

Beirut silo collapses, revives trauma

Part of the grain silos at Beirut Port collapsed on Sunday just days before the second anniversary of the massive explosion that damaged them, sending a cloud of dust over the capital and reviving traumatic memories of the blast that killed more than 215 people. There were no immediate reports of injuries. – AFP



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JACKSON TAKES 100M TITLE IN JAMAICAN CLEAN SWEEP IN LIGNANO



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IMPACT OF HIGH OIL PRICES ON PETROCHEMICAL AND CHEMICAL SECTOR



P20

OMANI CINEMATIC MAKE-UP ARTIST AIMS TO BREAK INTERNATIONAL FILM SCENE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO BENIN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Patrice Talon, President of the Republic of Benin, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and good wishes to the President, good health and happiness, and to the friendly people of the Republic of Benin steady progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO SWISS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ignazio Cassis, President of the Swiss Confederation, on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan offered sincere greetings and best wishes to the President, and the friendly Swiss people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

CANCER SURVIVORS AS COUNSELLORS

Oman Cancer Association held the second panel discussion on 'Challenges Facing Cancer Patients and Survivors' at Al Harthy Hall. Dr Wahid al Kharousi, Chairman of Oman Cancer Association, said that cancer survivors to be trained in the broad understanding of cancers so as to counsel cancer patients. DETAILS ON P2

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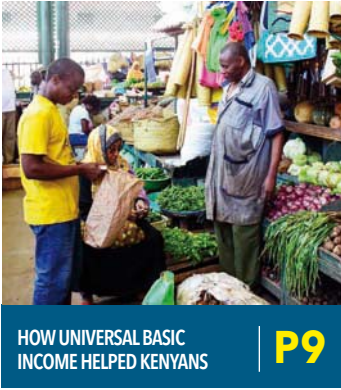
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Sayyid Badr and Blinken discuss peace efforts in Yemen

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Sunday received a phone call from Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

During the phone call, they

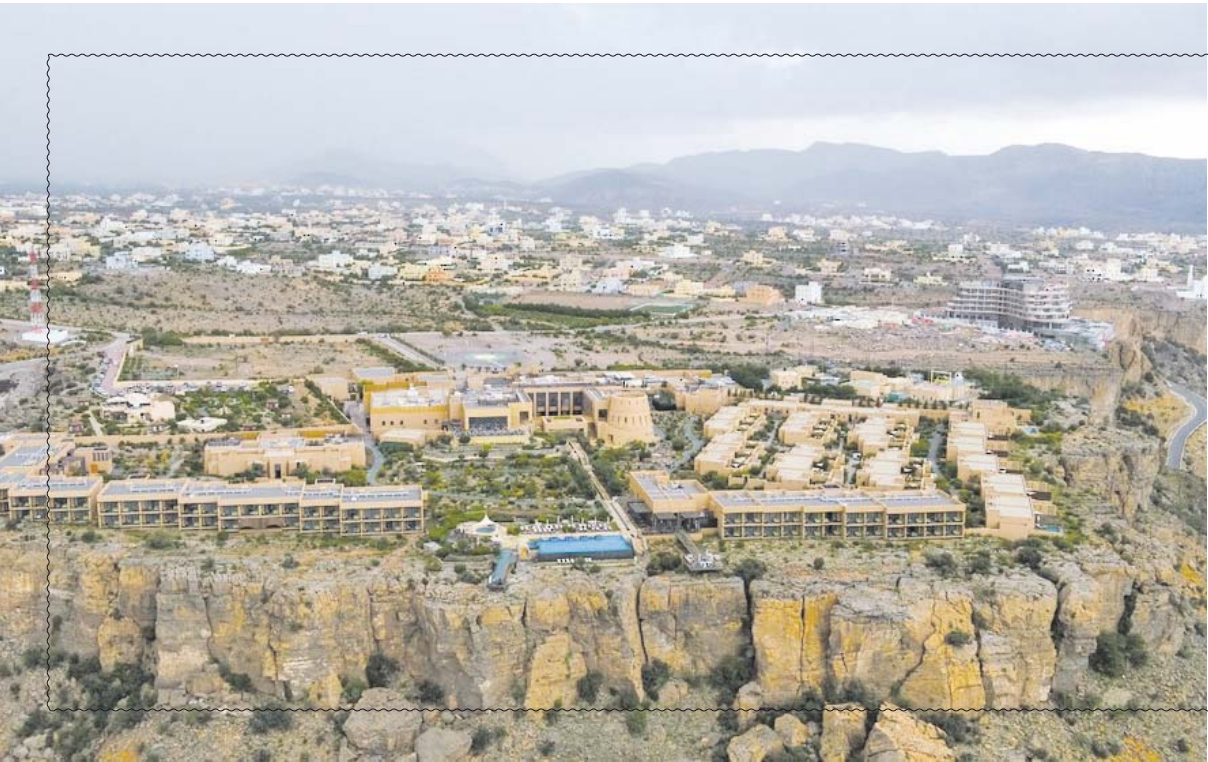
discussed the existing relations between the two friendly countries and their aspirations to advance them in various fields that enhances common interests and achieves more mutual benefits.

