

463 get investor residency

The number of investors who received residency cards through the Investor Residency Programme (IRP) in the Sultanate of Oman reached 463 from more than 30 countries by the end of May. As per the IRP, investors and foreign retirees are granted the right of long-term residency for a duration of 5 years or 10 years. **DETAILS ON P13**



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REAL ESTATE SECTOR REBOUNDS, BUT PROPERTY VALUES REMAIN BELOW 2014-PEAK



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CORDIA MYXA: A STRANGE FRUIT THAT THRIVES IN HOT WEATHER



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Moudhi bint Musaed bin Abdurrahman bin Faisal al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies to King Salman, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience and fortitude to bear the loss. — **ONA**

HM GREETINGS TO DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Ismail, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Djibouti further progress and prosperity. — **ONA**

OMAN OBSERVER

FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH NEWS APP IN OMAN



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EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SISI ARRIVES TODAY ON 2-DAY VISIT

OMAN, EGYPT PRESS AHEAD TO STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES

MUSCAT: The Omani-Egyptian relations have derived their strength from the deep-rooted history documented by evidence before approximately 3,500 BC, and they are witnessing a constant development.

Through the talks to be conducted by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt on Monday, the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt strive to strengthen these exemplary relations and push them to wider horizons.

The talks will be held within the framework of the Egyptian President's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

At the political level between the two countries, the Sultanate of Oman has consistently recorded positive positions on a number of issues backing Egypt, including the Renaissance Dam negotiations, in which Oman reaffirmed the need to reach an agreement that meets the interests of all parties' states.

The consensus in political visions between the two countries on many regional and international issues is another example of harmony, consultation, understanding, coordination and joint cooperation.

FRUITFUL COOPERATION

The first visit of President Abdel Fattah el Sisi to the Sultanate of Oman in February 2018 contributed in strengthening the advanced relations between the two countries and the fruitful cooperation between them. The efforts made by the Omani-Egyptian Joint Committee during the last period led to signing a number of memoranda of understanding and bilateral cooperation programmes in all economic, commercial and investment fields that



would open up new qualitative prospects for cooperation between the two countries.

The Omani and Egyptian sides are making persistent efforts to promote economic and investment relations in a manner that serves common interests and augments the volume of trade

exchange between them through the role of the Omani-Egyptian Chambers of Commerce and the Omani-Egyptian Businessmen Council.

These efforts exerted by the two countries explore opportunities for cooperation available in the areas that

enjoy a comparative advantage, such as tourism, construction, mining and other lucrative sectors.

Statistics indicate that the volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt has witnessed a remarkable increase, as it registered at the end of 2021 about RO 205.8 million, equivalent to \$535.4 million, compared to RO 97.7 million (\$254.3 million).

The number of Egyptian companies investing in the Sultanate of Oman in 2020 stand at 744, with a total invested capital hitting more than \$1.856 billion. Oil and gas products, iron ores, polypropylene and polyethylene products, fisheries represented the commodities exported from the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt, while the imported commodities from Egypt are vegetables, fruits, foodstuffs and medical products.

Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), called on the private sector in the two countries to establish more partnerships and cooperation particularly in the non-oil sectors being the key targets within the programmes of economic diversification in Oman Vision 2040 and Egypt Vision 2030.

He told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Omani-Egyptian Business Council joined hands to develop many visions for cooperation and integration between the two countries. Such visions came up with a number of initiatives, namely establishing a joint fund between the two sides to develop investment exchange and advance trade exchange, as well as a proposal to establish a joint bank and a specialised medical city in Egypt.



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received separately at his office on Sunday Mohamed Dori Mohamed Yakub, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya to the Sultanate of Oman and Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid them farewell at the end of their tour of duty. **DETAILS ON P5**

Memorial tribute paid to late Sultan Qaboos

LONDON: A ceremony was held in London to pay tribute to the memory of late Sultan Qaboos.

During the ceremony, Service Medal of the Order of St John was consecrated. This medal was conferred on late Sultan Qaboos in 1984 by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head of the Commonwealth in recognition of the late Sultan's support to hospitals, medical services and healthcare all over the world.

The Sultan Qaboos Standard was raised during the ceremony, which was held at St Paul's Cathedral in London amid a grandeur procession. The ceremony was attended by Shaikh



Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Princess Anne and Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester. — **ONA**



■ DEPUTY PM RECEIVES EGYPTIAN ENVOY



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received Khalid Abdul Halim Radi, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Sunday. They reviewed the bilateral relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them. They also discussed several matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by the Military Attaché at the Egyptian Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

Oman, Egypt press ahead to strengthen economic ties

FROM PAGE1

On his part, Dr Ahmed Reza, a member of the Omani-Egyptian Business Council, told ONA that the council functions as a link between the two countries in the economic field. It also seeks to reach the envisaged economic ambition by maintaining cooperation with various government and private institutions and embassies of the two countries.

He expected that the visit of the Egyptian President to the Sultanate of Oman would focus on the economic aspect of the two countries in line with the ambitious visions and plans they seek to achieve.

He affirmed that Oman enjoys great investment advantages, particularly in the tourism, industrial, fisheries, mining sectors. Air traffic between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt is witnessing a continuous growth, whether in the number of flights or new airlines that have operated flights between various airports of the two

countries during the last period due to the increasing demand for travel between the two countries for tourism and work purposes.

The average number of current flights between the two countries is about 17 weekly flights between Muscat and Cairo operated by Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, and via the codeshare agreement with Egypt Airlines, as well as 3 weekly flights operated by Air Arabia Egypt, while SalamAir operates two weekly flights between Muscat and Alexandria.

In the logistics sector, Omani ports are connected by direct shipping lines with Egyptian ports at a rate of 4 weekly trips between Salalah Port and Port Said and Damietta Port. These connection lines contribute to promoting direct export and import of goods and merchandise between the two countries. They also provide the best options for traders and importers from the country of origin and benefiting from direct international shipping lines to both countries. — ONA

OMAN VISION 2040 AND EGYPT VISION 2030



THE FIRST VISIT OF PRESIDENT SISI TO OMAN IN FEBRUARY 2018 CONTRIBUTED IN STRENGTHENING RELATIONS.

TRADE EXCHANGE BETWEEN OMAN AND EGYPT REGISTERED AT THE END OF 2021 ABOUT RO 205.8 MILLION, EQUIVALENT TO \$535.4 MILLION, COMPARED TO RO 97.7 MILLION (\$254.3 MILLION).

THE NUMBER OF EGYPTIAN COMPANIES INVESTING IN OMAN IN 2020 REACHED ABOUT 744 COMPANIES, WITH A TOTAL INVESTED CAPITAL HITTING MORE THAN \$1.856 BILLION.

OIL AND GAS PRODUCTS, IRON ORES, POLYPROPYLENE AND POLYETHYLENE PRODUCTS, FISHERIES REPRESENTED THE COMMODITIES EXPORTED FROM OMAN TO EGYPT, WHILE THE IMPORTED COMMODITIES FROM EGYPT ARE VEGETABLES, FRUITS, FOODSTUFFS AND MEDICAL PRODUCTS.

Oman-Egypt relationship to see further momentum

YOUSSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt, said that the Omani-Egyptian relations are witnessing a great economic and political momentum, especially in light as both leadership's belief in the importance of developing and expanding economic ties and boosting cooperation between the two countries during the next stage.

In an interview with Oman Arabic, the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Cairo constantly holds meetings to support the existing bilateral cooperation relations between the two countries. Businesspersons and economic leaders who participate in these meetings expressed their satisfaction over the level of bilateral relations. During periodic meetings organised by the mission of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt with the chairman and members of the Board of Directors of the Omani-Egyptian Businessmen Council to move towards joint action



Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Egypt

especially in food industries, the ambassador said.

The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Cairo has actually succeeded in achieving many accomplishments through meetings with Egyptian ministers including Dr Assem al Jazair, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities. The meeting aimed at reviewing the Egyptian experience in the field of urbanisation, the ambassador said, hoping the Egyptian experience will be transferred to the Sultanate of Oman and that the two countries achieve more cooperation in

various developmental fields.

Since President Abdel Fattah el Sisi assumed power in Egypt in 2014, the Egyptian-Omani political relations have gained great momentum at all levels within the framework of the Egyptian state's keenness to push forward the relations between the Egyptian and Omani peoples and to promote continuous consultation and coordination between on various bilateral and regional issues, the ambassador said.

The Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt have strong political as well as economic relations. The joint relationship between Oman and Egypt represents an important pivot in the Arab and regional political arena as the two countries always seek a policy of resolving differences and disputes on the basis of dialogue and negotiation while refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of other states. Both countries also call for the establishment of regional and international peace and stability while not relinquishing any of the Arab rights in general and the Palestinian rights in particular, the ambassador said.

When President Abdel Fattah el Sisi visited the Sultanate of Oman during the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, he received a warm 'state reception' that matches the status of Egypt and the Egyptian president. This historic visit set up a renewed relationship. When His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik came to the throne, he emphasised in his first address, that he will carry on with the same principle laid down by the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his brother, President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, established brotherly relations and continuous communication and more understanding and unification of visions on various issues. All contacts and meetings between the two countries confirm the depth, strength and stability of the relationship binding the two brotherly countries and affirm that the Egyptians enjoy respect and care in the Sultanate of Oman. Similarly, Omanis find warm welcome and nice treatment when they visit Egypt and this proves and confirms the strong bonds of friendship between the two peoples, the ambassador.





HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Council of Ministers, receives written message to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik from President Abdel Fattah El Sisi of Egypt. The letter was handed over by Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister of Egypt in Muscat. – file photo

Oman, Egypt relations set to see new horizons

SAMUEL KUTTY

[@samuelkuttyp](#)

The centuries-old relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab Republic of Egypt have been characteristically warm and unique.

The relations derive their strength from the historical dimension and the depth of bilateral relations between the two countries on various political, economic, strategic and cultural levels.

The two-day visit of President Abdel Fattah al Sisi to the Sultanate of Oman stems from the keenness of the leadership in the two countries. It will consolidate the firm fraternal relations between the two countries, boosting cooperation and developing ties in an atmosphere of affection and unity.

The visit is especially important as it is the second visit of El Sisi since he took office in June 2014. The first visit was on February 4, 2018, when he met late Sultan Qaboos.

During the current meeting, the President is expected to hold talks with officials on a number of issues of joint interest that will serve the people of both countries. The visit is also expected to give further fillip to the personal relations between the leaderships, which have always been a role model in the royal and republican covenants.

In January, the Egyptian President had sent a message to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to underscore his country's firm position in supporting the security and stability of the Gulf and Arab countries.

The relations are characterised by the historical link between the two great civilisations and wrapped in the bonds of Arab brotherhood, friendship and love. History shows that the Sultanate of Oman was a link between the civilisations of the Nile Valley and Mesopotamia on the one hand and the civilisation of the Indus valley on the other,



having a strong association with Egyptian civilisation.

This has resulted in extensive political, strategic, social and cultural relations after the establishment of modern Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman-Egypt ties provide a good model of relations between the brotherly countries and form the basis of mutual appreciation and share the concern for everything that serves stability in the region. Thus the relations represent an important focal point in the political and Arab arena as the two countries always seek a policy of resolving differences on the principle of dialogue and negotiation.

At the Arab political level, the relations are the cornerstone as they reflect on the policies that have been conducted in solving all differences through negotiations

and dialogue. Both countries call for peace and stability on the international and regional scales, provided not abandoning any of the Arab rights in general and the Palestinians' in particular.

Official meetings between the two countries denote the desire of the two governments to invest such distinguished relations in activating the existing bilateral cooperation.

Muscat and Cairo have an identical stance on providing maximum support to the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate rights.

Officials from both countries also meet constantly to review and activate the commercial relations between the two countries within the framework of the Great Arab trade agreement. Oman considers Egypt as an important channel for

export to the neighbouring African countries. Omani products could also benefit from the Egyptian market to access COMESA trade group comprising 21 countries.

In January this year, the Omani-Egyptian Joint Business Council held its fifteenth session in Muscat. The Omani side was headed by Sayyid Badr al Busaidy, Foreign Minister of Oman and Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, with the participation of a number of senior officials from the two brotherly countries.

The two sides affirmed to move forward in working to strengthen the bilateral cooperation process in all areas of cooperation, including political, security, economic, commercial, industrial, judicial, developmental, educational, media, labour and social

development cooperation.

They also affirmed to move forward in opening new horizons for them to achieve the aspirations of their leadership and the hopes and aspirations of their two brotherly peoples.

The Council also proposed to establish a joint investment fund as well as a joint investment company in Egypt to serve as an umbrella for businessmen of the two countries to provide investment facilities and financial support.

According to Egypt's Minister of Trade, Nevine Gamea, trade exchange between Egypt and the Sultanate of Oman reached about \$500 million by the end of 2021. Omani investments in the Egyptian market amount to \$77.5 million, distributed among 92 companies in the fields of industry, tourism, construction and agriculture.

THE VISIT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AS IT IS THE SECOND VISIT OF EL SISI SINCE HE TOOK OFFICE IN JUNE 2014. THE FIRST VISIT WAS ON FEBRUARY 4, 2018, WHEN HE MET LATE SULTAN QABOOS.

MUSCAT AND CAIRO HAVE AN IDENTICAL STANCE ON PROVIDING MAXIMUM SUPPORT TO THE STRUGGLE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR LEGITIMATE RIGHTS.

OMAN CONSIDERS EGYPT AS AN IMPORTANT CHANNEL FOR EXPORT TO THE NEIGHBOURING AFRICAN COUNTRIES. OMANI PRODUCTS COULD ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE EGYPTIAN MARKET TO ACCESS COMESA TRADE GROUP COMPRISING 21 COUNTRIES.



SCHOOLS
EXPANDED
THROUGHOUT
THE COUNTRY,
AND EXPATRIATE
TEACHERS FROM
EGYPT SUPPORTED
THE EXPANSION
SIGNIFICANTLY.
GENERATIONS
OF STUDENTS
REMEMBER
THEIR TIME IN
CLASSROOMS AND
TEACHERS
FONDLY



Omanis have indelible and fond memories of their Egyptian teachers

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt date back to 3,500 years. The State Information Service of Egypt has noted this fact with evidence.

“This has caused wide-scale economic and commercial relations between the two countries. These relations have developed after the rise of Modern Sultanate of Oman, including political, strategic, social and cultural aspects.”

But a unique relationship has been nurtured since the 1970s, and that is between teachers of Egypt and students of the Sultanate of Oman.

Education was a top priority, as late Sultan Qaboos, in the early 70s, set the vision for the renaissance march. He had said, “Let there be learning even under the shade of trees.”

Schools expanded throughout the country, and expatriate teachers from Egypt supported the expansion significantly. Generations of students remember their time in classrooms and teachers fondly. Asked about the Sultanate of Oman and Egypt’s relations, and Dr Hamed al Sinawi, a psychiatrist, said, “The thing that comes to the mind immediately is the role of Egyptian teachers. I had lot of Egyptian teachers. A tribute to the Egyptian teachers is their ability to fit into

the Omani culture. They coped with moving to remote villages, even those teachers who lived in big cities themselves.”

Rashid al Jabri was in the Hafs bin Rashid School, Seeb, in the late 70s.

“The teachers from Egypt played a significant role in the education sector. I remember all my Egyptian teachers, like Ahmed Maher, my math teacher. In the 70s, there were also many teachers from other Arab countries. Those days parents also had great respect for the teachers. Parents supported the teachers if their wards had gone through punishment in class. The teachers were polite who were friendly yet strict,” said Al Jabri.

According to him, the teachers were fatherly towards the students.

