way in the nation's banking and financial services industry.

CBO Executive President Tahir bin Salim al Amri said the initiatives will enable the roll-out of Central Bank Digital Currency, Open Banking and Digital Onboarding in the Sultanate of Oman.

He made the announcement while delivering the keynote address at the New Age Banking Summit 2022, which was held at Al Bustan Palace — A Ritz Carlton Hotel Muscat on Tuesday, May 31, 2022. The daylong forum, organised by UMS Events, was hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani and supported by Oman Banks Association.

Experts describe Central Bank digital currencies (CBDCs) as digital tokens issued by a central bank that are pegged to the value of that country's fiat currency.

A number of advanced economies have already embraced CBDCs, while others are weighing plans to introduce such government-backed digital currencies as a means to implement monetary policies to provide fiscal stability and control inflation.



THE EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT CAUTIONED ABOUT THE GRAVE PERIL POSED BY CYBER ATTACKS ON THE COUNTRY'S BANKING AND FINANCIAL SECTOR, WARNING THAT THE THREAT NOT ONLY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO UNLEASH LOSSES FOR VICTIMS, BUT WORSE, IT COULD DAMAGE PUBLIC TRUST IN DIGITAL SERVICES.

Al Amri also recalled the CBO's recent efforts to enable the introduction of virtual currencies and fintech solutions as part of the sector's ongoing digitalisation strategy. He cited in this regard the apex bank's decision, announced last year, to set up a high-level task force to study the pros and cons of authorising the use of cryptocurrencies in the Sultanate of Oman.

Studies conducted by the task force, comprising members of the

financial sector regulator, will help the CBO firm up its policy response to the possible use of virtual assets in the country.

Also in the Central Bank's sights are plans to enable the introduction of Open Banking — an increasingly popular system under which banks open up their application programming interfaces (APIs) for third parties, chiefly fintech service providers, to develop new apps and services.

Thus, instead of competing with

fintechs, traditional banks partner with them to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving financial technology space. The Open Banking system has thrived in Europe and the United States, with some countries in the GCC granting licenses for the first Open Banking in their respective jurisdictions.

In his keynote address, the Executive President also revealed that a new banking law will be issued shortly.

Accredited to international standards and best central banking practices, the new law has been designed to support the evolving needs of the banking and financial services sector in the Sultanate of Oman, he said.

Al Amri also commended the

robust uptake of digital channels for making payments in the country. Point-of-Sale (PoS) transactions soared over 500 per cent to 115 million transactions in 2021, up from around 24 million transactions in 2017, he said.

Likewise, e-commerce transaction surged to 32 million last year, up from around 300,000 in 2017.

The Executive President cautioned about the grave peril posed by cyber attacks on the country's banking and financial sector, warning that the threat not only has the potential to unleash losses for victims, but worse, it could damage public trust in digital services.

In this regard, he stressed the need for continued investment in cybersecurity tools, alongside the suitable development of talent to employ these tools.

He also affirmed the Central Bank's pledge to be mindful of the importance of “speed” in the roll-out of regulations, licensing procedures and adoption of modernisation and technology.

In concluding, he urged the banking sector not to make technological advancement as a goal in itself, but as an enabler to achieve financial inclusion, improve customer experiences, boost efficiency of financial services and cater to the needs of the economy and the people.

Market stakeholders should also be wary of the potential impact of climate change on the future of banking and financial services, he added.

Port of Salalah ranked 2nd most efficient port globally

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 31

Port of Salalah climbed four positions from 6th place in the Container Ports Performance Index (CPPI) 2020 to 2nd place globally in the CPPI 2021 report published by the World Bank-S&P Global Market Intelligence.

It also achieved the #1 spot in the throughput category of large ports (above 4 million TEUs) In its analysis to determine the top 100 best performing container ports in the world, the World Bank-S&P Global Market Intelligence, performance time stamp data were captured for 164,500 port calls involving 257.4 million container moves at 826 container terminals in 443 ports worldwide, narrowing down to 371 ports based on data availability.

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing global pandemic, the



Port of Salalah not only finished 2021 with record breaking container volume of 4.5 million TEUs breaking its past year's record, but also achieved world-class efficiency.

The Port of Salalah's geographical advantage coupled with its growing connectivity as well as its world-class operations gives its customers an unparalleled competitive edge in a very competitive region.

Salalah's status as a transshipment hub is also important for the growth of the local economy in Dhofar as the importers and exporters benefit from the best in class connectivity the port offers to trade their products globally.

Having a highly efficient port also improves local business confidence and will therefore attract further investment including FDI.

Port of Salalah attributed this success and recognition to the commitment and continuous improvement mindset of the team, support from its customers, prompt services of the various authorities including the Marine Services, ROP Customs and the Ministry of Health authorities.

“Receiving this ranking is very significant and a great achievement as it's a measure and acknowledgement of how efficiently we handle our customers ships without delays. This is vital for a hub port as we play a key role in the global supply chain by keeping cargo flowing smoothly. Us being efficient means that schedules are protected and that goods are ultimately getting to end consumers on time.

In this regard, I would like to thank the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, APMT and ASYAD

Group for their support, which helped us achieve this success”, commented Mark Hardiman, CEO of Port of Salalah.

“I'm happy to see the strong efforts of the Port of Salalah team being recognised. This is the culmination of a 4-year transformation using lean tools through our Way of Working to safely drive efficiency for our customers. The results of which have been an approximate 20 per cent increase in productivity, a 50 per cent reduction in customer idle time and an NPS increase of 16 per cent (Net Promoter Score measuring the Customer Satisfaction).

Though we have seen significant progress, the journey continues as we commit to invest in our people, technology and process improvement to deliver for our customers in this competitive space”, commented Scott Selman, COO of Port of Salalah.