The two ministers exchanged

views on a number of regional and international issues of common interest, especially with regard to efforts to maintain the ceasefire in the Republic of Yemen in order to enhance chances of achieving peace and stability in Yemen.

The two sides also discussed negotiations to resume the nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the developments on the Ukrainian war, where the importance of intensifying efforts

and endeavours to address issues through dialogue and political and diplomatic solutions in a manner that preserves the independence and sovereignty of countries and peoples and peaceful coexistence between them. — ONA



A STUNNING NATURAL BEAUTY

The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is a round-the-year tourist attraction due to low temperatures in summer and breathtaking beauty of nature. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is located 2,000 metres above sea level in a unique location and is known for its rugged natural beauty, hiking trails and adventure travel including rock climbing, cave exploration and rappelling. It's diverse topography offers activities even for more adventurous travellers. — ONA

SALALAH-BOUND MOTORISTS TOLD TO FOLLOW SAFETY RULES

SIX INJURED IN ROAD ACCIDENT NEAR HAIMA

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The long road drives to Salalah in Dhofar Governorate continue to be accident-prone in spite of the stringent measures adopted by the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

While various airlines have added capacity to Salalah this season, travel by road continues to be the preferred option as an attempt to beat the airfares and for the sake of flexibility in moving



around the governorate in one's own vehicles.

According to sources, many private vehicles pass through the popular Oman-UAE Hatta border daily towards Dhofar from the neighbouring country.

Tourists are also travelling from Saudi Arabia to the Dhofar Governorate following the opening of the direct road link between the two countries late last year, though the numbers are significantly less compared to those travelling from

the UAE. As fatigue set to be a serious factor on this long stretch, accidents continue to take place on this road at regular intervals.

The Directorate General of Health Services in Al Wusta Governorate on Sunday reported that the emergency department at Haima Hospital received six patients following a road accident in the wee hours. Of these three were critically injured, while two others suffered minor injuries.

TURN TO P5

Dangerous children's toys lurk in market, say experts

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

All the toys which our children play with are not 'real' toys, instead, some of them may be harmful to them in some way or the other, according to experts, educationists and child psychiatrists.

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has recently seized more than 280 goods including toys, bags, notebooks and kites bearing colours and slogans which have connotations

against public morals and were impacting children's thought process.

As playing with toys helps improve their communication skills, self-confidence, and release of emotions, they can also be detrimental to their emotional or physical well-being if proper care in their selection is not taken.

"Not all toys which our children play with are real toys, but are harmful to their physical or mental health or both and one needs to be careful while choosing



toys for children," says Dr Muna al Shekaili, Child Psychiatrist, Al Masarrah Hospital.

Just as toys impact children's cognitive development, social and emotional development, as well as language development, they can also encourage certain personality traits or styles of playing, such as an aggressive play, violent behaviour, and the like. There are active toys and passive toys. Some are auto play, while others need a child to activate and play with them.

TURN TO P5





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OHRC takes part in Arab human rights network meeting

NOUAKCHOTT: A delegation of Oman Human Rights Commission, headed by its chairman Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni took part in the 19th General Assembly of the Doha-based Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions in Nouakchott, capital of Mauritania, last week.

The Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions concluded its international conference “Integrating Human Rights into Public Policies” which accompanied the Networks General Assembly in the capital Nouakchott on July 27 and 28. The General Assembly witnessed the transfer of the Networks presidency from the National Human Rights Committee in the State of Qatar to the National Human Rights Commission in Mauritania. The National Council for Human Rights in Egypt was elected to host the next General Assembly.

In a press statement, the President of the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions noted that the conference resulted in many important decisions in the field of promoting and protecting human rights in Arab countries.

The conference witnessed participation of representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Development



Program and the Arab Institute for Human Rights, in the presence of representatives of all national institutions that are members of the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions, and civil society organisations.

The conference aimed at emphasising the importance of human rights, sustainable development plans, enhancing awareness and education for various segments of society, enhancing the capacities of workers in the areas of monitoring and follow-up, and proposing programmes to build and raise capacities for human rights activists.

During the conference, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Arab Network for National Human

Rights Institutions and the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation in human rights for Southwest Asia and the Arab Region.

The main session of the conference was devoted to discussing the transcendence of international standards over national law when states accede to international treaties, the role of legislative bodies in adopting a human rights-based approach in public policies, and the role of international treaty and non-treaty mechanisms in developing and strengthening the system of tracking and evaluating human rights in public policies.

Al Muathir bin Ahmed al Siyabi, a specialist of international organisations of OHRC was chosen as its rapporteur.

Muhammad al Rawahi, a member of OHRC, was nominated to the conference’s drafting committee.

The meeting of the 19th General Assembly approved the annual report of the network, agenda of the the year was reviewed, and the follow-up to the recommendations of the Arab Network regarding the Palestinian issue. It also discussed developments in the process of accreditation of Arab institutions and the possibility of establishing a national human rights institution in Somalia.