“I remember they took teaching as a great responsibility and had great patience. I remember in my fourth grade, we had older students too who could at times become loud, but the teachers patiently guided them,” recollected Al Jabri.

In the 2000s, Zainab al Nasseri was in school in Rustaq. She is nostalgic when she talks about her teachers.

“I remember all my Egyptian teachers - most kind and passionate. I learned a lot from them. We had teachers in Rustaq schools, mostly for Math and Physics. They were so strict and so

“

I have had a lot of colleagues from Egypt. My colleagues always told me how much they enjoyed teaching in the Sultanate of Oman when it comes to the number of students in a classroom and the methodology implemented in teaching

ALI AL GHAFRI
Teacher

sincere. I loved Physics because of my Egyptian teacher, Mirvat. I got the highest grade in Physics in General Diploma, and I think it is because of her,” said Al Nasseri.

Ali al Ghafri studied in Rustaq and began his schooling in the 70s. “We had a lot of teachers from Egypt teaching Math and Science.”

Today he is an English teacher. “I have had a lot of colleagues from Egypt. My colleagues always told me how much they enjoyed teaching in the Sultanate of Oman when it comes to the number of students in a classroom and the methodology implemented in teaching.”

In 2019 an executive programme was signed between the two countries.

Meanwhile, in a recent development, the Supreme Council of Egyptian Universities approved diploma and bachelor’s degrees granted by all private and government educational institutions from the Sultanate of Oman. On the occasion, Muna al Zedjali, Oman’s Cultural Attaché, said, “The decision was the result of several meetings with the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, the Scientific Research, Council of Egyptian Universities and the presidents of Egyptian Universities.”

Both parties had also discussed all challenges facing Omani students wishing to complete their studies in Egyptian educational institutions.



Asaad bids farewell to envoys



MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan received separately in his office on Sunday Mohamed Dori Mohamed Yakub, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya to the Sultanate of Oman and Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of

Oman to bid them farewell at the end of their tour of duty. The two ambassadors expressed their thanks to His Majesty the Sultan for the support extended to them during their tour of duty in Oman from His Majesty, the Government and the Omani people, which enabled them to carry out their tasks. They also expressed their best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing the Sultanate of Oman further

progress and growth under the wise leadership of His Majesty. On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his utmost thanks to the ambassadors for the efforts they exerted in serving the relations between Oman and their countries, wishing them permanent success, and the peoples of their countries further progress and prosperity. The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — ONA

Ambassadors end tour of duty in Oman



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday bid farewell to Dr Sulaiman Abdullah al Harbi, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate of Oman; Mohamed Dori Mohamed Yakub, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya; Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka; Dr Tibor Szatmari, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary and Haji Sulaini bin Haji Said, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam at the end of their

tours of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts they exerted in enhancing the relations between the Sultanate of Oman and their countries, wishing them success in their future endeavours. — ONA

tours of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts they exerted in enhancing the relations between the Sultanate of Oman and their countries, wishing them success in their future endeavours. — ONA

Harat Al Shanadeed cries for facelift



TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The old 'Harats' and the ancient market in the Wilayat of Ibri in the Al Dhahirah Governorate date back more than 500 years. They were the gateways for travellers and merchants and enjoyed wide fame and economic prosperity for ages.

One of the most famous in the neighbourhood is 'Harat Al Shanadeed', adjacent to the Ibri castle. The drawings here date back more than 400 years.

The visitors to this old neighbourhood feel the ingenuity of the Omani civilisation in terms of its unique construction method in that era, which suggests the extent of strength, solidity, homogeneity, interdependence and intimacy among its residents despite the simplicity of life. These houses are decorated with ornate roofs, arches, and 'mashrabiyyats' (balconies), which are inspired by Arab and Islamic architecture.

Citizens here appeal to the authorities to restore the ancient site. "We are asking the authorities to consider the possibility of restoring this neighbourhood, which is distinguished by its ancient architectural design. Many parts of this site have collapsed, and the rest are falling, especially during the heavy rain."

"The importance of this quarter



lies in its ancient architectural style and as one of the main crossings for commercial caravans in ancient times. Therefore, its proximity to the commercial market is evidence of its commercial importance", locals told the Observer.

"The competent authorities (the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism) must adopt a design project that will give a facelift to the site to attract tourists to the Wilayat of Ibri," they said.

Wilayat of Ibri is famous for its ancient lanes, forts and defensive towers. And its market is considered one of the oldest in the Sultanate of Oman, and citizens still practice traditional methods to buy and sell things, including Al Manadah and Al Habta.

Lost and found, fishermen share joy of return

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Four litres of water and almost 1,500kg of tuna on board, 100 kilometres to the harbour; the time is around 5 pm, and suddenly the engine dies. Coincidentally the mobile phones of the crew of the ship started losing charge. So close yet so far, and thus began an ordeal that lasted almost ten days. Luckily the Omani authorities stepped in to search Ali al Jaaferi and Salem al Jaaferi.

Life since then has just changed completely for the duo. The monsoon winds ushered them towards Pakistan, and although they came across a ship, the sailors could not hear their cry for help until they came across a fishing boat. Within those days, they only had four litres of water which Ali said they used only to wet their throat and not even let it reach down to the stomach. All they knew was they had to preserve it until they found help.

Ali al Jaaferi explained all this as the two were being given a grand reception by the Pakistani community residing in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrating their safe return to their homeland.

Their boat had drifted towards the west coast and kept sailing for another six days till it reached the water of their neighbouring country Pakistan, a fishing boat noticed them on the 9th day and rescued and it was then the connection was established with their families back home where a huge search operation was undergoing by the Royal Navy of Oman,

Oman Fisherman's Association and their family members who despite no success in locating them were hopeful that they are still alive and will return.

Pakistan Navy team, who were already on the lookout, reached them upon establishing contact with the Pakistani fishing boat that had rescued both Ali and Salem and took them to Karachi.

The Sultanate of Oman consulate in Karachi received them along with Pakistan Navy officials and later conducted a press conference at the Maritime centre.

Mian Mohammed Munir, former Chairman of Pakistan Social Club, hosted an evening for Ali and Salem and their family members to celebrate their safe return at Al Murooj Hotel, held under the auspices of honourable member of Majlis Ashshura Rashid bin Abdullah al Ghailani as the Chief Guest and Guest of Honour Captain Kashif Farhan, Defence Attaché at the Embassy of Pakistan for the Sultanate of Oman. Senior community members and other dignitaries were also invited. Al Ghailani thanked the Pakistan government and Pakistan Navy for their utmost support. Speaking on the occasion Captain Kashif Farhan said that both the nations are not just neighbours but are brothers and it was our moral obligation to find Ali and Salem.

Counsellor Amjad Malik assured that they would grant visas to the Omani Fisherman's Association for their upcoming visit to Pakistan, who will be meeting Pakistan Navy officials along with the fishermen crew who found and rescued Ali & Salem.



Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos Private School

Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos PVT School is currently seeking teachers to fill the following vacancies for the academic year 2022/2023:

- 1) Female English Teacher
- 2) Female Math Teacher (5-10)
- 3) Female Economics Teacher / Business Studies

Requirements: candidates must have

- ❖ B.A. in the subject / B.Ed.
- ❖ Minimum 3 Years experience.
- ❖ Must be resident in Oman.
- ❖ Minimum score 6 in IELTS.

Please submit your CVs in via E-mail:
schoolhr@gmail.com

Note: CV from outside Oman will not be considered

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (19/2022)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following biddings :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for obtaining bidding docs.	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for submission
1	BB/01/2022	Selling of used (Oils, Batteries and Tires)	25/- OMR	26/07/2022	18/07/2022	27/07/2022

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bids are invited to participate in the biddings as per the following:

- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat | 0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (**MM.PC@mm.gov.om**), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted**.

Documents must be enclosed in a plain envelope sealed with red wax (without any company information) and drop in the box located in Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (**www.mm.gov.om**). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through email (**crm@mm.gov.om**).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (**MM.PC@mm.gov.om**).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



Saudi Arabia, Iraq discuss ‘regional stability’

RIYADH: Iraq’s prime minister met with Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in the kingdom on Sunday as part of Baghdad’s efforts to mediate between Riyadh and Tehran.

Mustafa al Kadhemi, who headed to Saudi Arabia on Saturday, is expected to then visit Iran, with which Riyadh has had no diplomatic ties since 2016.

Prince Mohammed and Kadhemi addressed “bilateral relations and opportunities for joint cooperation”, reported the official Saudi Press Agency.

“They exchanged points of view on a number of issues that would contribute to supporting and strengthening regional security and stability,” it added.

Iraq has over the past year hosted five rounds of talks between the two regional countries, with the last session held in April.

Kadhemi said at the time he believed that “reconciliation is near” between Riyadh and Tehran, a further reflection of shifting political alignments across the region. On Saturday



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi upon his arrival in Jeddah.

an Iraqi cabinet source said that Kadhemi’s trip to Saudi Arabia and Iran “comes in the context of talks that Riyadh and Tehran recently held in Baghdad”. The source said those talks “represented a road map for mending relations and returning to the right course of strengthening

Lebanese billionaire picked to form new government

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s lawmakers designated incumbent Prime Minister Najib Mikati to form a new government on Thursday, more than a month after parliamentary elections that yielded no clear majority.

The 66-year-old billionaire, who had been widely expected to keep his job, secured 54 votes during parliamentary consultations, giving him a clear edge over other potential nominees.

President Michel Aoun subsequently asked him to form a new government, a task analysts fear could take weeks, if not months, despite the economic emergency facing the country.

Lebanon defaulted on its debt in 2020, the local currency has lost around 90 per cent of its value on the black market, and the UN now considers four in five Lebanese to be poor.

Saudi Arabia and Iraq addressed ‘bilateral relations and opportunities for joint cooperation’

bilateral relations” between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Saudi Arabia and Iran have had no diplomatic ties for six years.

Riyadh responded by cutting relations with Tehran.

In early March, Prince Mohammed said his country and Iran were “neighbours forever”, and that it was “better for both of us to work it out and to look for ways in which we can coexist”.

After his arrival in the kingdom, Kadhemi performed the minor pilgrimage, known as umra, in the holy city of Mecca, according to pictures released by his office.

— AFP

Semiconductor industry emerges as major area of attention in India

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

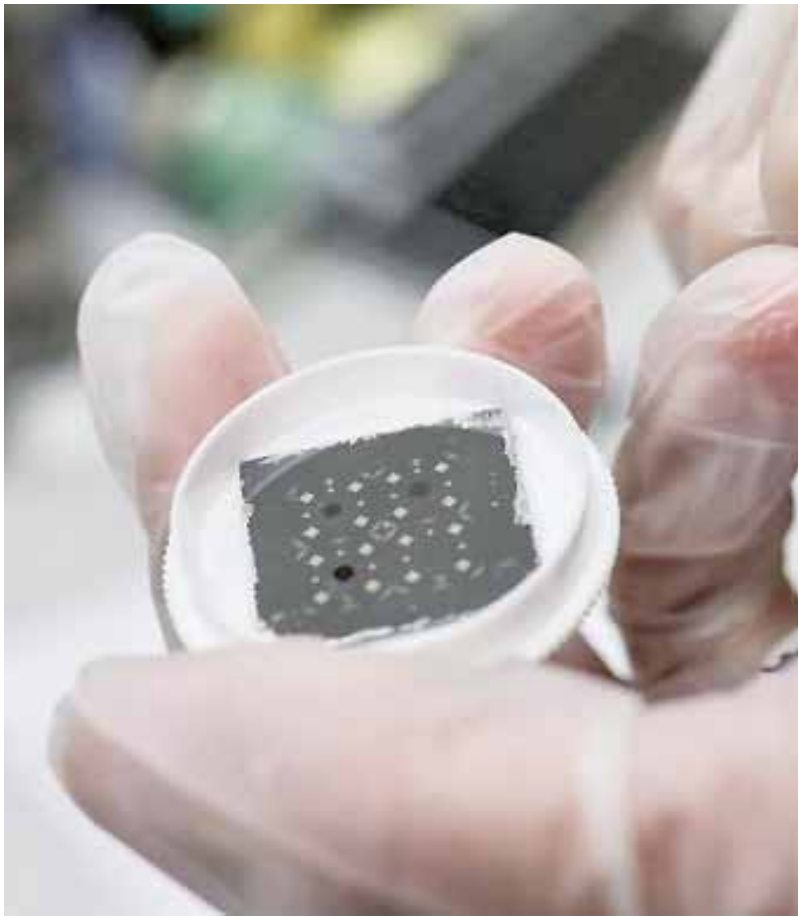
Semiconductor industry in India has emerged as a major focus area. The government is showing interest to boost the sector with the involvement of all other stakeholders.

Dr Anil D Sahasrabudhe, Chairperson of the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), called for adaptability of the new technologies, which are fast emerging as driving force for the growth of the institutions.

Addressing a conference titled ‘Embracing Educations AI-driven Revolution’, Dr Sahasrabudhe revealed India’s outlook on semiconductor industry and said, “There is a lot of interest in starting the semiconductor industry in India.

These industries are located in Taiwan, in South Korea. Although technology comes from the US, most of the manufacturing happens here and therefore we are building a database of all the languages that are spoken this side by our students so that they can go there and do internships as well,” media reports quoted him as saying.

The event saw attendance of



Semiconductor grabs industry attention in India

experts from around the world. The IT experts involved in imparting online education addressed the most recent technological advances in education and their implications.

Fillon-Ashida Pierrick, a spokesperson for the European Commission, Shreyas Jayasimha, co-founder of Aarna Law, gave inputs on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 5G technology.

Pierrick called AI a complex

yet an important learning tool. He called for cracking the limits of the system and getting maximum out of it.

Similarly, Jayasimha called the education imparting platforms important for coming and current generations and exhorted the stakeholders to envision the future of Artificial Intelligence and 5G technology.

Meanwhile, the AICTE chairperson made a mention of National Education Policy (NEP) and said, “No language has been left out of India’s world-class education system, including Mandarin, German, French, Japanese, etc.”

Commenting on Indian languages he said, “All languages, including English are equal. There is no overemphasis here on any particular language.”

He cited example of Tamil, Punjabi, Assamese, Marathi, Kannada, Bengali, or Telugu to substantiate his point.

There is huge demand for semiconductor chips globally. They are used in cars, aircraft, medical equipment, computers, mobile phones and other mobile communication devices, including security systems and gadgets being used for entertainment.

Egypt tries man over murder of student

AL MANSURAH: A trial began on Sunday for an Egyptian man accused of stabbing a woman to death in a public street after she rejected his advances — a case that has sparked widespread outrage.

A video went viral last week appearing to show the victim, identified as student Nayera Ashraf, being stabbed by a young man outside her university.

The crime has triggered widespread anger both in Egypt and beyond, having been followed a few days later by a similar incident in which Jordanian student Iman Irshaid was shot dead on a university campus.

Social media users immediately drew comparisons between the two murders.

At the Mansoura Criminal Court, 130 kilometres north of Cairo, Mohamed Adel was accused of “premeditated murder”, after confessing to intentionally killing the victim, an AFP correspondent said.

Ashraf had previously reported the alleged perpetrator to the authorities, fearing that he would attack her, according to her father and witnesses.

The maximum penalty for murder is death in Egypt, which carried out the third highest number of executions in the world in 2021, according to Amnesty International.

“He stabbed her several times,” said the prosecution, which found “messages threatening to cut her throat” on the victim’s phone. — AFP



Egyptian Mohamed Adel (C), is surrounded by guards as he is taken out of the defender's box, after his first trial session, 145 km north of Cairo.— AFP

SHORT TAKES

MANILA

One killed, one missing in Philippine ferry fire

At least one person was killed after a fire engulfed a Philippine ferry, authorities said, forcing scores of people on board to jump into the sea.