Bank Muscat continues its attractive offer on personal financing

MUSCAT: The availability and equality of opportunities to access financial services is of great importance in individuals to realise their dreams and life goals and for stronger and more sustainable economic growth and development of a nation's economy.

In line with its efforts to improve financial inclusion in the Sultanate of Oman and customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has announced the continued availability of reduced interest rates starting at just 4.75 per cent for select customer segments, who are not at present availing any financing facilities from the bank.

New customers can also avail the attractive offer by applying for financing facilities or transferring their existing financing to Bank Muscat.

Omani nationals in government and quasi government institutions



and selected private sector entities under Tier 1 companies are eligible for this special offer, which has attractive interest rates for financing up to RO 200,000.

Customers can also enjoy lower interest rates starting from

4 per cent on short term personal financing.

To take advantage of this offer, which is open till 30 June 2022, eligible customers may visit their nearest Bank Muscat branch and submit the required documents

including a salary assignment letter and ID card.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM.

Its range of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7.

The bank offers various financing options aligned to ever evolving customer needs, with the aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

Details of the financing options are available at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx> while general information on financing options can be accessed at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/default.aspx> or by calling 24795555.

Make the most of thrilling drives in the Kia Sonet SUV



MUSCAT: The Kia Sonet SUV is the perfect vehicle to fulfil tasks within the city or enjoying a quick getaway by the countryside. Loaded with impressive power, space, feature and more, the Sonet offers more than you wish for.

The Sonet is a 5-seater that is equipped with 1.5L Engine paired to a CVT Transmission and offers 17.5KmpL fuel average. Designed around the driver with a well laid-out, intuitive infotainment and cluster interface, the Sonet was built taking into consideration the end user's experience.

The Sonet comes with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay feature, Audio Remote Control, Bluetooth, USB charger. Harbours functional qualities in every inch of its ergonomic space.

The Sonet's attractive exterior is underlined by the body colour outside mirror, 2-tone bumper, power outside mirror, body colour door handles, side repeater lamps in outside mirror, 16" alloy wheels, chrome radiator grille, rear fog lamps, LED front fog lamps, roof rack, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lamps and more.

ahlibank wins excellence in corporate banking award

MUSCAT: ahlibank won the prestigious 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' award at the recently concluded Oman Banking & Finance Awards ceremony that was held on the sidelines of the high-profile New Age Banking Summit, at the Al Bustan Palace – A Ritz Carlton Hotel. Powered by Oman Economic Review (OER), the event awarded and felicitated top banking and financial institutions in Oman.

Having established its credentials as one of the fastest growing banks in the country, ahlibank topped its awards tally with the coveted 'Excellence in Corporate Banking' Award, setting a new benchmark in its Wholesale Banking segment. The award validates its customer-centric approach to banking and demonstrates its focused strategy to create and implement innovative banking products and services for the corporate segment.

Zaliya bint Lal Bakhsh al Balushiya – DGM –Corporate Banking, at ahlibank, accepted the award, on behalf of the Bank, from Tahir al Amri - Executive President of Central Bank of Oman. The 7th edition of New Age



Banking Summit had brought to the venue industry leaders from Oman and the GCC, showcasing fundamental and progressive developments that would impact the banking and financial sectors in the coming years.

Expressing pride and delight on winning the award, Zaliya al Balushi stated: "At the outset, I would like to thank Oman Banking and Finance Awards for recognising our meritorious performance in the corporate banking segment with the marquee of 'Excellence'."

Bank Nizwa wins best bank in mid-size banks and excellence in mobile banking awards

MUSCAT: In recognition of its efforts in driving digitalisation and enhancing customer experience, Bank Nizwa, the leading and the most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, was awarded the 'Best Bank in Mid-Size Banks' and also received the 'Excellence in Mobile Banking' award at the New Age Banking Summit (NABS) 2022 held on the May 31, 2022 at Al Bustan Palace – a Ritz Carlton Hotel.

Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker Tahir al Amri, Executive President, Central Bank of Oman, bestowed the accolade to Bank Nizwa. Bank Nizwa participated as the Strategic Partner of NABS, wherein the Bank's IT and Operations General Manager, Mujahid al Zadjali contributed as a panelist, deliberating the topic 'The Future of Banking and Financial Services'.

During the panel discussion, participants shed light on future prospects, digital developments and innovations that will shape customer behaviours, business models and the long-term structure of the financial services industry.

"We are thrilled to be commended for our efforts and winning these prestigious accolades at NABS 2022 is yet another



step forward for the bank as we continue to focus on our digital transformation, reaping the fruits of our hard work and dedication as well as aligning ourselves with the Sultanate's ongoing digitalisation agenda," commented Mujahid al Zadjali, General Manager of IT and Operations on the win.

"Our aim is to continually improve our Digital services portfolio, which is why the digital app was meticulously designed. The commitment we have to the future of financial services and the rapid digitisation of the sector indicates

that we constantly work to incorporate the latest technological upgrades into our products and services, offering customers a cutting-edge alternative to conventional banking and enhancing their lives," he added.

The Bank Nizwa mobile app expanded the bank's customer-centred digital service capabilities and reflects the banks 'digital-first' strategy. The app has a comprehensive set of features, including the ability to manage personal finance and investment accounts, as well as internal and external cash transfers.

Lexus announces Lexus Design Award Grand Prix winner

MUSCAT: Lexus recently announced that "Rewind" by Poh Yun Ru has been selected by the judging panel as the Grand Prix winner of the 2022 Lexus Design Award, the award's tenth edition that attracted 1,726 entries from 57 countries.

The Lexus Design Award was established in 2013 with the mission of supporting and nurturing creators early in their careers to help shape a better future and create happiness for all through design, while articulating the Lexus brand's three core principles: Anticipate, Innovate, and Captivate. The Grand Prix winner "Rewind" contributes to a better tomorrow by using

technology to help people stimulate their memories when their recall ability is challenged.