Apart from the Chairman and Al Siyabi, the Oman delegation included Mohammed bin Ahmed al Rawahi, member of the committee and Saeed bin Saleh al Abri, director of the Communication and Information Department.

Ministry of Interior launches summer school for students

ADAM: The Ministry of Interior on Saturday launched summer programme for students of the Al Dakhiliyah governorate’s schools. Over 200 boys and schools are taking part in the programme to instill values of national pride and social duties, and boost creative skills, which will run till August 10.

The programme aims to build a positive and balanced personality in all psychological, social, cultural and religious aspects. It includes many activities, workshops, competitions covering science, innovation, information technology, entertainment, sports, arts, music, literature, entrepreneurship, heritage and tourism.

Muhammad al Maawali, Director of the Department of Vocational Guidance and Student Guidance at the Ministry of Interior and Chairman of the Supervisory Committee of the Summer Programme, said: “The programme targets students from the third to eleventh grades of different categories, levels and interests. It will be held in Adam Center in the Wilayat of Adam, Abu



Saeed Al Kadmi Center in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Umm Ayman Center in the Wilayat of Izki, and Mariyah Al Qibtiyya Center in the Wilayat of Samayil.

He added that the summer programme for school students comes as a continuation of the efforts of the Ministry of Education in presenting its educational mission and strengthening its societal roles outside the students’ curriculum, by providing educational activities in which knowledge is mixed with application and entertainment in a flexible manner in an informal atmosphere. — ONA



Announcement

The Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the below tenders:

Particulars	Tender No:01	Tender No:02
Tender Name	Provision of Maintenance of Landscaping and Irrigation Services at OCEC	Provision of Maintenance Services
Tender No.	OCEC/T/2022/11	OCEC/T/2022/12
Scope of work	Inside / Outside Center	Inside / Outside Center
Experience	Local experience in Landscaping and Irrigation Services	Local experience in Maintenance Services
Companies Grade	Local Excellent to grade 4	Local Excellent to grade 4
Tender Fees Payment (non-refundable)	OMR 25/-	OMR 140/-
Tender Document Sale Start Date	1-08-2022	1-08-2022
Tender Document Sale End Date	04-08-2022	04-08-2022
Last date of seeking clarification	04-08-2022	04-08-2022
Tender Closing Date	11-08-2022	11-08-2022
Method of Payment	Beneficiary: Oman Convention and Exhibition Center Bank: Sohar International Branch: Qurum - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 005020045872 Swift Code: BSHROMRU Finance Code: 609109900 Electronic payment receipt must be send to the e-mail : yaitrashdi@ocec.om	
Tender Document Collection	Tender documents can be obtained by e-mail after sending the electronic payment receipt during working hours: Sunday - Thursday 8:30am - 3:00pm.	
Tender Submission	All bidders must submit their offers with the terms and conditions of the tender by sending their bids to the e-mail: yaitrashdi@ocec.om	
Impotent Notes	•OCEC is not bound to award the contract to the lowest bid or any other bidder. •Each Bidder must provide a valid contact details for required tender communication (company name, contact name, telephone and email) •All tender communication will be emailed to this contact person and email address yaitrashdi@ocec.om . •Tender fee and tender bond NOT required for Bidders holding Riyada card issued by Public Authority for SME Development (Riyada).	



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Brief:

Marafiq is currently in the final stage of commissioning the Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant (DIPWP) including:

Installed capacity of 326MW CCGT Power Plant & associated facilities

36,000 m3/Day SWRO Desalination Plant

1,500,000 m3/Day Seawater Intake and Outfall Facility

DIPWP will fulfil the power & water needs of OQ8 (Duqm Refinery) and will serve the future expansion in the area.



We proudly announce that Marafiq achieved a safety milestone by completing 10 million manhours without LTI over more than 3 years period during the construction of the plant.

\$ 500 Million
Total Investment
Cost

Installed
capacity
326MW

More than
\$ 56 Million
Made in Oman
Goods & Services

More than
\$ 30 Million
SMEs

5 Scholarships
Provided for
Omanis

65%
Omanisation
in total Manpower

60 Training
opportunities for
Omanis
5 On-Job Training
opportunities

In Country Value



Alexander Diack

QHSE Manager,
Marafiq

We are very proud to achieve this milestone and show our commitment to Marafiq's goal of ZERO HARM. We must also recognise the hard work and commitment of our contractors. The team effort has been outstanding and sets a strong foundation on which to build future success.



Thamir Al Sulaimani

HSE Officer,
Marafiq

Congratulations to our management, team and contractors, it's a pleasure to be part of this success with highly experienced, talented and hardworking team. achieving 10M manhours clearly demonstrates our commitment to ensure that everybody goes home safe. Looking forward to climb the next hill and add more zeros to the 10M.