Rescuers plucked 163 passengers and crew from the waters off the central island of Bohol, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

The ‘Mama Mary Chloe’ vessel, which had a 236-person capacity, was carrying 157 passengers, including 15 children, along with eight crew from Ubay in Bohol



to Bato on the nearby island of Leyte. The body of a passenger has been recovered and a coast guard ship has been deployed to help with the search, authorities added. — AFP

COLOMBO

Lanka hikes fuel prices as US delegation arrives

Sri Lanka hiked fuel prices creating further pain for ordinary people as officials from the US arrived for talks aimed at alleviating the island’s dire economic crisis.

Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) said it raised the price of diesel, used widely in public transport, by 15 per cent to 460 rupees a litre while upping petrol 22 per cent to 550 rupees. The announcement came a day after Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said there would be



an indefinite delay. He said oil due last week had not turned up while shipments scheduled to arrive next week would also not reach Sri Lanka due to “banking” reasons. — AFP

YANGON

Billions of seized drugs torched in Myanmar

Myanmar authorities said they torched more than half a billion dollars worth of narcotics as part of eradication efforts for World Drug Day, as the UN warns that production of methamphetamine in the region is hitting record levels.

Almost two tonnes of heroin and more than 630 million “yaba” meth pills went up in smoke at ceremonies in commercial hub of Yangon, the central city of Mandalay and Shan state in the north, authorities said. But some



analysts cautioned that the \$642 million bonfires are part of a long-running game of smoke and mirrors played by a junta government not serious about tackling the problem. — AFP



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In brief

■ RABAT



23 DIE AFTER MIGRANTS TRY TO STORM MELILLA EN MASSE

The death toll in an attempt by hundreds of migrants to break through a border fence between Morocco and a Spanish exclave earlier this week has risen to 23, Moroccan state television reported. On Friday, Rabat said 18 migrants had died, while others and security forces were injured, during a mass attempt to storm the border to the Spanish exclave of Melilla. Five further migrants have since died, raising the toll to 23, state television reported late, citing unnamed local sources. The 18 injured migrants and one member of security forces are still under medical observation, the broadcaster added without elaborating. — dpa

■ MADRID



ANTI-NATO DEMO IN MADRID AHEAD OF SUMMIT

Anti-Nato protesters gathered in Madrid on Sunday ahead of a summit of the Western alliance in the Spanish capital this week. The demonstrators called for Nato to be dissolved and for military bases maintained by the US in Spain to be closed. The organisers put the number gathered at 30,000, while the authorities said 2,200 participated in the march through central Madrid. They held up banners with “No to Nato, No to War, For Peace”, as they marched from Atocha station to Plaza España some 2.5 kilometres away. The rally, which was accompanied by a large police presence, went off peacefully. — dpa

■ LONDON



UK BEREAVED MAY SUE GOVT OVER COVID PROBE DELAY

Bereaved families in Britain have warned they may take legal action against the Government over delays to starting the coronavirus public inquiry. The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group is considering bringing a judicial review over the failure to provide a setting update for the inquiry into the Government’s handling of the pandemic. They say this leaves the inquiry in ‘limbo’, more than six months after Prime Minister Boris Johnson appointed Baroness Hallett to chair the probe in December 2021. — dpa

Russian strikes hit Kyiv as G7 meets

KYIV: Russian strikes hit a residential building in Kyiv on Sunday in the first attack on the capital in almost three weeks, Ukraine said, calling for increased support from G7 leaders meeting in Germany. One person died and four people, including a seven-year-old girl, were taken to hospital following the early morning strikes, said city mayor Vitali Klitschko.

Russia denied it had hit a civilian target, however, saying its forces had struck the Artyom weapons factory in the neighbourhood.

Earlier, it announced strikes against three military centres in northern and western Ukraine, including one near the border with Poland.

The high-profile attacks come as a week of Western diplomacy kicked off with the G7 summit in Germany, which will be followed by a meeting of Nato leaders in Spain.

Allies including US President Joe Biden — who condemned the Kyiv attack as “barbarism” — will take stock of their support for Ukraine and for sanctions imposed on Moscow. The G7 talks opened Sunday with the announcement of a ban on imports of Russian gold, but Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called for more.

He posted on Twitter a photo of an injured child being carried on a stretcher, who he said was “sleeping peacefully in Kyiv until a Russian cruise missile blasted her home”. The “G7 summit must respond with more sanctions on Russia and more heavy arms for Ukraine. Russia’s sick imperialism must be defeated”, he said.



Rescuers and firefighters work in a damaged residential building hit by Russian missiles in Kyiv amid Russian attack of Ukraine. — AFP

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will address both the G7 and the Nato summit, the week after the EU showed its support by granting Kyiv candidate status.

Russian forces sought to encircle Kyiv in the first few weeks after the February 24 invasion, but Sunday’s attack was the first strike on the capital since early June.

Klitschko said the attack was a Russian missile strike intended to “intimidate Ukrainians” ahead of the Nato summit.

But Russia’s defence ministry condemned as “fake” reports

that it had targeted a residential building.

A Russian missile had “hit the Artyom factory’s workshops” which had already been targeted in April, it said, saying the residential building was damaged by a Ukrainian air defence missile.

It was the third time since the invasion that this northwest neighbourhood had been hit. The weapons factory nearby produces air-to-air and anti-tank rockets among others.

An AFP team said there was a fire on the top three floors of the building and its stairwell was

completely destroyed.

Afterwards, residents gathered at the bottom of the building, many of them in tears. One woman was still wearing a bathrobe.

“I woke up at the first explosion, went to the balcony and saw missiles falling and heard a huge explosion — everything vibrated”, 38-year-old Yuri said declining to give his surname.

Edward Shkuta, who lives next door, said there had been four missiles since 6:30 am. A building “was directly hit on the top floors and I saw wounded people coming out”.

In recent months, the fighting in Ukraine has focused on the eastern Donbas region, which has been partially under the control of pro-Moscow separatists since 2014. The Russians made a strategic breakthrough on Saturday when they took the industrial hub of Severodonetsk, the scene of weeks of fierce battles that have left it largely destroyed.

Severodonetsk’s mayor said it had been “fully occupied” by Russian troops after Ukrainian forces retreated to better defend the neighbouring city of Lysychansk. — AFP

Nasa blasts off from Australian Outback in ‘historic’ launch

SYDNEY: Nasa’s first-ever launch from a commercial site outside of the United States blasted off from Australia’s Outback late on Sunday, in a “historic” moment for the country’s space industry. In the first of three planned launches from the Arnhem Space Centre, the rocket, carrying technology likened to a “mini Hubble” telescope, lifted off — blasted about 350 kilometres into the night sky.

“It is a momentous occasion for us as a company in particular, but it’s historic for Australia”, Equatorial Launch Australia CEO Michael Jones said ahead of the lift-off.

Jones, whose company owns and operates the launch site in the far north of Australia, described it as a “coming out” party for the country’s space industry and said the chance to work with Nasa was a milestone for commercial space firms in the country.

After a series of rain and wind delays, the suborbital-sounding rocket soared into the sky to study X-rays emanating from the Alpha Centauri A and B systems.

After reaching its apogee, the rocket’s payload was to capture data on the star systems before parachuting back to earth.

According to Nasa, the launch offers a unique glimpse of the distant systems and unlocked fresh possibilities for scientists.

“We’re excited to be able



Nasa blasts off from Australian Outback in ‘historic’ launch.

“It is a momentous occasion for us as a company in particular, but it’s historic for Australia

MICHAEL JONES

Equatorial Launch Australia CEO

to launch important science missions from the Southern Hemisphere and see targets that we can’t from the United States”, Nicky Fox, Nasa’s Heliophysics Division Director in Washington, said on announcing the mission.

Jones said the unique location had made preparations hard, with years of work to get regulatory approval and the need to haul rockets on barges to the launch site — about 28 hours drive from Darwin in northern Australia.

“I think for the team, it’s gonna be, you know, a huge relief that it’s done”, he said. But with the next launch already looming on July 4, the break would be short-lived.

“We need to, you know, dust ourselves off, take a day off and then get back into it in readiness for the next launch because it’s just as important.”

It is the first Nasa rocket to launch from Australia since 1995, and the project was hailed as the start of a “new era” for the country’s space industry by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. — AFP

Norway pays tribute to victims of Oslo shooting

OSLO: Norway paid tribute on Sunday to the victims of a deadly shooting near a gay bar in the capital that shocked the normally peaceful country and led to the cancellation of a Pride march. The altar of Oslo cathedral had vases with rainbow flags for a service to remember the victims of the attack, attended by Crown Princess Mette-Marit.

Investigators are probing the motives of the suspected gunman, who opened fire in the early hours of Saturday, killing two and wounding 21.

“Bullets cannot kill love”, the head of the Norwegian Protestant Church, Olav Fykse Tveit, said.

Noting that the Church had for years opposed equal rights for same-sex couples, he said: “We see that we can learn, sometimes in spite of ourselves, that diversity is a present, a richness and that many homosexuals have a capacity for love that we are incapable of.”

“The shooting... put an end to the Pride march”, said a somber Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store. “But it has not put an end to the fight to end discrimination, prejudice and hate.”

The shooting occurred at around 1 am on Saturday near the London Pub gay club in Oslo’s packed nightlife district, where Pride parties were in full swing. Two men in their 50s and 60s died. Twenty-one other people were wounded.

Police quickly arrested the suspect, whom they described as a 42-year-old Norwegian man of Iranian descent known to the nation’s security services. Norwegian media named him as Zaniar Matapour.

Domestic intelligence service PST said it was treating the attack as “an act of Islamist terrorism”.

The suspect “has a long history of violence and threats”, PST chief Roger Berg said.

— AFP



Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store (R), Crown Princess Mette-Marit of Norway (L) and Crown Prince Haakon of Norway lay flowers at a memorial in the aftermath of a shooting in central Oslo. — AFP

The joy of travelling without leaving your home



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is an Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

As the khareef season begins in Salalah and tourists throng to this monsoon treasure, it leaves many others wishing they could travel but cannot, for various reasons. Whether there are health concerns, economic limitations or even reluctance to cope with hours at airports, waiting in queues and traffic jams, travel may not be for everybody. But that hardly matters anymore as you can explore the entire world at your own leisure, thanks to the rise in popularity of travel literature and even vlogs which give you a three dimensional visual experience. Travel literature is not a new form at all. From 'Periplus of the Erythrean

Sea' of the 1st century CE, through the accounts of Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta and Nasir Khusrou's 'Safarnama' of the 11th century, travellers have been regaling readers with detailed and entertaining accounts of places visited, people seen and customs observed. By the 19th century, travel writing took on a more Orientalism perspective, with stereotyped pictures of natives portrayed for a western readership. Travel books range in tone and scope, from exploring life with royalty to living with shepherds and nomadic communities. They range from adventure, slave narratives, philosophical studies, guide books and travel journals. In the 21st century, travel

BEING ONE WITH NATURE, OR EVEN DWELLING ON A HISTORIC PATH IS REWARDING AND ENRICHING literature is a form of its own, even boasting of specific awards like the ones given by National Geographic or the Edward Stanford Travel Writing Awards, considered the most prestigious. There is a whole collection of travel writing on Oman, often by British and European travellers, as well as from the Middle East. Accounts by traders and sailors abound in the form of diaries and short descriptions. There are also

the sustained records of James Wellsted and Samuel Miles who explored the interiors of Oman. Zhang Qian's travels representing the Han dynasty rulers and Tipu Sultan's embassies to Oman are captivating accounts of this region from Asian travellers. Even Ibn Batuta spent time much time in Oman, travelling from present day Sur to Dhofar in the 14th century. But if all these detailed accounts are not your cup of tea, there is a burgeoning collection of vloggers who give city tours, culinary trips, cultural visits and even staycation recommendations on digital media. Whether on You Tube, Instagram, Facebook or Tik Tok, almost any place in the world can be visited from the comfort of your home.

This even includes pilgrimage sites and adventure trips. Vlogging is an entire industry in itself. It involves equipment, filming, voice overs, editing and disseminating. It is currently a very competitive industry, with vloggers vying for attention by choosing niche areas of expertise. Of course, there is nothing like experiencing the mountains, the seas, rivers, lakes and forests yourself. Being one with nature, or even dwelling on a historic path is rewarding and enriching. But it's never possible to be in every single place of the globe, and for that, we are grateful that we can pull up a couch, settle down with a favourite beverage and be in any part of the world we want.

Rich heritage buried under impoverished Gaza Strip

GUILLAUME LAVALLEE

While workers laboured on a large construction site in the Gaza Strip, a security guard noticed a strange piece of stone sticking out of the earth. "I thought it was a tunnel," said Ahmad, the young guard, referring to secret passages dug by Hamas to help it battle Israel. In the Gaza Strip, ruled by Hamas and repeatedly ravaged by war, people are more familiar with burying the dead than digging up their heritage. But what Ahmad found in January was part of a Roman necropolis dating from about 2,000 years ago -- representative of the Palestinian territory's rich, if under-developed, archaeological treasures. After the last war between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 left a trail of damage in Gaza, Egypt began a reconstruction initiative worth \$500 million. As part of that project in Jabaliya, in the north of the coastal enclave, bulldozers were digging up the sandy soil in order to build new concrete buildings when Ahmad made his discovery. "I notified the Egyptian foremen, who immediately contacted local authorities and asked the workers to stop," said Ahmad, a Palestinian who preferred not to give his full name. With rumours on social media of a big discovery, Gaza's antiquities service called in the French non-governmental group Premiere Urgence Internationale and the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem to evaluate the site's importance and mark off the area. "The first excavations permitted the identification of about 40 tombs dating from the ancient Roman period between the first and second centuries AD," said French archaeologist Rene Elter, who led the team dispatched to Jabaliya. "The necropolis is larger than these 40 tombs and should have between 80 and 100," he said. One of the burial sites found so far is decorated with multi-coloured paintings representing crowns and garlands of bay leaves, as well as jars for funeral drinks, the archaeologist added. Archaeology is a highly political subject in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and discoveries are used to justify the territorial claims of each people. While the Jewish state has a number of archaeologists reporting on an impressive number of ancient treasures, the sector is largely neglected in Gaza. Authorities periodically announce discoveries in the territory, but tourism at archaeological sites is limited. Israel and Egypt, which shares a border with Gaza, tightly restrict the flow of people in and out of the enclave administered by Hamas since 2007. — AFP

As Russia chokes Ukraine's grain exports, Romania tries to fill in



Patricia Cohen

The writer is an economics correspondent based in London

Stopping at the edge of a vast field of barley on his farm in Prundu, 30 miles outside Romania's capital city of Bucharest, Catalin Corbea pinched off a spiky flowered head from a stalk, rolled it between his hands, and then popped a seed in his mouth and bit down. "Another 10 days to two weeks," he said, explaining how much time was needed before the crop was ready for harvest. Corbea, a farmer for nearly three decades, has rarely been through a season like this one. The Russians' bloody creep into Ukraine, a breadbasket for the world, has caused an upheaval in global grain markets. Coastal blockades have trapped millions of tonnes of wheat and corn inside Ukraine. With famine stalking Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere in Asia, a frenetic scramble for new suppliers and alternate shipping routes is underway. "Because of the war, there are opportunities for Romanian farmers this year," Corbea said through a translator. The question is whether Romania will be able to take advantage of them by expanding its own agricultural sector while helping fill the food gap left by landlocked Ukraine. In many ways, Romania is well positioned. Its port in Constanta, on the western coast of the Black Sea, has