The six finalists selected this January spent three months developing their original proposals and creating prototypes under the enthusiastic and highly skilled guidance of Sam Baron, Joe Doucet, Yosuke Hayano and Sabine Marcelis. Mentoring by the world's leading creators was a once-in-a-lifetime learning experience for these young talents.

This process facilitated the impressive evolution of the finalists' projects, not to mention that of the Grand Prix work, "Rewind."

Commenting on her win, Poh



Yun Ru said: "I feel immensely grateful that Rewind is now a step closer to improving the lives of more people. This couldn't have happened without the unwavering support of my mentors, my team of dedicated engineers,

programmers, healthcare experts, and users.

This opportunity from Lexus Design Award to turn a project into a real-world product felt nothing short of amazing, and I feel heartened to have met and

learned from so many passionate designers from around the world. It has been such a rewarding and inspiring journey, and I am excited to continue designing for a better world and a better tomorrow for all."

In a new benefit for 2022, the finalists met one-on-one with the design world's elite panel of judges Paola Antonelli, Anupama Kundoo, Bruce Mau, and Simon Humphries following the 10th Lexus Design Award event.

After the judging session, the finalists received not only direct feedback on their work, but also career advice and tips for improvement.

This beta-feature of the 10th

anniversary Lexus Design Award turned out to be an extraordinarily valuable experience.

Congratulating Poh Yun Ru's on her innovative creation, Kei Fujita, Chief Representative of Middle East & Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "The Lexus Design Award was created with the aim of fostering the growth of ideas that contribute to society by supporting designers and creators whose works can contribute to a better tomorrow. This year's winner – Poh Yun Ru's Rewind– is a work of tremendous imagination and creativity that captures the essence of what the Lexus Design Award stands for."



PDO announces new social investment initiatives

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 31

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has committed to support a host of new initiatives which will benefit communities and boost sustainable development across the Sultanate of Oman.

The initiatives include commitments in the key areas of health, safety and the environment (HSE), community infrastructure development as well as sponsoring several programmes in education, culture and sports.

Twelve Memorandums of Collaboration (MoCs) confirming these commitments were signed at an official ceremony held under the auspices of Shaikh Nasser bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the State Audit Institution, on May 31, at the Crowne Plaza Muscat hotel.

To support the provision of the best health services, PDO is funding the procurement of new medical equipment, which will be distributed by the Ministry of Health to local hospitals and health centres.

In addition, to support the Company's goals towards HSE excellence, PDO is sponsoring the installation of solar powered streetlights on the Adam-Haima road as well as Hamra Ad' Duru road junctions, which will benefit more than a hundred villages in the surrounding areas.

Other projects include the construction of a Camel Racetrack in Maqshan; a walk path in Thamrait; and an air-conditioned path in Izki Hospital that will link the emergency building with the health centre.

PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister, who signed a



number of these agreements on behalf of PDO with high-ranking government officials, said: "PDO continues to expand its social

investment programme to support the communities in which we operate.

"Our dedication and support

are aimed at meeting community needs by providing critical facilities and services in areas such as health, safety, environment and cultural preservation. "We will thrive only if the communities in which we work prosper, and these initiatives will undoubtedly empower residents and contribute to the sustainable development of Omani communities".

Another agreement signed at the event was to sponsor a study that aims to set a standard for flood protection and mitigation studies and designs through a pilot project targeting Wadi Al Hawasinah that will help in understanding the impacts of climate change.

PDO has also signed an agreement to sponsor the programmes and activities of the Cultural Club and Geological

Society Oman. It will also sponsor the Paralympics team's participation in the in the Asian Games 2022, through the Oman Paralympic Committee (OPC).

OPC is the driving force of Paralympic movement in Oman, working to support athletes with disabilities to excel in sport and encourage community inclusion.

They had participated previously and won 23 medals and achieved third place in athletics.

In addition, PDO marked the graduation of 75 women from a Company-sponsored training programme in tailoring and embroidery in collaboration with the Omani Association for the Disabled in Suhar, as part of its Banat Oman flagship corporate social responsibility programme established to provide low-income women with the skills they need for sustainable employment.

Leading energy players to participate in IEEE Power Talks

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 31

While Oman's power and energy sectors are undergoing a major shift towards the use of renewable energy sources

and the adoption of innovations and technological advancements that will ensure overall efficiency to meet rising power demand, there are still several emerging challenges that the sectors are facing.

These challenges, plans, strategies, solutions and outlook will be discussed and presented by top regional power and energy industry experts and policymakers at the IEEE Power Talks Forum in the Sultanate of Oman from June 6 to 8, 2022.

The event's technical committee, represented by prominent officials from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Nama Group, OQ, Majan Electricity Company, Tanweer, Muscat Electricity Distribution Company and Al Shawamikh Oil Services, has provided a direction that will offer a meaningful platform and an opportunity to discourse, share ideas, and build collaboration amid a swiftly evolving energy landscape.

Ahmed Sayed, Conference Director, IEEE Power Talks says, "Now is the right time to collaborate as a truly collective industry through this significant forum to help push the industry forward during this transition phase and towards Oman's development goals of sustainability, efficiency and digital transformation.

We enjoy everyone to drive innovative thinking in order

to ensure growth and progress today and in the next generation."

IEEE Power Talks features a two-day conference with main topics such

as Oman Energy Market Outlook, Renewables and Energy Storage Solutions, The Future of Power Grids, Energy Management and Efficiency, Asset Management and Optimisation alongside case studies and panel discussions.