Mohamed Wally

Project Manager,
ACST (Alghanim Cobra Tedagua Sojitz power and water)

Every individual should be extremely proud of this achievement. This milestone is a proof that Project team, contractors and subcontractors are dedicated to the core value of "Safety, No excuses" while progressing in challenging conditions with best quality and productivity.



Ahmed Al Shaqsi

Mechanical Engineer,
Marafiq

Congratulations on the well-deserved success, It has been a significant milestone in our journey toward making this project an accident/ incident free project. We strongly believe that this achievement is a result of our work culture based on hard work, commitment, teamwork, strong management support, and continuous improvement



Health centres in Muscat resumes work in two shifts

MUSCAT: The health centres in the Governorate of Muscat from Monday will start working two shifts from Monday; from 7:30 am to 2:30 pm and from 2:30 pm to 9:00 pm. On weekends and official holidays, the working hours will be from 9 am to 4:30 pm.

The General Directorate of Health Services in the Governorate of Muscat indicated that patients can visit the centres from 2:30 am to 9:30 pm on weekends and 9:30 am to 4:30 pm on holidays.

These include Al Seeb Health Centre, Al Maabela South Health Centre, Al Mawaleh Health Centre, Al Mawaleh North Health Centre, Al Shadi Health Centre, Al Jamea

Health Centre and Al Hail Health Centre.

In the Wilayat of Bausher, the patients avail services at Al Ansab Health Centre, Bausher Health Centre, Al Ghubra Health Centre, Al Khuwair North Health Centre. In the Wilayat of Al Amerat, 4 health centres operate, which are Al Amerat Health Centre, Al Nahdha Health Centre, Al Hajer Health Centre and Siya Health Centre.

Three health centres in the Wilayat of Muscat are Muscat Health Centre, Yiti Health Centre and Sifah Health Centre. Al Wattayah Health Centre, Ruwi Health Centre, Muttrah Health Centre and Al Wadi Al Kabeer Health Centre are in the Wilayat of Muttrah.

Salalah-bound motorists told to follow safety rules

FROM PAGE 1

Only July 26, seven people were injured in a road accident that took place in the same region. On July 20, one person died, and five others of an Asian nationality were injured after the tyres of their vehicle burst on Adam-Thamrait road.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has deployed special checkpoints and patrol teams on the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate.

Col Faisal bin Salim al Hajri said: "We have enhanced police presence on the densely populated areas on the roads leading to Salalah on Adam-Thamrait road. Air ambulances have been placed at Haima to help take patients to hospitals in the event of any emergencies."

Not minding the resources



required for the deployment of such a scale, ROP has said that no efforts will be spared to save human lives.

Not ignoring the accidents which continue to be reported, Col Al Hajri said road accidents, however, have decreased compared to the past years due to an increase in police patrols

on the highways.

Col Al Hajri said: "We have noticed that while travellers are aware of precautionary measures to be taken on the roads, they still need to be wary of the natural desert climate conditions such as low visibility, strong winds, accumulation of sand on roads."

He added, "Most accidents are not only due to negligence, but also due to lack of preparatory measures such as vehicle maintenance, fuel checks, and ignorance of fatigue among drivers."

ROP has advised all visitors to Dhofar to follow traffic laws and regulations and ensure that they drive within the speed limits to ensure their safety and that of others, and to pay attention to presence of stray animals, especially at night, and sands that may accumulate on roads near desert areas.

Citizens and tourists heading to Dhofar Governorate can request service and assistance by calling the emergency phone (9999) or directly contacting the police personnel at checkpoints.

Oman Air launches flights to Trabzon

MUSCAT: Oman Air will launch a service between Muscat and Trabzon, Turkey, with 3 weekly flights (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday), which will commence Tuesday. The flight from Muscat will depart at 9:50 am and arrive in Trabzon at 1 pm.

The flight from Trabzon will

depart at 2 pm and arrive in Muscat at 7:05 pm.

Economy class starts at RO 155 and Business Class starts at RO 680. Guests travelling to Muscat and Trabzon should ensure they are aware of official requirements to enter or transit through the country.

Dangerous toys lurk in market, say experts

FROM PAGE 1

Some toys which replicate weapons connected to violent games, movies or cartoons are nothing but tools of glorifying violence with heroism and inculcate a belief that attacking and killing bad guys is a heroic act.

Psychologists opine that such toys can have a significant effect on the way a child views the actions and beliefs of other people.

Samar al Busaidy, a star-gazer, says certain toys can either be dangerous because of sharp parts unless proper care is taken while selecting them.

"Parents should make sure that all the parts of toys are properly fixed and intact, and ensure that there are no sharp edges. Some toys can lead to strangulation, hence, any loose ribbons or strings needs to be removed. Also, toys which cause choking, toys which have tiny parts or airtight bags which cause suffocation, need to be removed," said a leading supplier of toys.