DROUGHTS IN EUROPE, THE US, NORTH AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA HAVE ALL TAKEN ADDITIONAL TOLLS ON HARVESTS

provided a critical — although tiny — transit point for Ukrainian grain since the war began. Romania's own farm output is dwarfed by Ukraine's, but it is one of the largest grain exporters in the European Union. Last year, it sent 60 per cent of its wheat abroad, mostly to Egypt and the rest of the Middle East. This year, the government has allocated €500 million to support farming and keep production up. Still, this Eastern European nation faces many challenges: Its farmers, while benefiting from higher prices, are dealing with spiralling costs of diesel, pesticides and fertiliser. Transportation infrastructure across the country and at its ports is neglected and outdated, slowing the transit of its own exports while also stymieing Romania's efforts to help Ukraine do an end run around Russian blockades. Even before the

war, though, the global food system was under stress. Covid-19 and related supply-chain blockages had bumped up prices of fuel and fertiliser, while brutal dry spells and unseasonal floods had shrunk harvests. Since the war began, roughly two dozen countries, including India, have tried to bulk up their own food supplies by limiting exports, which in turn has exacerbated global shortages. This year, droughts in Europe, the United States, North Africa and the Horn of Africa have all taken additional tolls on harvests. In Italy, water has been rationed in the farm-producing Po Valley after river levels dropped enough to reveal a barge that had sunk in World War II. Rain was not as plentiful in Prundu as Corbea would have liked it to be, but the timing was opportune when it did come. He bent down and picked up a fistful of dark, moist soil and caressed it. "This is perfect land," he said. Because of price rises and better production from the watering equipment he installed, Corbea said, he expected revenues to increase by €5 million, or 50 per cent, in 2022. The costs of diesel, pesticides and fertiliser have doubled or tripled, but, at least for now, the prices that Corbea said he had been able to get for his grain had more than offset those increases. But prices are volatile, he said, and farmers have to make sure that future revenues will cover their investments over the longer term. The calculus has paid off for other large players in the sector. "Profits have increased, you cannot imagine, the biggest ever," said Ghita Pinca, general manager at Agricovert, an agribusiness company in Romania. There is enormous potential for further growth, he said, although it depends on more investment by farmers in irrigation systems, storage facilities and technology. Some smaller farmers like Chipaila Mircea have had a tougher time. Mircea grows barley, corn and wheat on 1,975 acres in Poarta Alba, about 150 miles from Prundu, near the southeastern tip of Romania and along the canal that links the Black Sea with the Danube River. — *New York Times*



Catalin Corbea, a farmer for nearly three decades, in his trophy room in Prundu, Romania, one of the largest grain-exporting members of the EU.

Wear a hat of a leader!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

Leadership is a common terminology which is not accurately understood by many. Else, it is sometimes not even reflected on people’s attitudes and behaviours. Many, especially those in leadership position, are giving a cold shoulder to what leadership signifies! Probably, the way they act as bosses could be attributed to their ignorance or carelessness!

Regardless of the reasons, it is an unprofessional way of wearing the leader’s hat. Hence, they stand as a boss, not a leader. Possibly, their ultimate goal of being a boss is just limited to simply managing a team or a group of people in an organisation. They, perhaps, lack management skills and competences, which assist them to manage their team properly. To tell the truth, a leader is the one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.

Ironically, such kind of bosses are many, being misplaced in different organisations and positions! They stand as a burden to their employers. On the other hand, they are giving others a cold shoulder and missing things up sometimes. Those bosses are an obstacle demotivating colleagues as well as depressing and irritating them.

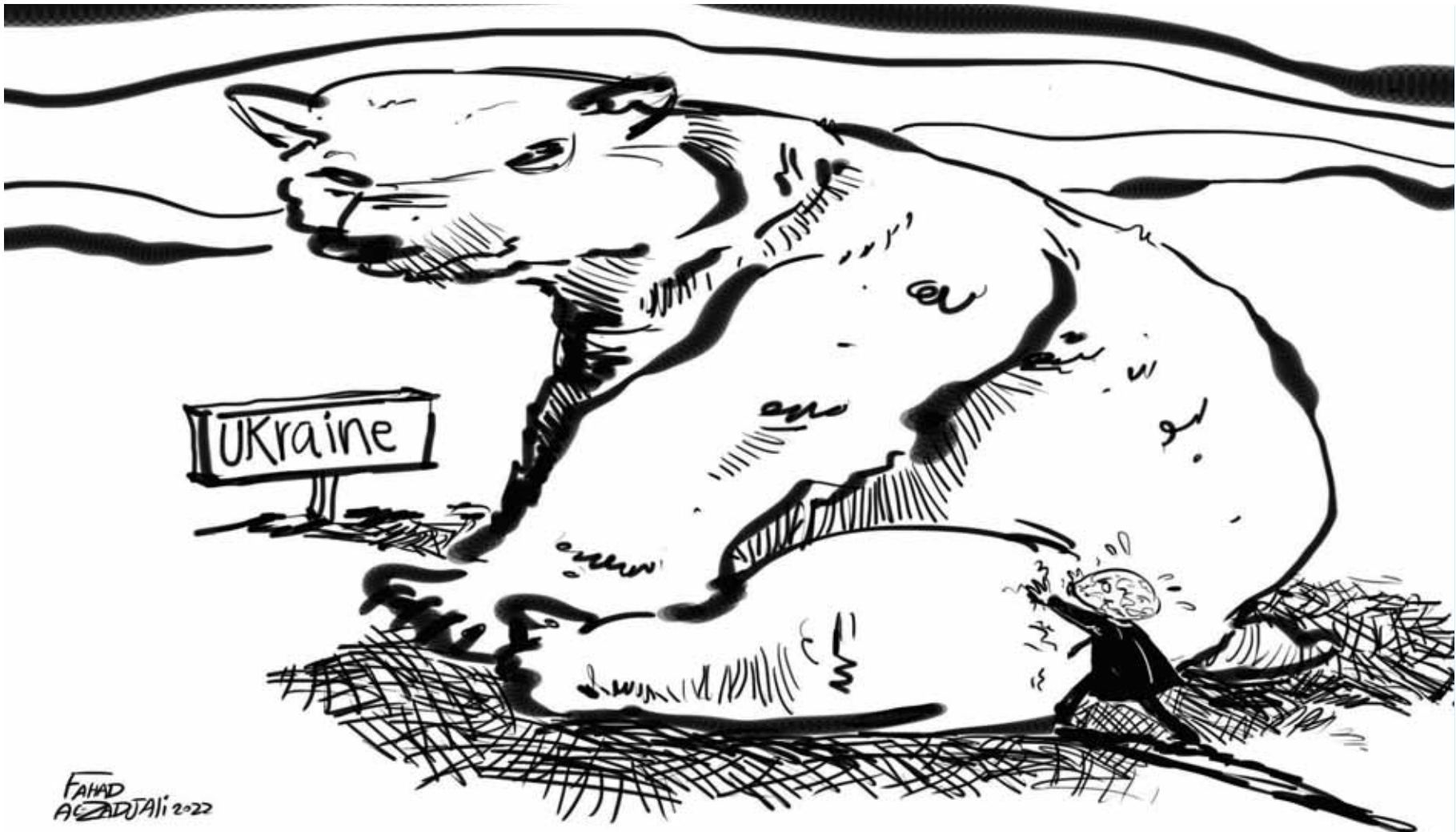
Likewise, those bosses could even impact the productivity of their teams and eventually affect the overall performance of their organisations. Their negative vibes, which they spread all over among others spoils the spirit, commitment and enthusiasm of other employees. Besides, they interfere in other’s business and tasks, trying to micromanage them in a very unprincipled way. Perhaps, this is due to their lack of confidence and reliance on employees. What is even worse is that they are unfair with their teams in regards to getting their rights. They are being aggressive and selfish; it is totally intolerable! Just imagine how one can work with such a frustrating boss with inhuman feelings and attitude. In other words, they are not even good to lead themselves, so how could they lead others!

Reflecting on this, do you think giving those bosses special courses on leadership and management where they can learn some good skills will have an impact?! It could be a useful way to reshape their attitude, but there is no guaranteed outcome. However, it’s worth trying as it might change some bosses to a better version of them. Therefore, organisations with such strange bosses should take it seriously and put them under intensive training!

A key thing a boss should understand is that before taking a chance and risk of leading others, a boss needs to clearly understand leadership. It involves making sound and sometimes difficult decisions, creating and communicating a clear vision, establishing achievable goals and providing followers with the knowledge and tools necessary to achieve their objectives. Leadership is not a title, but a behaviour that one needs to live and act accordingly.

Leadership is the art of motivating a group of people to act towards accomplishing a shared goal. In a business setting, this can mean directing colleagues with a strategy to meet the organisation’s needs. In this regard, a great leader knows how to both inspire people and get followers to complete the tasks that achieve the leader’s goal. Hence, a leader leads by example and not by force and making an example of others.

Dear bosses, if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a real leader. Therefore, just be humble and responsible for the mission you are assigned too. Promote the good chemistry and spread the teamwork spirit among employees and rest assured that they will spare no effort to bring about their best to the organisation. The difference between a boss and a leader is that a boss says “go”, while a leader says “Let’s go”.



Fahad Al-Jadali 2022

European security after Nato’s Madrid summit



Javier Solana

The writer is a former EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, secretary-general of Nato, and foreign minister of Spain, is President of EsadeGeo – Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

At the end of June, 25 years after Madrid last hosted a Nato summit, the Spanish capital will again be the scene of a new chapter in European security. And Europe, for the most part, will have to be the protagonist. Ultimately, the Alliance’s coming gathering must help us Europeans step up and assume our responsibilities with regard to our continent’s security. That is the best and most necessary contribution that Europe can make to Nato’s future.

Today’s geopolitical context is very different from that of a quarter-century ago. At its 1997 Madrid summit, Nato invited three former Warsaw Pact countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland – to join. In addition, following the signing that year of the Nato-Russia Founding Act and the subsequent establishment of the Nato-Russia Council, Europe was looking at a future of unprecedented rapprochement with the Kremlin. Now, of course, little of that optimism remains.

Nato has shown itself to be indispensable for Europe’s security and the best guarantee of their national security for a growing number of countries. One of the most important consequences of the war in Ukraine has been Finland and Sweden’s applications to join Nato – two countries with all the credentials to contribute positively to the Alliance. Following Danish citizens’ recent decision to join the European Union’s defence policy, the institutions that form the basis of European security are becoming increasingly aligned.

For decades, a false dichotomy between Europeanists and Atlanticists has fuelled a sterile and unproductive security debate in Europe. Today, few doubt that Europeans must contribute more to the Alliance and European security, and that they should develop the capacity to lead in future security crises. The question, therefore, is how Europe can best contribute to Nato’s mission.

A strong Europe is indispensable for revitalising the transatlantic security bond. In one of my first meetings as EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, a former British chief of the defence staff pertinently described the direction this relationship should take. “A Europe that remains allied with the United States simply because of its own weakness,” he said, “is of limited value.”

Strengthening the transatlantic relationship implies recognising that its European component has changed. The events of recent months have shown that the EU can respond to security threats in a coordinated and robust manner. Extensive sanctions against Russia, joint

RUSSIAN WAR ON UKRAINE HAS CREATED A VERY DIFFERENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT FROM THAT OF 25 YEARS AGO, WHEN THE SPANISH CAPITAL LAST HOSTED A NATO SUMMIT. TODAY, ONLY THE POLITICAL WILL OF EUROPEANS AND THEIR LEADERS WILL BE ABLE TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTINENT’S SECURITY

financing of arms supplies to Ukraine, and the mere idea of drastically reducing Europe’s dependence on Russian energy would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

The European response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, after the measures the continent adopted to mitigate the economic consequences of Covid-19, has confirmed that Europe becomes stronger in times of adversity. True, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s war has made it easier for Europe to unite. But its leaders’ ambition is noteworthy, given some of the measures’ economic costs to Europe.

The basis for advancing European defence integration already exists. Progress in the past 20 years in common security and defence policy, the experience of both civil and military EU missions, the work of the European Defence Agency, and the adoption of the Strategic Compass put Europe in a favourable position to confront the challenge.

The willingness of national publics and EU institutions to finance joint projects to strengthen the European defence sector

is an essential first step. The German government’s recent policy shift – nearly doubling defence expenditure in 2022, to €100 billion (\$107 billion) – represents a historic opportunity to finance projects with other European partners.

And Germany is not alone. The war in Ukraine has prompted EU member states to announce unprecedented increases in defence spending totalling €200 billion over the next four years. These commitments contrast with Europe’s previous sluggishness in this domain. Over the past 20 years, the percentage increase in EU member states’ combined defence spending was three times less than that of the US, 15 times less than that of Russia, and 30 times less than that of China.

Fortunately, the amount of military expenditure is less important than how it is spent. We must spend better, together, and as Europeans. Joint defence spending is more efficient than national efforts and helps to reinforce Europe’s industrial and technological base. The European Commission’s recent commitment to allocate €500 million for joint defence procurement suggests that Europe is headed in the right direction.

Europe currently relies on spending outside its borders for 60 per cent of its military capabilities. More and better defence expenditure must avoid increasing Europe’s dependence on other countries’ arms industries, as this would undermine efforts to achieve greater European strategic autonomy.

But while we should encourage investment in an entirely European defence industry, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s proposed European Defence Union must not create new internal dependencies that benefit a few national industries within Europe.

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Oman’s Real Madrid Academy unveils programmes, international tournaments

ADIL AL BALUSHI
Muscat, June 26

Oman’s Real Madrid Football Academy released their technical programme and details of internal and external camps beside the academy’s future plans in a press meet that took place at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Sunday.

The press conference was held in attendance of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion in presence of representatives of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Football Association (OFA).

A visual presentation was presented by Salim al Rushaidi, CEO of Oman’s Real Madrid Football Academy. The presentation covered different parts including a brief about the academy. Real Madrid Academy, which was established in 1997, have more than 400 academies

distributed into 82 countries with more than 60 thousand beneficiaries. The training programme in the academy will be divided into two stages. The first phase will be dedicated for development programme and will occur two days weekly and assist shaping the players to take part in different tournaments and championships. While the other type is talent and performance development programme and this will happen every three days weekly. It is specialised for player’s technical improvement.

AGE GROUP
The Academy will target players from age group of 5 until 17 years and Al Amal club was selected as the venue of training sessions.

The domestic preparatory camps for the academy’s players will be held in Sur, Suhar and Salalah during the forthcoming months.

Also, the management of Oman’s Real Madrid Football Academy decided to organise an international football



tournament during winter season in Wilayat of Bidiya. The aim of the international tournament is to enhance sports skills of the players, raise the competitiveness knowledge and experience among the international academies.

The academy will support to raise the technical skills of the players under direct supervision

of professional coaching staff. A digitalised tools and applications will be used to do proper analysis for player development with providing the reports to the parents.

ABROAD PROGRAMME
The Academy set a plan of sending the potential players to Spain for a professional abroad experience programme.

During this external trip, Oman’s academy players will have the chance to play against Spain’s Real Madrid Academy players and get coached under supervision of the top coaching staff.

Carlos Albert from Real Madrid club showed a presentation where he highlighted the Academy’s vision for solidarity in social, promoting the sporting values and encouraging football education to children and young people. He mentioned that Oman’s strategic location enabled them as one of the best environment for investment in sporting field.

The Academy will begin their official training programme in

August and the registration will be through Academy’s website (www.rmfofan.om) for different age groups.

Khamis al Ajmi, chairman of board of directors for Oman’s Real Madrid Academy delivered a speech during the press conference. He said: “ We are very pleased to begin this partnership with Real Madrid club which is ranked as one of the top leading clubs in the world. Launching the Academy in Oman will open new horizons for promoting our country at different levels and enhance the investment opportunities beside attracting club’s veteran stars to visit Oman. Thanks to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for their hard work towards launching the Academy in Oman.