It will feature renowned power and energy experts including Dr Amer al Hinai, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research, SQU; Eng Abdulaziz S al Shidhani, Director General for Renewable Energy and Hydrogen — Ministry of Energy and Minerals; Yaqoob bin Saif al Kiyumi, CEO of Oman Power & Water Procurement Company; Dr Ralf Blumenthal, SVP and Head of Grid Software Middle East — Siemens and Dr Fahd Hashiesh, Global Director, Renewable Energy Centre of Excellence — Air Products.

The event is organised under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and supported by Oman Society of Engineers. Nama Group is the event Strategic Partner and Schneider Electric the Sustainability Partner, while the sponsor lineup includes Siemens, Solar Wadi, Safe Line and Fortescue Future Industries.

IEEE Power Talks will be inaugurated by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of Communications and IT, at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 31

A seminar on cyber resilience and data risk management was opened by Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner of Crowe Oman at the Park Inn Muscat on May 31.

Welcoming the attendees, Kallukaran said, "Online criminal forums have existed for many years, but today these networks are thriving in part because of the unique circumstances brought

on by the Covid-19 pandemic. They look more like a corporate network now. This is a real threat."

Vivek Sripuram of Happiest Minds initiated the first session on cyber resilience and the role of vulnerability management. He said: "Network vulnerabilities are unfortunate and inevitable. Technological advances and software development result in a continuous cycle of new vulnerabilities and weaknesses in cyber infrastructures. This,

however, doesn't call for panic.

Instead, organisations must manage their vulnerabilities as effectively as possible and boost their cyber resilience in order to avoid potential attacks."

Priya Kanduri, the lead faculty for the session on Digital Risk Management, said: "In an era of uncertainty and advanced cybersecurity threat environment, digital risk management has become an essential part of business management.

Organisations need to build a robust risk protection framework that ensures sustainability and drives more business value for the organisation."

The seminar was attended by IT departmental heads of major corporates and government institutions. Also speaking on the occasion were: Jose Chacko, Partner Forensic and Technology, Afrah al Ghafri and Muzeebur Rehman, Cybersecurity consultant at Crowe.

Best practices to address accounting challenges of crowdfunding



DR SHAHNAWAZ KHAN

The Sultanate of Oman is geared up for a new source of funding as the Capital Market Authority (CMA) issued the rules for Crowdfunding Platforms (wide decision number E/153/2021, dated November 21, 2021).

Crowdfunding is a way of raising money to finance projects and businesses. It enables fundraisers to collect money from a large number of people (crowd) via online platforms or websites. While the rules lay down the important provisions, there are no accounting guidelines in the rules, nor do the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) define the accounting treatment for operators or applicants for fundraising.

Below are some of the best practices for operators and applicants for fundraising:

Accounting for the Operator The operator's income stream consists of fees for providing the platform or fees after successful crowdfunding.

Operator needs to follow the IFRS 15 "Revenue Recognition"

which follows the five-step model framework namely;

- Identify the contract(s) with a customer
- Identify the performance obligations in the contract
- Determine the transaction price
- Allocate the transaction price to the performance obligations in the contract
- Recognise revenue when (or as) the entity satisfies a performance obligation

While the fees, if any, for providing a platform can be recognised on hosting the application on the platform, the success fees will depend on successful fundraising by the applicant or reaching the target.

The operator has to keep the funds separate from its book in an escrow account till the target is achieved. Once the target is achieved in the stipulated time frame, the operator will deduct the fees and pass the funds to the applicant. In the event of failure to achieve the target, the funds will be returned to the crowd funders

with no deductions.

Accounting for applicant for fundraising

The accounting for the applicant depends on the method of crowdfunding as below:

Peer-to-peer lending: If the applicant receives the money, which represents a debt instrument or advance, and the money that has been received has to be repaid, then there is a present obligation and a liability is to be recognised.

This financial liability and would be initially recognised at the fair value less issue costs in line with provisions of IFRS 9 "Financial Instruments" applies.

The default accounting treatment for such financial instruments is amortised cost. The profit and loss account will be charged with an effective rate of interest on the debt.

Equity crowdfunding: If the applicant receives the money, which represents an ownership interest; then an equity instrument has been issued.

The relevant standard will

also be IFRS 9, "Financial Instruments". The issue of equity shares will be initially recognised at fair value less issue costs.

Rewards-based crowdfunding: If the applicant receives the money because of a sale or reward or if that is the substance of the crowdfunding arrangement, then IFRS 15 "Revenue from Contracts with Customers", applies.

Revenue will be recognised when the performance obligations are fulfilled and control passes.

Donation-based crowdfunding: If the applicant receives the money in the form of donation, then applicant may need to draft the accounting policies in line with the provisions of the IAS 20 "Government Grants" as there could be a number of conditions attached to the funding.

Donations will only be recognised on the completion of such conditions. CMA rules will encourage more and more applicants to start their operations in the Sultanate of Oman, and it will not only help corporate or big entrepreneurs to raise capital to start and grow their businesses, but also help small and medium scale businesses to secure funds through alternative sources of funding.

Operator and applicant needs to follow the best practices as above to curb the accounting challenges and make Oman more sustainable and attractive for international investors. *(The author is CEO of Baker Tilly Oman)*

EU’s Russian oil ban unlikely to affect Opec+ decision

Saudi Arabia, Russia and their allies are likely to stick to their policy of modest oil output increases when they meet on Thursday after the EU banned most imports from Moscow. European Union leaders agreed on Monday to ban more than two-thirds of Russian oil imports, tightening economic screws on the country over its invasion of its neighbour Ukraine.

This has caused oil prices, which have already hit record highs so far this year, to soar further amid pressure on the 23-member Opec+ to open tabs more widely and relieve the market.

Brent, the international benchmark, hit a two-month high above \$124 per barrel while the US contract, WTI, topped \$119.

But analysts say Opec+ will stick to its strategy of only slightly increasing output when it holds its monthly videoconference on Thursday as it remains united with Moscow.