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

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/026	2022/MM/QS-16 (Re-Call-02)	RFP for Renewal of AMC for Muscat Municipality IT Infrastructure (RE-TENDER-02) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	09/08/2022	16/08/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/009	2022/MM/QS-22 (Re-Call-01)	Preparation Works at Umq Rubakh -Wisal - at Quriyat (RE-TENDER-01) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	22/08/2022	11/09/2022	Fourth
PRE/22/070	2022/MM/QS-38	RFP for Muscat Contact Center Solution (E- Tender)	Rial 25	22/08/2022	11/09/2022	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

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



Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER NOTICE

The Tenders committee of Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
12/2022/MAFWR/HQ-1 - Recall - 1	Rent (50) Four Wheels Cars to be distributed to the Governorates in Order to Control Red Palm Weevil	25/-	Specialized	Sunday 7/8/2022	Tuesday 30/8/2022

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender), and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, And the bidders can contact the Esnad technical support team at the number listed below to find out how to request electronic guarantees from local banks.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



Tender Announcement

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, North of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:

ASU's Tender Committee has the pleasure to invite the companies who are experienced in project management services:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document fees
ASU/12/2022	Consultancy Services for the Design and Supervision of the Construction of Student Accommodation Buildings at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra	08/08/2022	10/08/2022 at 11 am	22/08/2022	100 OMR

- The participated companies of this tender should be excellent grade.
- The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days from 8:00 am to 02:00 pm.
- Bids have to be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.
- The submitting of the main envelope should contain the following:
Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For more details, please don't hesitate to contact us on: (+968) 25401115.


A'sharqiyahUni



Biden again tests positive for Covid, returns to isolation

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden has tested positive for Covid-19 for a second time and is returning to isolation, his White House doctor said, attributing the result to “rebound” positivity from treatment the US president received.

Biden “tested positive on Saturday, by antigen testing,” following four consecutive days of negative tests, and “will reinstate strict isolation procedures,” presidential physician Kevin O’Connor wrote in a memorandum.

“This in fact represents ‘rebound’ positivity,” O’Connor said, referring to a situation in which patients treated with the drug Paxlovid -- as Biden was -- clear the virus but test positive after completing their course.

“The president has experienced no re-emergence of symptoms and continues to feel quite well. This being the case, there is no reason to reinstate treatment at this time,” he added. — **dpa**

Hundreds camp at Iraqi parliament for second day

BAGHDAD: Hundreds of followers of Moqtada Sadr camped at the country’s parliament on Sunday for a second day, protesting against corruption and political mismanagement.

Despite tear gas, water cannon and baking temperatures that touched 47 degrees Celsius (116 degrees Fahrenheit), they stormed the complex on Saturday after pulling down heavy concrete barricades on roads leading to Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone of diplomatic and government buildings.

The health ministry said at least 100 protesters and 25 security personnel were hurt in the confrontation.

Nearly 10 months after October elections, Iraq is still without a new government despite intense negotiations between factions.

Analysts have said Sadr, a cleric who once led a militia against US and Iraqi government forces, is using street protests to signal that his views must be taken into account in any government formation.

Both the United Nations and European Union warned about escalating tensions.

The immediate trigger for the occupation was the decision by a rival bloc to pick former cabinet minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani for the prime minister’s post.

“We were hoping for the best but we got the worst. The politicians currently in parliament have brought us nothing,” said one of the protesters.

In multi-ethnic Iraq, government formation has involved complex negotiations since a 2003.



Supporters of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Sadr gather inside Iraq’s parliament on Sunday, a day after storming it. — **AFP**



A customer clutches a bag of subsidised flatbread after finally reaching the front of the queue at a bakery in Beirut. — **AFP**

Lebanese face long queues to buy bread

BEIRUT: In Lebanon, Khalil Mansour has to queue for hours every day just to buy bread for his family and some days he can’t afford any.

In a country which once boasted the nickname “Switzerland of the Middle East” for its thriving banking sector before financial crisis hit in 2019, the chronic shortage of the staple of the Lebanese diet has been hard to take.

Lebanon defaulted on its national debt in 2020 and its currency has lost around 90 per cent of its black market value.

The World Bank has branded the financial crisis one of the worst since the 19th century while the United Nations now considers

four out five Lebanese to be living under the poverty line.

Faced with demands from international creditors for painful reforms in return for the release of new aid, the government has been forced to end subsidies on most essential goods -- although not so far on wheat.

The price of subsidised bread has gone up, although by less than if there were no subsidy, but bakeries have started rationing the staple.

A bag of flat Arabic pitta-like bread now officially sells for 13,000 Lebanese pounds (43 US cents). On the black market it costs more than 30,000.

“Last week I went without bread for three days because I

cannot afford to pay 30,000,” said Mansour, 48.

For Mansour and most Lebanese, buying bread means standing for hours in long queues outside bakeries and sometimes, when their turn comes, the bakeries have run out of bread.

“Today I queued for three hours, yesterday two-and-a-half. What next?” Mansour said on Friday outside a Beirut bakery.

“I have to feed my family. What else can I do?” asked Mansour.