“ Invest in Oman” platform assisted this project until it came into reality. It is a valuable investment product and tool towards better promotion of Oman at international level,” he ended.



Himam Trail Run Race returns in December 2022 in Al Hajar mountains

MUSCAT: The third edition of Oman’s Himam Trail Run Race will return in December 2022 to take on Al Hajar mountains once more with hundreds of trail running enthusiasts and pros expected to line up at the start line. The 2022 edition will take place on December 1-3, 2022, and will feature routes designed to suit all endurance levels at distances of 55km and Al Hajar Range Challenge 100km that qualify those who complete them with points earned from the International Trail Running Association (ITRA), and a 25km for beginners who are looking to start a trail running career.

Aiming to celebrate sport, health and the environment in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate of Oman, the 2021 edition of the Himam Trail Run Race attracted 421 runners from 36 countries, including 50 female athletes and 29 runners aged over 50 years of age. It brought together a dedicated team of 60 organisers and 270



volunteers to deliver a highly-successful event. This year’s event will aim to attract more female athletes, and runners of all ages from across Oman and around the world to test themselves against a unique challenge.

Organisers have officially open registration for the race. The Al Hajar Range Challenge 100km will start in Al Hamra on Thursday at the heart of traditional plantations, magnificent Omani irrigation canals and picturesque villages, taking

runners in a journey of discovery. 100km runners will experience a route that once witnessed international runners coming to compete for the Oman by UTMB in 2019. The route then circles the foothills of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar before heading to the gates of the old Fort in Birkat Al Mouz where a race village open for spectators awaits their arrival. The 25km and 55km races will begin at Birkat Al Mouz on Friday, with routes designed to give runners a variety of terrain and

a taste of culture, ancient history and tradition.

Dr Zahir al Riyami, Head of the Organising Committee, said, “We are delighted to announce the return of the Himam Trail Run Race later this year and invite runners from around the world to visit Oman to take part. The last two events have been hugely successful and shown that there is a deep-rooted passion for sport within Oman and that the nation offers a unique landscape found nowhere else on the trail running circuit. We look forward to welcoming runners to the beautiful region of Al Hajar mountains to take on some of the courses tailored particularly for this event.”

The 2022 Himam Trail Run Race is organised by Himam Adventure under the umbrella of Al Sahwa Team, Nizwa Club, and supported by the Oman Athletics Association, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.



Bale confirms MLS move to Los Angeles FC

LOS ANGELES: Wales captain Gareth Bale confirmed his move to Major League Soccer's Los Angeles FC on Saturday following his departure from Spanish giants Real Madrid.

Bale confirmed his plans to join LAFC in a post on Twitter following widespread reports earlier on Saturday about the move.

"See you soon, Los Angeles," the 32-year-old wrote. An accompanying video showed Bale wearing an LAFC shirt and cap.

Earlier the Los Angeles Times said Bale will be eligible to play for LAFC from July 1.

ESPN reported that Bale will fly to Los Angeles at the end of next week to sign a deal which

runs to the end of this season, with an option for an additional year.

Bale was once the world's most expensive player and has spent the last eight seasons with Real Madrid, winning three domestic championships and five Champions League titles.

The Welshman has scored 139 league goals in his club career with 39 goals in 106 internationals for Wales.

Bale played a pivotal role in helping Wales qualify for this year's World Cup, where they will face the United States, England and Iran in the group stage in Qatar.

It marks the first time Wales have qualified for the tournament

since the 1958 finals.

Bale's signing comes as LAFC bid to build on a strong start to the MLS season.

The California club lead the Western Conference standings with 30 points from 15 games.

Bale will be the second high-profile international signing the club has made in recent weeks. Former Juventus and Italy international Giorgio Chiellini joined the club earlier this month.

News of Bale's decision to head to Major League Soccer comes just days after reports in Britain indicated he was in talks with Cardiff over a possible move.

His former club Tottenham and Newcastle were also mooted as possible destinations. — AFP

Mayers century helps West Indies dominate Bangladesh in second Test

GROS-ISLET, Saint Lucia: Kyle Mayers' undiminished appetite for Bangladesh's bowling took him to a second Test century and lifted the West Indies to 340 for five on the second day of the second and final Test in St Lucia on Saturday. The hosts are in a dominant position, leading by 106 runs as they bid to win the two-match series 2-0.

Having come to the crease just before lunch with his side stuttering at 132 for four in reply to the tourists' first-innings total of 234, Mayers' positive manner dominated the rest of the day as he finished unbeaten on 126.

It was his second Test century, coming off 180 balls and embellished with 15 fours and two sixes.

That second six took him to the three-figure mark and sets the stage for even more of his left-handed aggression going into day three in partnership with Joshua da Silva, the wicketkeeper having contributed 26 so far in an unbroken sixth-wicket stand of 92.

"Kyle's effort was really good, given the situation we were in at lunch," said West Indies opener



John Campbell.

"The pitch is starting to play a bit more up-and-down now so if we can build on this lead of 106 tomorrow we will be in a very good position."

That partnership, which grew in momentum against an increasingly dispirited Bangladesh bowling attack, followed on the excellent work of Mayers and Jermaine Blackwood, who rescued an uncertain situation for the home side with a 116-run fifth-wicket stand.

Bangladesh were wicketless in the afternoon session, although Blackwood fell just after tea, leg-before for 40, the second wicket

of spinner Mehidy Hasan.

Having stumbled to lunch at 137 for four, Mayers and Blackwood batted through the afternoon as if it were a different game.

Mayers, who will always be remembered for a historic unbeaten 210 on debut in a victory chase of 395 against the same opponents in Chattogram last February, was most impressive in his off-side play.

Blackwood, in contrast, batted with admirable discipline in a noted transformation from the reckless abandon which defined much of his batting prior to 2022.

— AFP

India captain Sharma has Covid ahead of deciding England Test

NEW DELHI: India Test captain Rohit Sharma tested positive for Covid-19 just days before the rescheduled fifth Test against England, the country's cricket board said on Sunday.

"Rohit Sharma has tested positive for Covid-19 following a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) conducted on Saturday," the BCCI tweeted.

"He is currently in isolation at the team hotel and is under the care of the BCCI Medical Team."

The right-handed batsman had been playing in a four-day warm-



up match against Leicestershire but did not bat in their second innings on Saturday's third day. He scored 25 in the first innings on

Thursday.

The rescheduled fifth Test of last year's series begins on Friday at Edgbaston, Birmingham, giving little time for the 35-year-old to recover.

The match was originally due to have been played last September at Old Trafford in Manchester, but a coronavirus outbreak in the India camp forced the Test to be postponed.

India lead 2-1 after four matches and can win their first Test series in England since 2007 should they avoid defeat. — AFP

The U-23 Asian Cup triumph offers yet another showcase of the progress of Saudi football

RIYADH: The triumph of the Green Falcons at the 2022 AFC U-23 Asian Cup, marked yet another successful milestone for Saudi Arabian football this year. The dominant performances at the tournament came on the back of a remarkable World Cup qualification campaign for the senior team, as well as the ongoing success of the Saudi clubs on the continental level, in addition to the great progress achieved by the women's national team.

SAFF president, Yasser al Maseha said, "The success of the Saudi national teams demonstrates that our strategy is yielding positive results. Bringing back to the Kingdom the AFC U-23 Asian Cup for the first time ever with our very own Saudi national coach, Saad al Shehri, is a source of great pride and satisfaction. The players who achieved this great feat will be part of the main drivers of the success of our National Team going forward."



"This gives us greater confidence and trust in our younger generation, beside the achievements we had this year for both men's and women's football. We are working on developing a pathway tailored for every up-and-coming Saudi footballer on the grassroots level. We are working on extending a very large pool of Saudi talent with the support needed for the upcoming generations of Saudi football to match the highest professional levels of the game, be it in the technical and tactical aspects of the game, as well as the dietary, psychological, physical and athletic aspects," he added.

The Saudi National team is set to take part in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in what will be the green falcons' sixth World Cup participation. The Green Falcons booked their spot at the World Cup, having topped their qualification group which featured continental giants such as Japan and Australia.

■ AL SAID STABLES TEAM RETURNS
BACK TO ACTION



HH Sayyid Louay bin Ghalib al Said and HH Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said, entered the qualification programme for the World Endurance Cup, representing Oman. They will take part in different Europe qualifiers to secure spot in the finals. HH Sayyid Ali will attend a race at Trekowitz city for a distance of 100 km, while HH Sayyid Louay will participate at Wemano city in France for a distance of 120 km. Then they will compete in Germany Strohn race for a race distance of 100 km.

Chun lead shrinks to three after third round at Women’s PGA

BETHESDA, United States: Chun In-Gee will take a three-shot lead into the final round of the Women’s PGA Championship after battling to a three-over-par 75 in Saturday’s third round.

The South Korean world number 33, who dominated play over the first two days to open up a six-shot lead at the halfway stage, found the going tougher on Saturday at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland.

Although Chun led the field by as many as seven shots early in her round, she saw her advantage gradually shrink as she came down the stretch, with a bogey on the 15th and double-bogey on the 16th leaving her just three shots clear.

Chun recovered from that late wobble with pars on the 17th and 18th holes to leave her on eight under for the tournament with a 54-hole aggregate 208.

Chun’s round could have been worse had it not been for a superb recovery on the par-five 16th.

After a wayward second shot bounced into deep rough beyond the cart path, Chun pulled her third shot into undergrowth on the opposite side of the fairway.

She elected to take a penalty and replay the shot, but her fifth ended up in rough beyond the green.

That left the very real possibility of a triple-bogey eight, but Chun got up-and-down in two to stop the bleeding with a double-bogey.

Chun later put a positive spin on her challenging round, saying it should make for a competitive final round on Sunday.

“I’m excited and looking forward to an exciting final round”, she said. “If it’s going to be too easy, then I feel it is boring.

So I just want to enjoy another day tomorrow.

“I just want to keep being positive. No matter where I am, I’m ready to make another good day or another good round if I can.”

Chun’s nervy third round has left a clutch of players with grounds for optimism heading into the final round.

Lexi Thompson and Koreans Choi Hye-Jin and Kim Sei-Young are in a three-way tie for second on five under 211.

Thompson overcame an early stumble that included two bogeys in her opening four holes to shoot a two-under-par 70.

A bogey-free back nine saw her move up the leaderboard with birdies on the 12th, 14th and 15th holes.

Thompson attributed her form to the fact she no longer pays attention to the leaderboard during her rounds.

“Looking at leaderboards does me no good, honestly, so really just focusing on my score, my shot at hand”, Thompson said. “That’s all I can do.”

Choi also shot a two-under-par 70 while Kim finished with a one-under-par 71.

Australia’s Hannah Green is alone in fifth place on the leaderboard on four under after her even-par 72.

Thailand’s Atthaya Thitikul had the day’s lowest score, shooting a four-under-par 68 that included six birdies.

Atthaya is tied for sixth on three under alongside Canada’s Brooke Henderson and the USA’s Jennifer Chang and Jennifer Kupcho.

Northern Ireland’s Stephanie Meadow and Australia’s Minjee Lee are six shots off the lead, tied for 10th on two under. — AFP



Oman U-20 grouped with Egypt, Oman and Somalia in Arab Cup

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Oman U-20 football team clubbed with Egypt, Oman and Somalia in Group D.

The draw of the Arab Cup for U-20 teams in its eighth edition was organised under Arab Football Federation on Sunday in Dammam. The tournament will be hosted in Saudi Arabia in Abha city during July 20 to August 5. As many as 18 teams will take part at the event.

The last edition of the tournament was held in Egypt in 2021 and Saudi Arabia team won



the title after defeating Algeria in the final.

The first edition was held in Morocco in 1983 when Iraq won the title after betting Saudi Arabia team.

The Arab Cup for U-20 teams

were divided into six groups and three teams in each group. Group A featured from the hosts Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Iraq. UAE led Group B which included Jordan and Yemen.

Group C comprised from



Algeria, Lebanon and Libya. Group D include Egypt, Oman and Somalia teams.

Tunisia clubbed in Group E beside Bahrain and Djibouti teams. Group F included Morocco, Sudan and Palestine teams.

Finland’s Rovannerpa stretches lead with Safari Rally win



NAIVASHA, Kenya: Finland’s Kalle Rovannerpa won the Kenya Safari Rally for the first time on Sunday to stretch his lead at the top of the world championship standings.

The victory is the fourth podium finish in six races this season for the impressive 21-year-old who remained dominant after a major scare when his Toyota

rolled in Friday’s Superspecial stage outside Nairobi.

“It feels great to win the Safari. I have to say this was the hardest rally I have ever done, and to be honest, we have to thank our team”, Rovannerpa said.

The race was dominated by Toyota with Britain’s Elfyn Evans taking second 52.8sec behind and Japan’s Takamoto Katsuta,

who finished runner-up last year, dropping into third, 1min 42.7sec behind the winner.

Last year’s Safari Rally winner Sebastian Ogier, who was the quickest in the morning powerstage dress rehearsal, was over two minutes adrift in fourth.

It was Toyota’s first clean sweep of the top places in the Safari Rally since Rovannerpa’s

compatriot Juha Kakkunen led a 1-2-3 in the 1993 edition.

Rovannerpa also went one place than his father Harri, who took the runner-up spot behind Britain’s Colin McRae in the 2002 edition of the race in East Africa.

The championship continues with the Estonia rally from July 14 to 17. — AFP

Bagnaia wins Dutch MotoGP after Quartararo crashes out

ASSEN, Netherlands: Italy’s Francesco Bagnaia won the Dutch MotoGP on Sunday after championship leader Fabio Quartararo crashed out of an incident-packed race following what he called a “rookie’s mistake”.

Frenchman Quartararo fell twice, flipping spectacularly over his handlebars in the second incident although he walked away afterwards, shaking his fists in anger at his error.

Bagnaia, in contrast, stayed out of trouble to record his third victory of the season and a welcome full points score after failing to finish in the last two

races.

“I am so happy after two difficult races”, the Italian said.

In a great day for Italian riders, Marco Bezzecchi on a Ducati was second while Spanish rider Maverick Vinales rounded out the podium in the 11th race of the season.

Quartararo heads into the summer break with a 21-point lead over Aleix Espargaro, who was fourth on Sunday.

The Frenchman fell on the fifth then on the 13th lap out of 26 in front of the enthusiastic crowd in the Netherlands.

Even if he quickly got back on his feet, he had to give up after



this second accident.

The Frenchman got off to a bad start and was quickly overtaken by Aprilia rider Espargaro.

It was while he tried to recover his second place, in an attempt on the inside of a bend, that the Frenchman lost control of his Yamaha, ending up in the gravel although he was soon back in the saddle, albeit in last place.

But a few laps later, Quartararo’s race was over after an acrobatic tumble.

“I made a rookie’s mistake”, Quartararo said, and as soon as the race was over he apologised to Espargaro for forcing him off the track in the fifth lap. — AFP



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Asyad Group to divest non-strategic assets

Global solutions: Logistics group showcases private sector engagement strategy and partnership plans on global stage

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Taking part in the 2022 Qatar Economic Forum, Asyad Group reiterated its strategy to partner with the private sector as a key enabler in implementing the Group's expansion plans, both locally and globally, and underscored its in-country role in providing competitive logistics solutions that facilitate greater international trade flows into Oman.

During a high-level panel discussion on the realities of logistics today, Abdulrahman al Hatmi, Asyad Group CEO, highlighted that the Group's priority is to maximise returns by focusing on its core integrated logistics services and divesting non-strategic assets.