“With Russia being one of the two most important members of the alliance (alongside Saudi Arabia), any decision on increasing output has become highly political,” Craig Erlam, analyst at trading platform OANDA, said.

“Both because (Russia) cannot sell what it’s already producing as a result of sanctions and perhaps even because it wants prices to be uncomfortably high and maintain pressure on countries it considers ‘unfriendly,’” he said.

The 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries chaired by Saudi Arabia and their 10 partners led by Russia drastically slashed output in 2020 as demand slumped because of the coronavirus pandemic and worldwide lockdowns.

They have been increasing output modestly to the tune of around 400,000 barrels per day each month since last year and have resisted pressure by top consumers, including the US, to open the tabs wider.

Ipek Ozkardeska, an analyst with Swissquote bank, said on Thursday’s meeting “looks like a formality.” “There is little hope to see Opec countries announcing anything that would give a relief to the market,” she said.

Analysts have also noted even if the group was willing to increase its output, several of its members have fallen short of the quotas, resulting in a lower supply to the market. — AFP

With Russia being one of the two most important members of the alliance, any decision on increasing output has become highly political.

CRAIG ERLAM
OANDA analyst



GOLD-LOOKING MINERS

Tanzanian miners look for gold at an open-pit gold mine in Nyarugusu, Geita Region, Tanzania. Tanzania is a land rich in minerals and one of the main gold producers in Africa, with gold representing more than 90 per cent of the country’s mineral exports. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining have culturally and historically relegated women’s participation. — AFP

UK bans various sectors from exporting services to Russia



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

CUTTING RUSSIA’S ACCESS TO BRITISH SERVICES WILL PUT MORE PRESSURE ON THE KREMLIN AND ULTIMATELY HELP ENSURE PUTIN FAILS IN UKRAINE

The UK has been banning the export of various services, such as, accountancy, public relations and management consultancy to Russia, UK foreign minister Liz Truss has said.

“Cutting Russia’s access to British services will put more pressure on the Kremlin and ultimately help ensure Putin fails in Ukraine,” Truss said. The new measures mean Russia will be cut off from a wide range of the UK’s professional services, she added.

“By restricting Russia’s access to our world-class management consultants, accountants and PR firms, we’re ratcheting up economic pressure on the Kremlin to change course,” business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said.

Accountancy and management consultancy firms came under huge pressure to close their Moscow offices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. The Big Four accountancy firms – EY, PwC, KPMG and Deloitte – have all since said they are closing their Russia businesses. However, the pull-out has been slow, and none of the firms have fully cut off their Russia firms from their international network yet.

A spokesperson for accountancy firm Mazars, which has committed to retaining its Russia operations for now, said the firm

would look carefully at the details of the new measures.

The firm said in a statement: “Mazars in Russia employs 500 people and our clients in this region are essentially international companies with operations in Russia. Going forward, we will solely focus on these international clients who need our help to navigate the consequences of this crisis and comply with international and local regulations and sanctions. Our Mazars team in Russia will continue to support these clients for the time being.”

Professional services giant Accenture said last month that it had completed the transfer of its Russian business to local leadership, that is, to hand over its firm to its local management. At the time, the new firm was given until May 9 to change its name and a further two weeks to finalise its rebranding, Accenture said.

Managing director for reputation and influence at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), Iain Wright, said: “Many of our individual members and member firms have already taken proactive steps to disengage as appropriate with Russia.

ICAEW is confident that chartered accountants, whether in practice or in business, will be ready and willing to play the fullest possible role in making these further measures effective.”

Also closing down its operations in Russia is Credit Suisse. The Swiss bank placed its staff on paid leave as it looked to wind down, its chief executive Thomas Gottstein said. The bank in Russia had a staff of around 125. International banks have had to take tough decisions on cutting jobs in Russia.

Both Bank of America and JPMorgan paid their employees four months’ salary in advance, amid a broader retreat from the country. Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley have relocated the majority of their Russia-based employees to other countries.

While the majority of international banks including Societe Generale, JPMorgan, Citigroup, and Goldman Sachs had unveiled plans to pull back from Russia, quitting the country has been complex. Banks have been unwinding a web of loans and positions in Russia and some have yet to formally close their operations.

Back in March, in a note to clients, Credit Suisse had said that it was not pursuing any new business in the country and was assisting clients in winding down positions. It was also relocating staff out of Russia the document had added.

Credit Suisse slumped to a loss of 273 million Swiss francs (\$284m) in the first quarter, and booked CHF703 million in legal costs and CHF206 million related to its Russia exposure.

Stockholm+50: Dismantling fossil fuel economy



NIKKI REISCH

The author is director of the climate and energy programme at the Centre for International Environmental Law.

Our planet is facing a triple crisis of climate, nature, and pollution, with one common cause: the fossil-fuel economy. Oil, gas, and coal are at the root of runaway climate disruption, widespread biodiversity loss, and pervasive plastic pollution.

The conclusion is clear and must be paramount when political leaders gather in Stockholm this week to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Any effort to address these existential threats to human and ecological health will mean little as long as the fossil fuel economy remains intact.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently noted,

fossil fuels are choking our planet. In the last decade, their combustion accounted for 86 per cent of global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, for which just a few actors bear overwhelming responsibility.

In fact, nearly two-thirds of all CO2 emitted since the Industrial Revolution can be traced to just 90 polluters, mostly the largest fossil fuel producers.

Yet, rather than reining in the polluters, the world’s governments are currently planning to allow more than twice as much fossil fuel production in 2030 than would be consistent with the goal – agreed under the 2015 Paris climate agreement – of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

And when it comes to the damage wrought by fossil fuels,

higher global temperatures and intensifying extreme weather events are only the beginning.

Last year, the UN special rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos A. Orellana, affirmed what frontline communities have long known: fossil-fuel production generates toxic compounds and pollutes air, water, and soil. Air pollution from burning fossil fuels was responsible for about one in five deaths worldwide in 2018.