Most bakeries limit the sale of bread to one or two bags per customer, and each bag contains six flatbreads. Subsidised bread is often bought in large quantities and sold again on the black market by unscrupulous dealers. — **AFP**

Chinese booster rocket makes uncontrolled return to Earth

WASHINGTON: A Chinese booster rocket made an uncontrolled return to Earth on Saturday, leading US officials to chide Beijing for not sharing information about the potentially hazardous object’s descent.

US Space Command “can confirm the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Long March 5B (CZ-5B) re-entered over the Indian Ocean at approx 10:45 am MDT on 7/30,” the US military unit said on Twitter.

“We refer you to the #PRC for further details on the reentry’s technical aspects such as potential debris dispersal+ impact location,” it said.

In a statement posted to its

official WeChat profile, the China Manned Space Agency later gave coordinates for an impact area in the Sulu Sea, about 57 kilometres off the east coast of the Philippines’ Palawan Island.

“Most of its devices were ablated and destroyed during re-entry,” the agency said of the booster rocket, which was used last Sunday to launch the second of three modules China needed to complete its new Tiangong space station.

Malaysia’s space agency said it detected rocket debris burning up on re-entry before falling in the Sulu Sea northeast of the island of Borneo.

“The debris of the rocket caught fire while entering the Earth’s



Onlookers watch the launch of a rocket transporting China’s second module for its Tiangong space station from the Wenchang spaceport in southern China.

airspace and the movement of the burning debris also crossed Malaysian airspace and could be detected in several areas including crossing the airspace around the state of Sarawak,” it said.

Nasa administrator Bill Nelson criticised Beijing on Twitter, saying the failure to share details of the rocket’s descent was irresponsible and risky.

“All spacefaring nations should follow established best practices, and do their part to share this type of information in advance,” Nelson wrote, “to allow reliable predictions of potential debris impact risk, especially for heavy-lift vehicles, like the Long March 5B, which carry a significant risk

of loss of life and property.”

He added: “Doing so is critical to the responsible use of space and to ensure the safety of people here on Earth”.

The Tiangong space station is one of the crown jewels of Beijing’s ambitious space programme, which has landed robotic rovers on Mars and the Moon, and made China only the third nation to put humans in orbit.

The new module, propelled by the Long March 5B, successfully docked with Tiangong’s core module on Monday and the three astronauts who had been living in the main compartment since June successfully entered the new lab.

— **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

YANGON

Japanese man detained in Myanmar

A Japanese man has been detained by authorities in Myanmar after filming a protest in the country’s biggest city of Yangon, Jiji news agency reported on Sunday, citing Japanese government officials.

The report did not name the man, but said he was aged in his 20s and that the Japanese Embassy in Myanmar had called for his release.

Some local media reports named the man as documentary film-maker Toru Kubota and



said he was detained in the South Dagon area of Yangon on Saturday along with two others at a protest against the recent execution of four activists by military authorities.

DOHA

August signing of Chad peace plan expected

Qatar seeks to hold a ministerial summit in early August to seal an accord between Chad’s military government and opposition rebels on a national peace dialogue, negotiators said on Sunday.

Qatari emir Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani spoke with the Central African nation’s military leader, Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno, on Saturday, officials said.

The Gulf state’s mediators will meet with rebel negotiators this



week in a bid to sway holdout groups.

“Qatar would like to get an accord settled this week so they can hold an international meeting soon,” said one negotiator.

DAKAR

Senegal heads to polls for parliamentary elections

Senegal on Sunday voted in parliamentary elections the opposition hopes will force a coalition with President Macky Sall and curb any ambitions he may hold for a third term.

Sixty-year-old Sall, who was elected in 2012 for seven years then re-elected in 2019 for another five, has been accused of wanting to break the two-term limit and run again in 2024. He has remained vague on the subject, but any defeat of his supporters in the vote could



upset such plans.

“I hope voting day goes off peacefully,” said Lamine Sylva, a 60-year-old artist. “It’s like football -- there is a winner and a loser”



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In brief

■ MANILA



FORMER PRESIDENT FIDEL RAMOS DIES AT 94

Former Philippine president Fidel Ramos, credited for lifting what was known as Asia's basket-case economy to "tiger cub" status in the 1990s, died at 94 on Sunday, his family said.

The cause of death was not immediately known, and the family asked for privacy for "time to grieve together," according to a statement announcing the former leader's passing.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr expressed his deepest condolences to the family, adding, "Our family shares the Filipino people's grief on this sad day." "We did not only lose a good leader, but also a member of the family," he said.

■ ISLAMABAD



IMPORTS FALL SHARPLY IN JULY, TO HELP RUPEE STABILISE

Pakistan imports fell by more than a third in July after a ban on non-essentials, the finance minister said on Sunday, adding the improved trade situation will reduce pressure on the struggling rupee.

July imports fell to \$5 billion, down 35 per cent from June's record monthly high of \$7.7 billion, Miftah Ismail told a news conference in Islamabad.

The central bank and Pakistan statistics bureau is yet to post its July data.

"This is very welcoming," Ismail said, adding it was the result of his government's ban on all non-essential imports. "It will remove pressure on rupee," he said.