He also reaffirmed the Group's ongoing efforts to enable private companies to offer their services to its business units, be it through direct investment or public offering.

Asyad Group CEO stressed that the Group navigated the pandemic challenges and showed exceptional resilience with no significant downtime, thanks to



THE GROUP NAVIGATED THE PANDEMIC CHALLENGES AND SHOWED EXCEPTIONAL RESILIENCE WITH NO SIGNIFICANT DOWNTIME, THANKS TO A WORLD-CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS ADDED TO ASYAD'S SERVICE LINEUP BY OPENING NEW DIRECT IMPORT LINES AND MARITIME SERVICES.

a world-class infrastructure and innovative solutions added to Asyad's service lineup by opening new direct import lines and maritime services.

These capabilities were instrumental in positioning Asyad Group to adapt to consecutive crises, while major players in leading countries, such

as the USA and China, struggled to weather the storm.

Al Hatmi addressed sourcing questions that arose in light of lessons learned from Covid-19, stating that onshoring may not be a realistic solution due to capacity, inflation and cost restrictions.

Instead, the Group CEO called for exploring multiple sourcing and putting in place business continuity mechanisms to hedge against potential crises.

He further underlined the need to strengthen co-

operation between countries and businesses.

The Group CEO concluded in an interview with Al Jazeera Channel: "Omani ports proved their readiness, despite the challenges, to face economic downturns and meet food security and commodities' requirements as Asyad succeeded to maintain its operational efficiency and competitiveness while expanding its strategic partnerships with various global maritime lines during Covid-19."

Oman issues 463 Investor Residency Cards to date

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 26

The number of investors who received residency cards through the Investor Residency Programme (IRP) in the Sultanate of Oman has reached 463 from more than 30 countries by the end of May 2022.

As per the IRP, investors and foreign retirees are granted the right of long-term residency for a duration of five years or 10 years.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said 275 cards were in the ten-year category, 184 cards in the five-year category and 4 cards for the category for retirees. The total investments linked to the IRP card holders reached RO 183.5 million.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, said the programme aims to attract and boost quality investors, thereby contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, generation of job opportunities, localisation of industries and transfer of advanced technologies.

(With inputs from ONA)

Oman's real estate sector rebounds, but property values and rentals remain below 2014-peak

LATEST TRENDS: New stock additions during past five years keep market oversupplied

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

The real estate industry of the Sultanate of Oman – an important pillar of domestic economic growth – has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, but the returns from property sales or rentals are nowhere near the peaks witnessed in the fourth quarter of 2014, according to a key report.

Oman REIT Fund, a publicly traded real estate investment trust fund, revealed that real estate activity rebounded "strongly" in 2021 from the "pandemic-induced sluggishness" of the previous year.

Citing figures published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the MSX-listed Fund noted in its latest Chairman's Report that the total value of traded property in the Sultanate Oman grew 4.3 per cent to RO 2.56 billion in 2021, up from RO 2.46 billion in 2020. The uptick signalled the "sector's resilience amid easing pandemic restrictions", said Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Vice-Chairman – Oman REIT Fund.

Reflecting the strong revival of market activity last year, the total number of real estate transactions surged 27 per cent to 106,696 in 2021, up from 83,805 in 2020, he stated.

Property transactions have also returned to levels witnessed before the pandemic, according to the official.

"During the 12 months period prior to onset of Covid-19 Pandemic, there were an average



of RO 246 million worth of properties traded every month. After the onset of pandemic, this value reached average of RO 189 million a month, a decline of 23 per cent.

However, during 2021, the average value of property transactions improved to RO 229 million per month."

In parallel with this uptrend, mortgage activity too has rebounded sharply, the Vice-Chairman pointed out. The traded value of mortgage contracts had reached RO 1.34 billion in 2021, which was still below pre-pandemic levels, but the number of executed mortgage contracts soared 21 per cent to

during 2021 from the previous market peak observed in 2Q14," he said.

This was attributable to a combination of factors, notably new stock additions in the last five years.

Average value of mortgage transactions also declined 24 per cent year-on-year between 2020 and 2021, the Vice-Chairman added. Oman REIT Fund achieved a net profit of RO 1.83 million in 2021. The fund distributed two interim cash dividends of 1.75 per cent each to unitholders, resulting in total dividend distribution of RO 1.649 million till December 31, 2021.

Total assets of Oman REIT Fund as of 2021-end were RO 48.66 million, out of which RO 44.42 million are in property investments, effectively making Oman REIT Fund the largest listed REIT in Oman.

Meethaq launches dedicated desks for MSMEs

MUSCAT: The micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) sector, which has huge potential for improving economic diversification and creating employment, is an important target of Meethaq's efforts to support the national economy.

As part of the importance given to the sector, Meethaq from Bank Muscat recently celebrated the United Nations designated Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Day on June 27 by launching a dedicated desk for MSME & Corporates at Meethaq branches in Suhar, Salalah, Ruwi, Al Khuwair, Al Khoudh and Head Office.

On this occasion, a number of Meethaq senior officials celebrated the launch of Ruwi's desk. These desks are the first of their kind in Islamic Banking in the Sultanate of Oman and they are expected to open new horizons for the development of MSMEs.

Speaking on the occasion, Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq — Corporate Banking, said: "An important goal of Oman Vision 2040 is to encourage sustainable development in Oman. It is thus



vital to support the MSME sector as it can support in providing job opportunities to Omani youth across different sectors.

Meethaq's Shariah-compliant MSME solutions are designed by keep in mind the essential role that MSMEs play in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's economy. These MSME solutions, products and services can help customers grow their businesses through various banking solutions and non-banking support as well. Celebrating this occasion, we are delighted to launch our dedicated MSME desks to provide the best

services possible to our valued customers."

Ali al Lawati further pointed out that Our comprehensive suite of Corporate Banking solutions supports corporate customers at every stage of their business evolution, and in growing to their full potential.

Hence, it is no surprise that Meethaq has been playing a key role in the development of key sectors in the Sultanate of Oman including, Manufacturing, Logistics, Telecommunication, Fisheries, Mining & Energy.

This is part of Meethaq's

endeavours to help achieve the national goals of strong economic growth, sustainable development and ensuring prosperity for all. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for the tremendous confidence they have placed in Meethaq, and promise to continue developing our portfolio of products and services so as to serve them better, every day.

Meethaq's large suite of cutting-edge Islamic banking offerings include project financing, working capital facilities, trade financing, access to the largest Islamic banking

branch network in the Sultanate of Oman, and digital banking facilities. Throughout the past, Meethaq has been continuously working on improving its services and supporting the corporate sector in enhancing its competitiveness by providing a variety of banking facilities.

Meethaq's services include capital finance, term and project finance, contract finance, trade services, currency exchange services and tailored financing solutions for corporates based on their business needs. Other essential solutions offered by Meethaq include bank guarantees to third parties as well as Letters of Credit.

These solutions facilitate the import and export of goods and the completion of various contracts for large entities. The services also cover accounts like current accounts, deposits and call accounts and corporate purchase cards.

Moreover, it offers special services related to transfers, collection of cheques, digital services, payment and currency services. All of these are designed in accordance with Islamic

Shariah-compliant contracts such as Murabaha, Musharaka, Ijarah and Wakala amongst others. The products and services are available through the extended network of 24 Meethaq branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

Banking support for the MSME sector is backed by an easy, convenient processes and assistance from dedicated Relationship Managers.

Every Meethaq product goes through Shariah compliance certification by the bank's Shariah Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman. The important role that Meethaq plays in the Sultanate of Oman has been well recognised by a number of awards and accolades over the years including multiple awards from the prestigious Islamic Finance News.

Meethaq was also chosen as Oman's Most Trusted Islamic Brand by Apex Media, which confirms the trust and confidence of its customers. For more details about Meethaq Islamic Banking MSME, please go to <https://www.meethaq.om/en/smebanking/Pages/default.aspx>.

Mazoon Electricity holds workshop on HSE

MUSCAT: Mazoon Electricity the leading electricity provider in Oman, organised a workshop on the topic 'Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) requirements during the implementation of electrical work'.



The workshop was conducted as part of the company's awareness campaign being held to enhance communication between parties involved in electrical connections. The workshop covered several topics on essentials in electrical works and HSE procedures.

The workshop began with a presentation by Eng Nasser bin Harib al Jabri on the topic 'introduction to HSE during implementation of electrical work'. He dealt with several topics, including the necessary precautions to be followed during the implementation of electrical work, the potential risks and ways to avoid them. He also spoke about the dangerous and unsafe connections at construction sites, and the procedures to be followed when electrical accidents occur and how to deal with them.

Later Eng Majid bin Said al Hashmi gave a brief presentation on the procedures for inspection and technical examination of electrical connections in accordance with Oman Electrical Standard No. 4.

The presentation referred to the technical stages during the inspection and the technical examination as per the approved Omani specification and some observations detected during field visits to electrical connections. It also dealt with the types of documents to be filled out during the inspection according to the international system and as per Oman Electrical Standard.

All-new Subaru WRX sends pulses racing with Oman debut

MUSCAT: An all-new edition of Subaru WRX — an icon of adrenaline-filled rally racing championships around the world — has arrived in the Sultanate of Oman much to the excitement of local motorsports enthusiasts.

Completely redesigned and engineered, the all-new WRX is an attention grabber with its bold and aggressive new look that begins with its distinctive hexagonal grills and ends with its striking fenders at the rear, including its iconic bonnet scoop.

Standard with the WRX is Subaru's highly acclaimed Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive (AWD), which distributes power to all wheels for better traction on wet and slippery roads. Its well-balanced, low centre of gravity design ensures a stable and safe ride.

As with past generations of the WRX, the all-new version is also powered by a 2.4-litre direct injected, turbocharged horizontally-opposed BOXER engine, delivering 275 horsepower at 5,600 rpm and broader



torque curve with 350 Nm of torque from 2,000-5,200 rpm. An exciting Drive Mode Select feature comes with four preset modes — Comfort, Normal, Sport, and Sport+ — which enables you to, depending upon your mood and circumstances, shift from sporty solo driving to comfortable trips with the family.

Enhanced acceleration, better gas-pedal response and improved fuel efficiency add to the exhilarating experience at the wheel of the WRX. Ensuring superior comfort and structural strength is the automotive brand's much-lauded Subaru Global

Platform (SGP), which provides a stress-free, high quality and sporty driving experience. Complementing this distinctive attribute is Subaru's EyeSight Driver Assist Technology, which provides drivers with complete peace of mind on the road.

It incorporates Adaptive Cruise Control (Lane Departure Prevention and Lane Centring Control and Preceding Vehicle), Adaptive Steering Control (Pre-Collision Throttle Management, Pre-Collision Braking System, Autonomous Emergency Steering, Lead Vehicle Start Alert and Manual Speed Limiter).

Special offers for ahlibank's credit cardholders



MUSCAT: In an effort to provide its customers a fast, secured and convenient banking experience, ahlibank has continued its initiatives by offering innovative and sophisticated solutions and products that meet the needs of different customer segments.

The bank offers various credit cards that include a range of benefits and exclusive offers for existing and new cardholders. The bank's extensive credit card product range offers the choice of Classic, Gold, Platinum, Signature and Infinite cards, which also come with contactless payment feature.

Commenting on the bank's efforts to develop its digital services, Muneer al Balushi — AGM- Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "at ahlibank we are keen to drive digital innovation in our operations, providing a technologically advanced banking environment to our customers.

We believe that this flows from the increased usage of our products. Thus, by providing enhanced benefits with our credit cards, we are encouraging customers to shift and increasingly adapt the use of digital services."

Maisarah holds 2nd Shariah Supervisory Board Meeting

MUSCAT: Maisarah Islamic Banking Services — BankDhofar's Shariah-compliant window — recently held its second Shariah Supervisory Board (SSB) meeting for this year. The meeting was attended by SSB members Shaikh Abdullah bin Ali al Shihri — Chairman, Shaikh Azzan bin Nasser al Amri — Deputy Chairman, and members of the board Dr Abdul Rub bin Salim al Yafai, Dr Amin Fateh and Shaikh Hilal bin Hassan al Lawati, along with SSB's Secretary Shaikh Abdul

Hakim bin Osman.

Agenda of the meeting covered various topics pertaining to Maisarah's product development, acknowledgement of the previous SSB meeting decisions, in addition to approval to launch new segmented products that would be revealed soon.

The meeting was also attended by members of Maisarah's management, Shariah audit and compliance teams who emphasised on maintaining highest Shariah standards



throughout the design to the delivery of all Maisarah's products, services and financial solutions.

SSB members expressed their satisfaction towards the internal Shariah review and compliance system applied by Maisarah and hailed its commitment to abide by Islamic banking guidelines.

Since the launch of its operations in 2013, Maisarah has set its vision to be the best Islamic banking services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, demonstrating a high degree of product innovation with

an expansive range of Shariah-compliant financial solutions that cater to the needs of retail and corporate customers.

As part of its future growth plan, Maisarah continues to distinguish itself by focusing on outstanding service quality, developing and launching new innovative products, and investing in technology to provide the best customer experience through an expanding network of branches, ATM/ CDM facilities and digital banking platforms.



CMA official presides over launch of EthisX in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

EthisX, based out of Muscat, and part of ethical investment and social finance platform operator Ethis Group, officially launched its first event, “Entrepreneurship Haven — From Idea to Profit through Crowdfunding” to raise awareness on crowdfunding and its importance in growing the local entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The half-day physical event was held at the College of Banking and Financial Studies, Muscat on June 23, 2022 in collaboration with the SMEs Development Authority, Al Jabr, Thawani, Baker Tilly, Oman Technology Fund, Sehatel Advanced Medical Care, Global Psytech, Future Tech Event,



Gulf Investment Services and SD Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence, UAE.

The event was officiated by Mohammed bin Said al Abri, the Vice-President of the Capital Market Authority, Sultanate of Oman (CMA), and had brought together major stakeholders within Oman's entrepreneurship ecosystem including experienced



local and international industry experts.

“I would like to congratulate EthisX on its official launch after it has been approved by the CMA as the first Islamic Global Crowdfunding Platform to operate

in the Sultanate of Oman”, said Mohammed al Abri of the CMA.

“The facilitative Crowdfunding regulation framework which has been established in the Sultanate of Oman is the first of its kind in the GCC region which allows

global cross-border fundraisings and investments”, he added.

He also highlighted that the Crowdfunding Platform initiative by the CMA aims to provide an alternative financing platform for companies including SMEs to raise capital directly from global and local investors. “It also enhances financial inclusion and easier access to finance to all segments of the society and in line with the e.Oman 2030 Digital Strategy as well as Oman Vision 2040”, he explained.

EthisX is the first-of-its-kind global cross-border Ethical Private Capital Marketplace able to offer direct shariah-compliant investments into SME companies, including startups and special

purpose vehicle (SPV) projects from the Sultanate of Oman and across the globe via their equity crowdfunding platform. Through EthisX, SME companies can also receive short-term financing for their businesses directly from global and local investors via their Peer-To Peer (P2P) financing crowdfunding platform.

Crowdfunding, though nascent, is gaining acceptance in the Sultanate of Oman and expects to develop even further with the support of the Capital Market Authority, who in an effort to stimulate the local market, announced early this year that companies intending to carry out crowdfunding activities will be exempted from licensing fees until 2023.

Three major transmission projects to strengthen water supply

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 26

Having successfully delivered the water transmission pipeline project linking Suhar with Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Co (OWWSC) — part of Nama Group — is now focused on the completion of three key equally notable water transmission schemes.