Moreover, oil and gas are the building blocks of the toxic chemicals, pesticides, and synthetic fertilisers that are pushing ecosystems and species to extinction. These fossil-fuel-based products perpetuate an economic and agro-industrial model that drives deforestation, destroys biodiversity and threatens human

health.

Fossil fuels are also behind the proliferation of plastics, which are accumulating in even the most remote areas of the planet, from the top of Mount Everest to the bottom of the Mariana Trench.

Ninety-nine per cent of all plastics are made from chemicals derived from fossil fuels, predominantly oil and gas. The production of petrochemical feedstocks for plastics and the use of fossil fuels throughout the plastics value chain are boosting demand for oil and gas and exposing millions of people to toxic pollution.

As if that were not enough, fossil fuels foment and fund violent conflict around the world. The fossil fuel economy is enabling Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine and the humanitarian

crisis it has created. In the seven years after Russia illegally annexed Crimea, eight of the world’s biggest fossil fuel companies enriched Russia’s government by an estimated \$95.4 billion. Russia’s revenues from energy exports have soared since the invasion of Ukraine in February, which drove up prices.

And big Western oil companies, cashing in on the conflict, have raked in record profits.

Instead of facing accountability, the oil and gas industry and its allies are exploiting the Ukraine crisis to push for even more drilling, fracking, and exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) all around the world. But new fossil-fuel infrastructure, which will take years to bring online, will do nothing to address the current energy crisis.

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Strawberry farms threaten Spanish wetlands

STANDING IN THE middle of a stretch of land surrounded by dunes and pine forest, Juan Romero examines the cracked ground then stares at the dusty horizon. “It’s dry... really dry,” the retired teacher said at the huge Donana National Park in southern Spain, home to one of Europe’s largest wetlands, which is threatened by intensive farming. “At this time of the year this should be covered with water and full of flamingos,” added Romero, a member of Save Donana, a group that has been fighting for years to protect the park. Water supplies to the park have

declined dramatically due to climate change and the over-extraction of water by neighbouring strawberry farms, often through illegal wells, scientists say. The situation could soon get worse as the regional government of Andalusia, where Donana is located, has proposed expanding irrigation rights for strawberry farmers near the park. It’s a battle pitting environmentalists against politicians and farmers, and the proposal to widen irrigation rights has drawn backlash from the EU, the UN and major European grocery store chains. The proposal would regularise nearly 1,900 hectares (4,700 acres) of berry farmland currently irrigated by illegal wells, said Juanjo Carmona of the local branch of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). “For Donana it would be a disaster,” he added. The park, whose diverse ecosystem of lagoons, marshes, forests and dunes stretch across 100,000 hectares, is on the migratory route of millions of birds each year and is home to many rare species such as the Iberian lynx. “Donana is a paradise for migrating birds. But this ecosystem is threatened,” said Romero. The driving force behind the plan to extend irrigation rights is the conservative Popular Party (PP), which governs the southern region of Andalusia with the sup-



port of far-right party Vox. The plan’s fate will be decided after a snap poll in Andalusia on June 19 but with both parties riding high in the polls the controversial proposal looks set to go head. **RED GOLD** Defenders of the proposal argue it will

aid those who unfairly missed out during a previous regularisation of farms in the area put in place in 2014 under a Socialist government. About 9,000 hectares of farms were regularised but another 2,000 hectares that started being farmed after 2004 were deemed illegal. “This plan was badly done. It should

have used 2014 as the cut-off date,” said Rafael Segovia, a lawmaker with Vox in Andalusia’s outgoing regional parliament. The proposed amnesty “does not present any danger for Donana”, Segovia said, adding people should take into account the “economic importance of the sector”. Huelva, the drought-prone province where the park is located, produces 300,000 tonnes of strawberries a year, 90 per cent of Spain’s output. Known locally as “red gold”, strawberry farming employs some 100,000 people and accounts for nearly eight per cent of Andalusia’s economic output. Unesco, the UN’s cultural agency, has designated the park one of its World Heritage sites and has called for illegal farms near Donana to be dismantled. It has warned that the regional government’s plan would have an impact that would be “difficult to reverse”. The European Commission has also weighed in. It has threatened to impose “hefty fines” if any steps were taken to extract more water from Donana park after a European court ruling last year scolded Spain for not protecting its ecosystem. And around 20 European supermarket chains, including Lidl, Aldi and Sainsbury’s, sent the regional government a letter urging it to abandon the plan. — AFP

READ

THE STRAWBERRY GARDEN

BY LIA YAFFE TALMOR

“The Strawberry Garden” offers kids lessons about the progress of nature, about bravery and about sharing.



SOLAR AFFAIR

Disney announced a new live-action “Star Wars” series featuring Jude Law at a major fan convention on Thursday – but any mention of upcoming films in the beloved sci-fi franchise was conspicuously absent, as the company focuses on its streaming service. Harrison Ford and Ewan McGregor were among the stars who appeared on stage before a raucous and outlandishly dressed crowd in Anaheim, California for “Star Wars Celebration,” a four-day gathering held every few years, usually tied to new movies. — AFP



FASHION TRENDS

Cynthia Schimming (L), a Namibian fashion designer and a member of the selection committee points on May 30, 2022 at one of the ancient pieces returned today from Germany displayed at the Independence Museum of Namibia in Windhoek. Namibia on Monday took delivery of 23 ancient pieces of jewellery, tools and other objects pillaged during colonial rule and returned as an indefinite loan from Germany. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

British royals to share friendship, food and fun at jubilee lunches



MEMBERS OF Britain's royal family are to share friendship, food and fun at special lunches on Sunday, June 5, to celebrate the Queen's 70-year reign.