■ WASHINGTON



PELOSI BEGINS ASIA TOUR

US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi starts a tour of four Asian countries on Sunday, her office said.

"Speaker Nancy Pelosi is leading a Congressional delegation to the Indo-Pacific region, including visits to Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan," her office said in a press release.

The release said the visit would include those countries, but did not specify whether Pelosi, who is number 3 in the line of presidential succession, might make other stops.

"The trip will focus on mutual security, economic partnership and democratic governance in the Indo-Pacific region," it said.

Russia hits southern Ukraine city

Zelensky says grain harvest may be halved by war, orders evacuation of Donetsk

KYIV: Heavy Russian strikes hit the southern Ukrainian port city of Mykolaiv overnight and early on Sunday, killing the owner of one of the country's largest grain producing and exporting companies, the local governor said.

Oleksiy Vadatursky, founder and owner of agriculture company Nibulon and his wife, were killed in their home, Mykolaiv Governor Vitaliy Kim said on Telegram.

Headquartered in Mykolaiv, a strategically important city that borders the Russia-occupied Kherson region, Nibulon specialises in the production and export of wheat, barley and corn, and it has its own fleet and shipyard.

President Volodymyr Zelensky described Vadatursky's death as "a great loss for all of Ukraine", saying in a statement the businessman had been in the process of building a modern grain market involving a network of transshipment terminals and elevators.

Three people were also wounded in the attacks on Mikolaiv, the city's Mayor Oleksandr Senkevych told Ukrainian television, adding 12 missiles had hit homes and educational facilities. He earlier described the strikes as "probably the most powerful" on the city of the entire five-month-old war.

Up to 50 Grad rockets hit residential areas in another southern city, Nikopol, on Sunday morning, Dnipropetrovsk Governor Valentyn Reznichenko wrote on Telegram. One person was wounded.

Ukrainian forces struck the headquarters of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Russian-held Sevastopol early on Sunday, the Crimean port city governor, Mikhail Razvozhayev told Russian media. Five members of staff were



A firefighter works in a field, which burns after a military strike, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues in Mykolaiv region.

— Reuters

wounded in the attack when what was presumed to be a drone flew into the courtyard at the headquarters, he said.

HARVEST COULD BE HALVED

Zelensky said on Sunday the country may harvest only half its usual amount this year due to the attack.

"Ukrainian harvest this year is under the threat to be twice less," suggesting half as much as usual, Zelensky wrote in English on Twitter. "Our main goal — to prevent global food crisis caused by Russian attack. Still grains find a way to be delivered alternatively," he added.

Ukraine has struggled to get its product to buyers via its Black Sea ports because of the war.

But an agreement signed under the stewardship of the United Nations and Turkey on July 22 provides for safe passage for ships carrying grain out of three southern Ukrainian ports.

There is a high possibility that the first grain-exporting ship will leave Ukraine's ports on Monday, a spokesperson for Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday.

EASTERN DANGER

In a televised address late on Saturday, Zelensky said hundreds of thousands of people were still exposed to fierce fighting in the Donbas region, which contains Donetsk and Luhansk provinces and which Russia seeks to control completely. Swathes of the Donbas were held before the attack by Russian-backed separatists.

"Many refuse to leave but it still needs to be done," Zelensky said. "The more people leave the Donetsk region now, the fewer people the Russian army will have time to kill." Russia on Sunday invited UN and Red Cross experts to probe the deaths of dozens of Ukrainian prisoners held by Moscow-backed separatists.

Ukraine and Russia have traded

accusations over a missile strike or explosion early on Friday that appeared to have killed dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war in the front-line town of Olenivka in eastern Donetsk.

Russia invited experts from the UN and Red Cross to probe the deaths "in the interests of conducting an objective investigation", the defence ministry said on Sunday.

The ministry had published a list of 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war killed and 73 wounded in what it said was a Ukrainian military strike with a US-made High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).

Ukraine's armed forces denied responsibility, saying Russian artillery had attacked the prison to hide mistreatment there.

Russia denies its forces have deliberately attacked civilians or committed war crimes in the attack, which it calls a "special operation". — Reuters

Putin introduces new naval doctrine

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin has put a new naval doctrine into effect as the country celebrates Navy Day.

He said Russia would protect its maritime borders by all means necessary — including in the Arctic and Black Seas — in comments made in St Petersburg during a parade of warships.

Zirkon, a new hypersonic cruise missile, will also enter service soon, according to Putin, who said the missiles would be delivered in the coming months.

The Admiral Gorshkov frigate is to be the first to be equipped with them.

Russia's new doctrine states that the United States' bid for dominance of the world's oceans is a "challenge to Russia's national security."

The document also provides for the expansion of the military infrastructure on the annexed Black Sea peninsula of Crimea.