Efforts to strengthen the water transmission line in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate are now around 56 per cent complete, while a similar transmission line serving North and South Al Sharqiyah governorates is about 42 per cent complete.

The significance of the three projects was highlighted on the first anniversary of OWWSC's launch of its operational work in the water and wastewater sectors, which also coincides with its incorporation into Nama Group with the mandate to manage and develop the water and wastewater sectors across the Sultanate of Oman, with the exception of



Dhofar Governorate.

The ceremony was held in the presence of Eng Omar bin Khalfan al Wahaibi, Chairman of

the Board of Directors — Nama Group, and senior officials of OWWSC. Employees watched the event from various work sites via

the company's YouTube platform.

The event, focusing on the theme, ‘One Team, One Family’, began with welcome remarks by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC), who hailed the teamwork and cohesion of the employees as one integrated group following the amalgamation of the water and wastewater sectors. Significantly, the company achieved more than 38 million man-hours without Lost Time Injury (LTI).

In his speech, the CEO also outlined the operational efficiency of the water and wastewater networks, which amounted to 96 per cent during the past year. The total length of the networks is about 26,000 km. Water production in 2021 amounted to about 424 million cubic metres.

In recognition of these achievements, OWWSC will designate June 1 of every year as ‘Water and Wastewater Sector Annual Day’, with a focus on “High Professionalism for Better Efficiency.”

Bankrupt Sri Lanka seeks discounted Russian oil



A man fills an auto rickshaw tank at a petrol station in Colombo. — AFP

COLOMBO: Cash-strapped Sri Lanka on Sunday announced sending ministers to Russia and Qatar to try and secure cheap oil a day after the government said it had all but run out of fuel.

The government meanwhile extended a two-week closure of non-essential state institutions until further notice in order to save fuel, maintaining only a skeleton staff to provide minimum services.

Energy Minister Kanchana Wijesekera said two ministers will travel to Russia on Monday to discuss getting more oil following last month's purchase of 90,000 tonnes of Siberian crude.

That shipment was arranged through Coral Energy, a Dubai-based intermediary, but politicians have been urging the authorities to negotiate directly with President Vladimir Putin's government.

“Two ministers are going to Russia and I will go to Qatar tomorrow to see if we can arrange concessionary terms”, Wijesekera told reporters in Colombo.

Wijesekera had announced on Saturday that Sri Lanka was virtually out of petrol and diesel after several scheduled shipments were delayed indefinitely due to “banking” reasons.

Fuel reserves were sufficient to meet less than two days' demand and it was being reserved for essential services, Wijesekera said while apologising for the situation. The state-run Ceylon

Petroleum Corporation on Sunday hiked the price for diesel by 15 per cent to 460 rupees (\$1.27) a litre and petrol by 22 per cent to 550 rupees.

Since the beginning of the year, diesel prices have gone up nearly four-fold and gasoline has almost tripled. Wijesekera said there would be an indefinite delay in getting new shipments of oil and urged motorists not to queue up until he introduces a token system to a limited number of vehicles daily.

A delegation from the US Treasury and the State Department meanwhile arrived to “explore the most effective ways for the US to support Sri Lankans in need”, the US embassy in Colombo said.

“As Sri Lankans endure some of the greatest economic challenges in their history, our efforts to support economic growth and strengthen democratic institutions have never been more critical”, US ambassador Julie Chung said in a statement.

US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury for Asia Robert Kaproth and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Kelly Keiderling were in the delegation. The embassy said it had committed \$158.75 million in new financing in the past two weeks to help Sri Lankans. About 1.7 million residents need “life-saving assistance”, according to the United Nations which issued a flash appeal last week. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

PARIS

French energy giants urge consumers to cut back

Consumers should start cutting back on their energy use immediately, the bosses of France's three big energy companies urged on Sunday, warning of social tensions next winter unless reserves are replenished.

“The effort has to be immediate, collective and massive”, Patrick Pouyanne of TotalEnergies, Jean-Bernard Levy of EDF and Catherine MacGregor of ENGIE wrote in an op-ed piece in the JDD weekly.

The call came after the French government said this week it aimed to have its natural gas reserves at full capacity by autumn as European countries brace for supply cuts from major supplier Russia with the Ukraine war dragging on, and would build a floating terminal to receive more gas supplies by ship.

The three energy bosses said that European energy production



was further hampered by hydro-electric production suffering from drought.

“The surge in energy prices resulting from these difficulties threatens our social and political fabric and impacts families' purchasing power too severely”, they said, adding: “The best energy is the one we don't use.”

They said “every consumer and every company must change their habits and immediately limit their energy consumption, be it of electricity, gas or oil products. Replenishing reserves of natural gas over the summer is a priority, as is eliminating the national waste” of energy. — AFP

ZURICH

Central banks must act quickly on inflation: BIS

Central banks must not let inflation become entrenched as the threat of stagflation looms over the global economy, the Bank for International Settlements warned on Sunday in its annual economic report.

BIS, considered the central bank of central banks, said they will have to act quickly and decisively to ensure a return to low and stable inflation, while limiting the impact on growth.

Its flagship report said the priority for central banks was to restore low and stable inflation. In doing so, they should seek to minimise the hit to economic activity, in turn safeguarding financial stability.

BIS said engineering a so-called soft landing had historically been difficult, and the starting conditions now were making the task all the more challenging. “It would be more desirable if we could have a soft landing



because that would mean that the tightening of monetary policy could be more subdued”, BIS General Manager Agustín Carstens told a press conference.

“But even if this is not the case, definitely the priority should be to combat inflation”, to prevent the world economy from slumping.

After the shock of the Covid-19, central banks initially saw the return of inflation as temporary as the economy picked up again. But the rise in prices has sharply accelerated since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leading central banks to tighten their key rates sharply. — AFP

Despite strong summer start, Europe’s aviation industry frets

Air traffic is booming this summer, but after European vacations are over will passenger demand hold up? The question was the focus of the annual congress of the Airports Council International (ACI) Europe in Rome this week, held at the cusp of the approaching peak season.

The summer period is shaping up to be by far the best since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis that has severely affected the airline industry since 2020.

Some airlines, such as Ryanair, and countries, in particular Greece, have already recovered or even exceeded their 2019 daily flight numbers, according to Eurocontrol, a pan-European air traffic agency. Across the continent, air traffic was last week at 86 per cent of the same period in 2019, Eurocontrol said, and expected to reach up to 95 per cent in August under its most optimistic estimate.

And companies are filling seats for the coming weeks despite the sharp rise in ticket prices, long lines in various airports from Frankfurt to Dublin to Amsterdam and strikes by flight attendants, pilots or air traffic controllers.

But after that? “Visibility is low because there is a lot of uncertainty,” said Olivier Jankovec, director general of ACI Europe.

“We’re now in a war economy in Europe, we have the prospect of a quite harsh recession, we have inflation at record levels, so how all of this is going to play into consumer sentiment... the jury’s still out.”

The director general for transport and mobility at the European Commission, Henrik Hololei, echoed that thought.

“We really need to tighten the seatbelt because there’s going to be a lot of turbulence,” he told delegates. “We are entering... a period of uncertainty which we have never experienced in the last decade. And that of course is the biggest enemy of the business,” he said.

Hololei listed the war in Ukraine, high energy prices and shortages of energy, food and labour. “We have also interest rates which are going up for the first time in a decade,” he said. — AFP

We are entering... a period of uncertainty which we have never experienced in the last decade. And that of course is the biggest enemy of the business.

HENRIK HOLOLEI
European Commission director general for transport and mobility



HARVESTING GRAPES
A worker cuts grapes during the harvest on the Awash Wine vineyard, in the area of Merti, 120 kilometres from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Even though wine making has been part of the Ethiopian culture since centuries due to its ceremonial importance in Christianity, it was not until 1936 that the first company, Awash Wine, was established. Originally producing affordable wines for the local market, since 2013 and with the privatisation of the company with foreign capital, they started producing higher quality wines for the local market and with a scope of future export. Since 2014 a second winery, Castel, has been opened in Ethiopia. — AFP

Fact-checking deglobalisation narrative



ANDRÉS VELASCO
The writer, the dean of the School of Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, has served on the faculty at Harvard, Columbia and New York Universities, and is a former finance minister of Chile.

PROTECTIONISM IS SUPPOSED TO BE POPULAR WITH VOTERS, BUT THE REALITY IS SUBTLER.

The left and the right united shall never be defeated,”claimed the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, and the current debate over deglobalisation illustrates the point. So-called progressives never liked fast growth in world trade and now greet any reversal with cries of “I told you so!”

Globalisation-supporting conservatives, on the other hand, react to the smallest setback with Chicken Little-like cries that “the sky is falling!” Both camps have an interest in exaggerating the extent of deglobalisation. The result is a widely accepted narrative of decline: After repeated financial crises, a nativist reaction, the Covid-19 pandemic, and now Russia’s war on Ukraine, globalisation’s days are numbered.

It’s an eye-catching claim. But is it true? According to the World Bank, trade in goods and services as a share of global GDP fell from a peak of 61 per cent in 2008, just before the global financial crisis, to 52 per cent in 2020. But this figure is still very high by historical standards — the trade-to-GDP ratio averaged just 42 per cent in the 1990s, when critics were already complaining about hyper-globalisation. Once final data are available, they will show that trade recovered in 2021 and 2022 as the pandemic receded.

More interestingly, the all-out tariff war predicted by trade sceptics never erupted.

Starting in 2018, then-US President Donald Trump increased tariffs on some Chinese goods, China retaliated, and the

dispute spilled over into a handful of other markets. President Joe Biden initially found it expedient to keep some of Trump’s tariffs, but now plans to roll them back in an attempt to reduce US inflation.

A worldwide escalation in tariffs and quotas will not happen, for the simple reason that voters do not want it to happen.

In rich and poor countries alike, a parent can buy a pair of Chinese-made children’s sneakers for US\$10 or less. A generation ago, the only option in most places was a locally-made pair costing several times that.

Protectionism is supposed to be popular with voters, but the reality is subtler. As any pollster will tell you, the statement “government should do what it can to protect local businesses and local jobs” typically elicits overwhelming support.

The statement “government should protect local industry even if that means much higher prices for consumers” meets with widespread derision. Big changes are afoot in world trade, but none of them need imply widespread deglobalisation.

The first change is the reconfiguring of global supply chains. As the media have reported in gory detail, first the US-China tensions, then the pandemic, and now the Russia-Ukraine conflict caught many global firms — in sectors ranging from cars to baby formula — without a plan B to source the inputs they need. So, they are now switching from “just-in-time” to “just-in-case” supplies. “Resilience,” “near-shoring,” and “friend-shoring” are the buzzwords du jour.

The expansion of world trade over the past two decades resembled the Gold Rush or the dot-com bubble of the early 2000s.

Firms that found the lowest-cost supplier internationally, with little regard for the risks involved, could make big money. Other companies followed suit because their competitors were doing it. Eventually, something had to give.

While the dotcom crash took away Pets.com, it gave us Facebook, Amazon, and Netflix. This time around, crises are causing firms to diversify suppliers and draw up plans B, C and D. Costs will increase, but so will safety and reliability. Crucially, most supplies will still come from abroad. Apple recently decided to move some of its assembly operations from China to Vietnam, not to Arkansas or Alabama. As I wrote in a previous commentary, Guangdong’s loss could well be Guadalajara’s gain.

The second big change is a gradual but unmistakable shift from trade in goods to trade in services. Manufacturing’s share of total output is falling almost everywhere, and the drop has been particularly sharp in China.

Unsurprisingly, trade in manufactures is declining as a share of global GDP. Services will likely make up the slack, but trade in services is hampered by all kinds of political, regulatory, and cultural barriers. There is no need for customers to speak the same language as the people who make their smartphones.

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G7 opens summit with gold export ban on Russia

SEBASTIAN SMITH AND HUI MIN NEO

World powers on Sunday agreed to ban gold exports from Russia, in new concerted action to cut off Moscow’s financial lifeline as G7 leaders met in southern Germany to lock down new support for Ukraine.

US President Joe Biden and his counterparts from the world’s most industrialised nations are gathering at Elmau Castle in the Bavarian Alps before they continue on to Madrid for talks with NATO partners.

They will seek to close ranks in their backing for Ukraine against Russia’s attack while grappling with the intensifying global fallout of the war.

From soaring inflation to a looming food crisis and energy shortages, Russia’s

attack on Ukraine, now in its fifth month, has mired the world in a series of crises.

The leaders will also be confronted with the looming threat of recession as well as pressures over climate change.

In a show of their resolve to heap pressure on Moscow, the G7 announced that it will outlaw imports of Russian gold which the US said is the second largest export for Russia and a significant source of revenue for Vladimir Putin and his allies.

According to the White House, Russia accounted for about five per cent of all gold exports in 2020 and 90 per cent of Russia’s output went to G7 countries — mostly to Britain.

Western allies have been scrambling to coordinate their response since Russia sent its troops flooding into Ukraine on February 24.

While they have hammered the

Russian economy with unprecedented sanctions, Putin’s armies have been digging in their heels for a drawn-out war.

Ahead of the talks, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged allies not to waver in their support.

“Ukraine can win and it will win. But they need our backing to do so. Now is not the time to give up on Ukraine,” he said, as Britain announced another \$525 million in guarantees for World Bank lending later this year.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will make the same plea when he joins in via video-link on Monday.

John Kirby, National Security Council spokesman at the White House, said the G7 will be seeking to hold Russia accountable and to increase the costs and consequences of the war on Putin and his economy.

At the same time, they will aim to minimise “as much as possible the effect of these rising oil prices and the way (Putin) has weaponised energy”.

The fallout on the economy will be at the centre of the G7’s opening session. Just six months back, the global economy had been poised for a huge post-pandemic recovery but it is now staring down the barrel of a recession.

“Core problems that are on the top of mind for all of us” include “rising prices, supply chain disruptions, all exacerbated by this war in Ukraine”, said Kirby.

Scarred by a reliance on Russian energy that has hampered several European nations including Germany and Italy from going all out to punish Putin’s Russia, the G7 was also warily looking at China — which it views as a systemic rival.

“The impact that China’s coercive

economic practices, use of forced labour, intellectual theft — all those are front and centre for the G7, and I think you’re going to see China very much at the forefront as the G7 goes on,” said Kirby.

As the gulf separating Western allies from Russia and China widens, the G7 will also be looking to rally other major players to its side.

To this end, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has invited the leaders of Argentina, India, Indonesia, Senegal and South Africa to the Alpine summit.

While Argentina and Indonesia voted at a crucial UN vote to condemn Russia, the other three abstained.

But all are being directly hit by a looming hunger crisis sparked by the holdup in grain and wheat exports from Ukraine, and India for instance has imposed restrictions on wheat exports.

— AFP

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#Living_with_COVID19

Cordia myxa: A strange fruit that thrives in Oman's hot weather

By Arwa al Hashimi

Oman's varied landscape made it possible for different fruit trees to thrive in different parts of the country. These fruit trees are not only eaten raw but are also often used for cooking and medicine.

Of the many different fruits grown in Oman, 'Pimper' or Gau is one of the local favourites that is yet to grow in popularity fully.

Known scientifically as Cordia myxa, the fruit tree is also called Assyrian plum, lasura, laveda and pidar tracing its origin back in Asia. Still, it has then spread all over the world including Oman.

It is also called 'al Gouj' in Bahrain, and it is from a species of flowering plant in the borage family, Boraginaceae.

The pimper tree is called by this name because its ripe fruits make a strong sound when they hit the ground. Its fruits are of a single-core and sweet in taste, somewhat similar in shape to the figs and contain a gelatinous substance that is usually used to treat some diseases.