The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall will meet guests at a feast at The Oval cricket ground in south London, while the Earl and Countess of Wessex will join members of the local community in Windsor.

The get-togethers are part of the Big Jubilee Lunches, which includes events ranging from world record attempts for the longest street

The Platinum Pudding, Scotch eggs and fruit platters will feature on a six-metre felt creation by artist Lucy Sparrow which is to be viewed by Charles and Camilla at The Oval.

It will be given pride of place in the Grand Entrance of Buckingham Palace later this year.

Sparrow, who is described as "quirky yet subversive" on her website, recreated the Crown Jewels in felt to celebrate the Queen's official 90th birthday.

She also had commercial and critical success when she opened a fully stocked felt corner shop in London's East End in 2014.

Her first solo show in the US was a New York bodega in May 2017 called The Convenience Store which was stocked with 9,000 felted artworks.

Members of the local community, 70 volunteers who have been recognised as Platinum Champions through the Royal Voluntary Service's Platinum Champions Awards, celebrity ambassadors and various charity representatives will be among the guests at the cricket ground.

The royal couple will also present the Platinum Champions with certificates and pins, before cutting a Big Jubilee Lunch cake.

More than 600 international Big Jubilee Lunches are being planned throughout the Commonwealth and beyond — from Canada to Brazil, New Zealand to Japan and South Africa to Switzerland.

Prince Edward and his wife Sophie, Earl and Countess of Wessex, will join Berkshire residents for their special lunch on the Long Walk, not far from Windsor Castle.

The Long Walk is being reinvented to create "the Long Table" in celebration of the jubilee. This royal pair are also set to meet groups of street performers.

Charles and Camilla will also celebrate with the residents of Albert Square in an EastEnders special.

They will be seen attending a Big Lunch in a June 2 episode of the BBC soap.

The Big Lunch is an annual event aimed at celebrating community connections. — dpa

CHANGING WORLD

Iconic Iran river threatened by droughts, diversions



THE FAMED RIVER bridges of the Iranian city of Isfahan are a beloved tourist draw — but much of the time their stone arches span just sand and rocks, not water.

Drought and upstream water diversions have seen the Zayandeh Rood, "fertile river" in Persian, run dry since 2000, with only rare exceptions.

Sitting on a quay with two friends, 60-year-old Jalal Mirahmadi gazed with melancholy at the riverbed, which became the site of a farmers' protest late last year.

"When I was a child, the water flowed under the arches of the bridge and sometimes overflowed to spill into the surrounding streets," he sighed.

The river runs nearly 400 kilometres (250 miles) from the Zagros Mountains in the west to Lake Gavkhouni in the east, making it the longest waterway in central Iran.

On its way through Isfahan, it meanders under several beautifully crafted bridges from the 17th century, the city's golden age when it was the Persian capital.

"When the water of Zayandeh Rood flows, the bridges have a special appearance and beauty," said Ali Mohammad Fassihi of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

"These historic bridges are meaningless without water." Heat and drought

Largely arid Iran, like other nearby countries, has suffered chronic dry spells and heat waves for years, which are expected to worsen with climate change.

Iran is sometimes hit by summertime blackouts when the blistering heat drives up air conditioner use while low rainfall reduces the water reservoirs of hydro-electric dams.

The reduced flow of the Zayandeh Rood, however, is

also man-made because much of its water has been diverted to supply neighbouring Yazd province.

Last November, tens of thousands of people, including farmers, gathered in the dry riverbed to complain about the drought and blame officials for diverting water.

Security forces fired tear gas when the protest turned violent and said they arrested 67 people.

The municipality later launched an awareness campaign on the fate of the river, with several signs erected in Isfahan, the country's third-largest city with two million people.

Young people in the city say they are used to only seeing the river's dry bed.

High school student Amir, 18, said he rarely goes there because it "is no longer pleasant without water".

"Most of my memories and those of my generation are associated with the dryness of the river," he lamented.

RIVERSIDE SELFIES

From time to time, authorities briefly open the upstream dam's floodgates to irrigate wheat fields east of Isfahan — to the delight of thousands who quickly flock to the river.

This happened in mid-May when locals and tourists rushed to the waterway to capture the ephemeral views with their eyes and with selfies.

Under the shade of trees on the banks, families drank tea and smoked shisha. Some strolled and others pedalled swan-shaped boats, which were back in use after baking in the dust.

At the majestic Si-o-Se Pol Bridge, portrait painter Mohammad-Reza Abdollahi, 50, drew the yellow-brick bridge while awaiting clients.

"I hadn't been to Isfahan for

CONSERVATION

Race to save undersea Stone Age cave art masterpieces



TO REACH THE only place in the world where cave paintings of prehistoric marine life have been found, archaeologists have to dive to the bottom of the Mediterranean off southern France.

Then they have to negotiate a 137-metre (yard) natural tunnel into the rock, passing through the mouth of the cave until they emerge into a huge cavern, much of it now submerged.

Three men died trying to discover this "underwater Lascaux" as rumours spread of a cave to match the one in southwestern France that completely changed the way we see our Stone Age ancestors.

Lascaux — which Picasso visited in 1940 — proved the urge to make art is as old as humanity itself.

Archaeologist Luc Vanrell's life changed the second he surfaced inside the Cosquer cavern and saw its staggering images. Even now, 30 years on, he remembers the "aesthetic shock".

But the cave and its treasures, some dating back more than 30,000 years, are in grave danger. Climate change and water and plastic pollution are threatening to wash away the art prehistoric men and women created over 15 millennia.

Since a sudden 12-centimetre (near-five-inch) rise in the sea level there in 2011, Vanrell and his colleagues have been in a race against time to record everything they can.

Every year the high water mark rises a few more millimetres, eating away a little more of the ancient paintings and carvings.

PREHISTORIC WONDERS

Vanrell and the diver-archaeologists he leads are having to work faster and faster to explore the last corners of the 2,500 square metre (27,000 square feet) grotto to preserve a trace of its neolithic wonders before they are lost.

An almost life-sized recreation of the Cosquer cavern will open this week a few kilometres (miles) away in Marseille.

AFP joined the dive team earlier this year as they raced to finish the digital mapping for a 3D reconstruction of the cave.

Around 600 signs, images and carvings — some of aquatic life never before seen in cave paintings — have been found on the walls of the immense cave 37 metres below the azure waters of the breathtaking Calanques inlets east of Marseille.

"We fantasised about bringing the cave to the surface," said diver Bertrand Chazaly, who is in charge of the operation to digitalise the cave.

"When it is finished, our virtual Cosquer cavern — which is accurate to within millimetres — will be indispensable for researchers and archaeologists who will not be able to physically get inside."

CHILDREN'S HANDS

The cave was some "10 kilometres from the coast" when it was in use, archaeologist Michel Olive said. "At the time we were in the middle of an ice age and the sea was 135 metres lower" than it is today.

From the dive boat, Olive, who is in charge of studying the cave, draws with his finger a vast plain where the Mediterranean now is. "The entrance to the cave was on a little promontory facing south over grassland protected by cliffs. It was an extremely good place for prehistoric man," he said. The walls of the cave show the coastal plain was teeming with wildlife — horses, deer, bison, ibex, prehistoric auroch cows, saiga antelopes but also seals, penguins, fish and a cat and a bear.

The 229 figures depicted on the walls cover 13 different species. But neolithic men and women also left a mark of themselves on the walls, with 69 red or black hand prints as well as three left by mistake, including by children. And that does not count the hundreds of geometric signs and the eight sexual depictions of male and female body parts.

What also stands out about the cave is the length of time it was occupied, said Vanrell, "from 33,000 to 18,500 years ago". The sheer density of its graphics puts "Cosquer among the four biggest cave art sites in the world alongside Lascaux, Altamira in Spain and Chauvet," which is also in southern France. — AFP



Omani “hotbox” offers exciting camp solution for outdoor lovers worldwide

By Ruqaya al Kindi

As a country of exciting outdoor adventures, one of the issues when out in the wild is how to keep water or food hot, especially in winter, but a recent Omani innovation addresses this challenge and therefore will definitely bring joy to campers when they are out and about during winter.

“Hotbox is first of its kind device in the world. Two patents have been registered globally for the device.

“Early this year we have released Hotbox-Mini which is the solution for many campers who have a specific requirement with less volume and the same advantages”, Sulaiman al Habsi said, Chief Technology Officer at Aphcarios company.

Hotbox, as he explained, “is a smart water heater for cars that utilise the energy from the car’s engine wasted heat to heat a water source. It serves as a solution for having access to hot water in remote locations during family outings and adventure trips.”

Common ways to heat water during trips are slow and bad for the environment, so the company comes with Hotbox to make your trip much better and easier.

“Camper use burning wood, carryout gas cylinders or use an electrical heater that is powered by cars battery to heat a water source. All methods are inconvenient, slow and bad for the environment. The hotbox utilises the wasted heat of the engine to do that. It is very convenient for the users since it is controlled through a mobile phone”, he pointed out.

Several features make Hotbox products a reliable choice for the consumer. The idea, as he men-

tioned, is to use the car’s engine as a basis for heating, which is achieved by circulating water from the internal water tank in the car, towards the heat exchanger in the engine compartment, and then back again into the tank as hot water.

The operation, as he added, is simple, as all you need is to download the dedicated Hotbox application on your smartphone that connects to the Hotbox device using Bluetooth. With the application installed, as he shared, you’re able to adjust the water temperature, observe the water level in the water tank, and switch between multiple modes such as shower, heating, and refilling the water tank.

With all these features, “Our customers can enjoy on-demand hot water to take a shower at the water temperature of their choice or to wash the dishes and the car itself. And the beauty of the device is that it requires no batteries, no gas, or solar panel equipment needed to operate and heat the water; it simply utilises the heat that is naturally created by a running engine, which otherwise would be heat wasted”, he pointed out.

The hotbox contains a high-pressure water pump, water valves, sensors and a smart controller board. The device is controlled via a smartphone application or through manual switches. Hotbox has five smart modes; Heating Mode will take the water from the internal tank and pass it through the heat exchanger. The hot water will be returned to the tank. The Hotbox will keep circulating the water until the target temperature is reached”, he shared.

In the Shower Mode, as he pointed out, the hotbox will take the heated water from the internal tank and pump it through

one of the external ports. A shower head with different spraying patterns is provided in the kit.

If you would like to use Tank Filling mode, you need to connect an external water source such as reverse, home water tap or water containers to the Hotbox through one of the external ports. “The Hotbox pumps the water from the water source to the internal tank. This is useful for customers who have internal tanks that are not easily accessible for a manual refill. The Hotbox has a flow sensor that can calculate the water volume and stop the fill when the tank is full. The tank volume must be set into the mobile app when the tank is empty or when it is filled”, he mentioned.

While in the External Tank Mode, the hotbox can take water from any external water source and heat it on the go without consuming water from the internal tank.

External Tank Heating System is the fifth mode. “This mode works exactly like the external tank except the water pumped out will be returned to the external tank. This feature is helpful if you need to heat water for others, heating water in water containers or heating water tanks in a cattle ranch”, he said.

The hotbox is installed inside the customer’s SUVs and there is nothing to worry about. “It is very safe, and it does not interfere with the car’s normal operation. On the contrary, the hotbox can help cool down cars with overheating issues. Everything that is needed to install the hotbox is provided for the customer in the package. The mobile app is available in Apple’s App Store, Google Play Store and Huawei’s App Gallery. The App is regularly maintained and updated.