According to blogger Craig

Hepworth who manages the blog page Florida Fruit Geek, "the fruit has two distinct layers of flesh, an outer layer just under the skin and an inner jelly-like layer surrounding the seed. The outer flesh has a soft, melting texture, almost the consistency of mango, with wonderful sweet flavours of cherry, watermelon and bubblegum. In the inner layer of flesh around the seed, things get even more flavourful — and also kind of strange."

He added, "In that layer, the sweetness and flavour become more intense, like a cherry-watermelon candy. But the texture of that inner layer is like no other fruit I've ever eaten. It's jelly, but with a kind of thick, glue-like stickiness. Despite the odd texture, that flesh is so tasty I found myself sucking every last bit of it off the tiny, flattened seed."

Hepworth noted that after eating the fruit, one is left with the "twin sensations of stickiness... and a bit of coating on my tongue that both lasted a couple of minutes before they went away."

While the pimper flower which is usually white blooms from March to April, the fruit usually doesn't appear until



July and August. The fruit starts pale brown or even pink but darkens as it ripens.

Pimper is one of the few fruit trees which survives temperatures frequently rising to 49°C. It can also tolerate sandy and even high PH soil without the need for fertiliser.

Sitting under the canopy of the Pimper tree is relaxing. More than its strange and memorable taste, it has been used by different Omani families to treat indigestion including cough.

While pimper is able to withstand the challenging climate of Oman, some Omanis noted that they feel its count is going down as there is a lack of interest in cultivating the plants unlike places like Kuwait and Bahrain.

Omanis used pimper fruits in different ways to make different things such as jams, healthy juice as well as pickles. Additionally, they used to dry the leaves of the fruit and use them as Pimper vegetable seasoning.

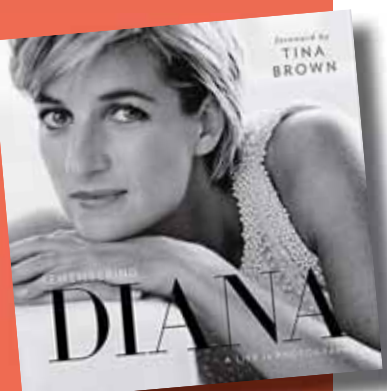
Many years ago, the people of Al Mudhaibi used to cultivate pimper but eventually, they stopped planting it contributing to its demise as a good source of unusual but great flavour.

READ

REMEMBERING DIANA: A LIFE IN PHOTOGRAPHS

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Twenty years after her death, this dazzling photography collection with a foreword by bestselling author Tina Brown celebrates Princess Diana's poignant life in more than 100 iconic images.



QUEEB B

Beyonce has released the first single, titled "Break My Soul," from her anticipated upcoming album "Renaissance." The new music follows the announcement last week that she would be releasing her seventh solo studio album next month. — dpa



FASHION TRENDS

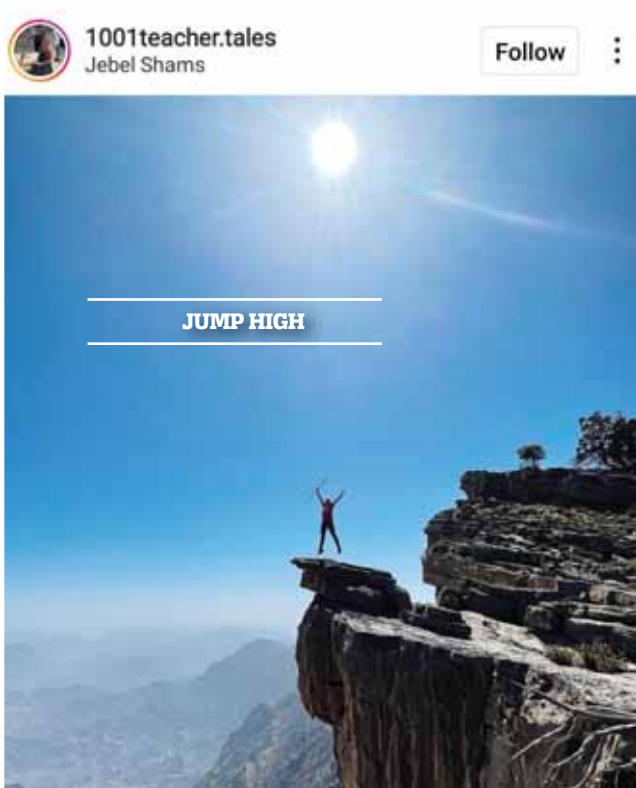
A model presents a creation for Kenzo by Japanese fashion designer Tomoaki Nagao aka Nigo during the Menswear Ready-to-Wear Spring/ Summer 2023 Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Oman represented at CAB intl Symposium for Formative Arts



OMANI ARTIST MUSA Omar is heading out to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to participate in the "Cairo Amman Bank International Symposium for Formative Arts" happening on June 27 to July 6.

Organised by the Cairo Amman International Bank and under the supervision of artist Mohamed Al-Jalous, 26 artists from across different Arabian and European countries were invited. Through their participation, the artists will represent works that reflect their diverse artistic experiences that employ different technical presentation, unique style and board ideas.

The symposium aims to deepen communication between artists and share their experiences and visions in various directions in order to raise the fine art in all its trends and issues.

Musa Omar is one of the prominent artists in the arena of Omani Fine art, and one of the Omani artists who presented Omani art to the world through his numerous artistic participations around the world for more than thirty years. He is unique in the content he showcases or in terms of technology he employs in his art.

Musa Omar has held fifteen personal exhibitions in the Sultanate of Oman, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar and Germany, the latest of which is his personal exhibition "Songs of the Sun", which was opened at Stal Art Gallery in Muscat in August 2018. He also exhibited his works in many joint exhibitions in the Arab Gulf countries and the world and held various exhibitions in a number of European countries, in addition to the United States of America, Mexico, Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Algeria, Morocco, Taiwan, Lebanon, Australia, South Korea, Egypt, Japan, Jordan, Syria, Bangladesh and China.

Musa also participated in many artistic workshops, and he is a member of the Unesco International Federation of Arts, the Omani Society for Fine Arts, and the Youth Studio. Musa Omar received many prizes from the Sultanate of Oman, Egypt, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait.

CHANGING WORLD

Cameroon's 'cloth of kings' torn over future



WAMBESSO FANKAM stands out elegantly from the crowd at a funeral ceremony in western Cameroon.

As a prince, he's among a select few who are traditionally entitled to wear an eye-catching fabric of vivid indigo with intricate white patterns.

"It's an ndop, not everyone can wear it," he said with pride, to the beat of tam-tam drums and the balafon, a type of xylophone, in the western town of Batie.

The ceremonial cloth was once the preserve of chiefs, dignitaries and members of secret societies in the central African country.

But the culture around it is now being threatened by cheap imitations and crude rip-offs.

Ndop's distinctive motifs -- often animals or geometric shapes -- are drawn on cotton fabric then embroidered with raphia before the material is dyed blue.

Its richness is down to the many different combinations of symbols that can be designed on the ndop.

Cameroon is thought to have 13,500 traditional chiefdoms across its 10 regions.

And it is the north and the mountains of the west where chiefs are seen as all but divine guardians of tradition, where ndop and its culture is the strongest.

Once warlords and masters of justice, these days chiefs' powers are limited to inheritance or matrimonial disputes.

Even so ndop is "the most important ritual element" among the main western tribal group, the Bamileke, said Hermann Yongueu, head of the Sauvons le Ndop (Save the Ndop) group, which is trying

to preserve its heritage.

Making the cloth is a costly affair that takes several days' work and requires specialised knowledge.

Prices for a piece of ndop cloth can go up to 100,000 CFA francs (about 150 euros) -- a small fortune in Cameroon where a third of the population lives on less than two euros a day.

ROYAL GARB

Back in Batie, an ndop cloth is symbolically hung on a wooden fence at the main entrance to the funeral.

One woman is wearing a long dress entirely in ndop.

"She is one of the few to wear an ndop outfit because she is a queen," said Gisele Monkam, who accompanies the traditional chief.

Ndop mostly features "drawings that symbolise our way of life", said Arsene Ngandjouong, head of a museum in the village of Bangoua in the west of the country.

One of the principal motifs is "a circle which represents the duality of the Bamileke world, a communication between the living and the dead," he added.

Sitting near the door of her house made of baked mud bricks in Baham, the main town high on the western plateau where ndop is still made, craftswoman Solange Yougo, 52, is busy on a piece of fabric she's been working on for over a week.

Making ndop is extremely laborious, with some long pieces measuring up to 15 metres taking up to a month to complete.

"I'm adding the finishing touches," she said. The finished item will be white with

an indigo tint.

On a bamboo bench, her cousin, Sylvie Momo, 50, holds an already dyed piece.

Cameroon's Ministry of Arts and Culture declared ndop a part of its official national heritage in February 2020 and some also want it to be given UNESCO status as further protection.

VULGAR

For hile it was once strictly reserved for royals and nobles, ndop has been fast losing its exclusivity, so much so that some of its motifs are now turning up on bottles of beer as well as low quality wraps and boubous, the loose unisex garment popular across West Africa.

"It is even becoming a bit vulgar," complained museum head Ngandjouong.

"In the past when someone who hadn't the right to wear ndop wore it, they had to pay a fine," said Prince Fankam.

"But the most important thing is that we pass on knowledge of how to make it," said Hermann Yongueu.

"Before ndop fabric was controlled by the chiefs and the kings made sure that the savoir-faire was passed on to the makers' children. From the age of seven, children began their apprenticeships."

But today few young people are prepared to take that on, preferring more lucrative jobs like driving motorbike taxis.

Others hope that a little of the reflected glory the fabric is picking up abroad might tempt them back, with the French luxury fashion house Hermes using ndop motifs in one of its silk scarf collections four years ago.

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Rescues in Kitzania (Part 2)

JUST WHEN the bird rescues were over, a new influx of kittens flooded Kitzania. By the end of Ramadhan, I received a call from my friend Joseph, who'd found a litter of five kittens at his workplace without a mother. Not sure what to do, he moved them to a safe corner in the building in case the mother showed up.

The next morning, three kittens were missing and the two left were hiding. He took them home but couldn't keep them as he had a business trip the next day.

I offered to shelter them but asked him first to take them to the vet to know their age (I was praying hard that they weren't babies who needed bottle feeding, my worst nightmare). Thankfully, my prayers were answered and the kittens were a month old exactly.

Joseph dropped the tiny beings at my house that evening and I had to put them in the cage to protect them from the bigger cats. I named them Farhan (happy) and Marha (welcome). They were hyper and blended fast with the younger cats. It was almost Eid time when my Russian neighbour found me feeding the dogs in the wadi. She was leaving for good and had a tiny problem: the black kitten she'd been feeding for months. She had no place to leave her as the person who promised to take her in never showed up nor answered their phone. Would it be okay to bring her to Kitzania? And how could I refuse?

The black kitten was brought in a transparent box as the lady's carrier was broken. She was skinny and had a tilted head as if pondering life's most difficult questions. She let me pat her but obviously was the shy type. The neighbour shared her story: the kitten was stuck in their car engine for hours and they had

to bring the mechanic to remove a few parts and free her -hence the tilted head and the hairless patches on her side. I announced that she'd be called Rusiya (Russian) in honour of her owner. The neighbour left her with the box and a big bag of dry food. Rusiya was shocked by the number of cats surrounding her as it was supper time. I fed her and she vanished for two days before coming back again. She decided to stay in the office in front of us and only come to Kitzania at feeding time. Time passed and Rusiya got used to the cats and decided that Kitzania wasn't a bad place to stay after all. It was that time when the third litter of kittens arrived in our house. This time they were from the neighbours and delivered in a huge box of Rainbow milk. There were two at the time- a black and a ginger- almost one month old. I decided to put them in the cage with Farhan and Marha in case their mother came searching. It was early morning of the next day when the third kitten started meowing loudly. She was hiding under the plant pot when I found her siblings. She joined them at 4 am after half an hour of trying to locate her! Luckily enough, they were at the eating stage and devoured the food I'd given them. Their mother arrived two days later (none but the uncatchable Borsal). She'd spent the night in front of the cage and the next morning the family were happily united again! For three weeks, the five kittens suffered from recurring flu but now are well. Kitzania welcome its new arrivals!

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: The World According to Bahja. rasha.books@yahoo.com

art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | JUNE 27 | 2022

Inflation a thorn in the side of Bulgaria rose oil makers

BUSINESS IS NOT a bed of roses for Bulgaria's rose oil makers these days.

Made from Damask roses grown in the aptly named Rose Valley, the oil is a vital ingredient in the perfumes made by the world's top luxury brands such as Christian Dior, Estee Lauder and Chanel.

But a heatwave has slashed this year's harvest of rose petals, labour is hard to find and the global surge in energy prices has increased costs for a product so precious that it is dubbed "liquid gold".

This year's oil will be "considerably more expensive", Plamen Stankovski, a partner at rose oil producer and exporter Bulattars, told AFP in his distillery near Pavel Banya, in Bulgaria's famed Rose Valley.

Production costs for one kilogram of rose oil stood at around 6,000 euros (\$6,300) in 2021, but they have surged by as much as 40 per cent this year.

The price of petals alone doubled since last year, according to producers.

This means that a 4.5 kilo glass jar filled with the thick, golden-yellow oil could sell for more than 45,000 euros this year.

Bulgaria is the world's top rose oil maker along with Turkey and the distilleries to make the precious substance run on natural gas, diesel and fuel oil — commodities whose prices soared after Russia war on Ukraine in late February.

"The price of fuel has gone up two or even three times", Stankovski said.

'NOT ALL ROSES'

Small amounts of rose oil are used in almost every high-quality perfume — not for its aroma, but because its fixative qualities help blend other ingredients and prolong the scent on the skin.

To produce it, huge amounts of petals are boiled in massive metal vats. The vapours are then distilled to separate the oil in a process nearly unchanged since the days of the Ottoman empire in the 17th century.

On his family's rose fields near Pavel Banya, Dimitar Dimitrov laments that a chronic labour shortage has plagued the sector for years.

"Picking is the most expensive as it is done solely by hand. If you don't pick the open roses today, tomorrow they're gone", said the 40-year-old, who plucked petals



with his father and brother-in-law.

Fertiliser, fuel, ploughing and pruning have all become more expensive, he said.

With petal prices almost doubling, he said he hoped "this will cover at least our production costs so we don't end up in the red".

To make things worse, a heatwave scorched rose buds before they could open, slashing yields and reducing the picking season by half.

The flowers that survived excrete less oil. To extract one kilo of rose oil, 4,000 kilograms of petals are now needed, 15 per cent more than usual.

"We are worried by the increased cost of our production", said exporter Filip Lissicharov, CEO of the Enio Bonchev Production company in the nearby village of Tarnichane.

"The picture is not all roses", he added.

More fuel is now needed to sustain production, which is interrupted by irregular petal deliveries, but the industry association's calls for fuel subsidies have thus far gone unanswered by the government.

Rose oil production is expected to drop below its usual annual haul of 2.5 tonnes.

CERTIFIED AS 'PURE'

Nearly 100 per cent of the oil produced in Bulgaria is exported to places such as France, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Lissicharov is anxious about how the market will react to higher prices.

"There's interest (from buyers)", he said. "But whether this interest will turn into deals depends on the price."

To prevent counterfeit products from entering the market, the oil is certified by a few designated labs, such as the state Bulgarska Rosa Laboratory in Sofia.

The product leaves the lab in hermetically-sealed aluminium flasks with a label that guarantees "100 per cent pure and natural genuine Bulgarian rose oil".

Cutting corners, Stankovski said, is not an option: "Regardless of our troubles, we will preserve the high quality of the rose oil." — AFP