The doctrine also foresees the construction of modern aircraft carriers. — dpa



Russian warships sail during a parade marking Navy Day in Baltiysk. — Reuters

Lanka president seeks unity govt to save economy



Drivers push auto rickshaws in a line to buy petrol from a fuel station in Colombo. — Reuters

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's new president Ranil Wickremesinghe has formally invited MPs to join an all-party unity government to revive the bankrupt economy by undertaking painful reforms, his office said on Sunday.

Wickremesinghe took office earlier this month after public anger over the island nation's worst economic crisis forced his predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and quit.

In a meeting on Saturday with the influential monks of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, one of Buddhism's most sacred shrines, Wickremesinghe outlined his plans.

"As the president, I wish to start a new journey," Wickremesinghe was quoted as telling the monks in his first meeting with the powerful Buddhist clergy since taking office.

"I would like to get all the parties together and go on that journey as well as to form an all-party government." He has written to all lawmakers asking them to join a unity government.

A former opposition MP, Wickremesinghe, 73, took up the premiership for the sixth time in May after Rajapaksa's elder brother Mahinda resigned and there were no other takers for the job.

Wickremesinghe went onto become the president after Gotabaya escaped on July 9 when tens of thousands of protesters angry at the economic crisis stormed the presidential palace.

He fled to Singapore from where he resigned five days later and Wickremesinghe became interim president and later won a vote in parliament confirming his ascension. — AFP

Mountain melt shuts classic Alpine routes

GENEVA: Little snow cover and glaciers melting at an alarming rate amid Europe's sweltering heatwaves have put some of the most classic Alpine hiking routes off-limits.

Usually at the height of summer, tourists flock to the Alps and seek out well-trodden paths up to some of Europe's most iconic peaks.

But with warmer temperatures speeding up glacier melt and thawing permafrost — which scientists say are driven by climate change — routes that are usually safe this time of year now face hazards like falling rocks released from the ice.

"Currently in the Alps, there are warnings for around a dozen peaks, including emblematic ones like Matterhorn and Mount Blanc," Pierre Mathey, head of the Swiss mountain guide association, said. This is happening far earlier in the season than normal, he said.

"Usually we see such closures in August, but now they have started at the end of June and are continuing in July."

Alpine guides who usually lead thousands of hikers up towards Europe's highest peak announced earlier this week that they would suspend ascents on the most



Usually at the height of summer, tourists flock to the Alps and seek out well-trodden paths. — AFP

classic routes up Mont Blanc, which straddles France, Italy and Switzerland.

The Guide Alpine Italienne said on its Facebook page that the "particularly delicate conditions" caused by the temperature spike made it necessary to "postpone the climbs".

Mountain guides have also refrained — reportedly for the first time in a century — from offering tours up the classic route to the Jungfrau peak in Switzerland.

And they have advised against tours along routes on both

the Italian and Swiss sides of the towering pyramid-shaped Matterhorn peak.

Ezio Marlier, president of the Valle D'Aosta guides association, said having to steer clear of routes most coveted by tourists was a blow after the Covid slowdowns.

"It is not easy... after two almost empty seasons to decide to halt work," he said.

He stressed that the Italian Alpine region had shut only two and that there were many other breathtaking and safe routes to take. — AFP

Are children reading enough?



MASSRAT SHAIKH
www.massratshaikh.com

The writer is an educational psychologist

The time that teenagers and tweens spend on YouTube, TikTok, and other video-sharing sites has taken off during the pandemic, while reading time amongst these age groups remains flat.

Summer is a perfect time for children to immerse themselves in reading. Voluntary reading is, in many ways, the silver bullet. It not only improves learning outcomes and life chances but is connected to short-term and long-term health and wellbeing.

One of the key findings of a recent survey by Common Sense Media, a non-profit research organisation, shows that media use by children aged 8 to 18 was already on the upswing before the pandemic. However, the pace of the acceleration has quickened significantly during the pandemic.

The report shows that overall media use rose by 3 per cent for tweens (ages 8-12) between 2015

and 2019 and 11 per cent for teens, or children 13 to 18, over the same period.

However, in just two years — between 2019 and 2021 — social media use for both groups increased by 17 per cent, to a little more than five-and-half hours a day for tweens and just over eight and half hours for teens.

The most significant increase has come in watching online videos, which grew by 23 minutes per day for teens. Social media usage surged among tweens, with 18 per cent saying they use it everyday, compared with 13 per cent in 2019. This should be a worrying finding, considering tweens are not technically allowed to be on social media platforms at all.

While it may be tempting to conclude that extra time at home during the pandemic was the big reason for the spike in online video watching, TikTok may be

TEACHERS HAVE IMMENSE POWER IN INFLUENCING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS READING. THEY CAN CHANGE SOMETHING THAT WAS ONCE PLEASURABLE AND DIMINISH IT OR MODEL A LOVE OF READING

at least partly behind that finding, according to the report.

Platforms like TikTok have continued to swell in popularity, which may also be driving increased use.

One survey finding that could be particularly troubling for educators is that only about a third of tweens and one in 5 teens reported spending some time reading for their pleasure everyday.

A new study published in Reading and Writing found

significant differences between students' academic achievement between those who read for pleasure outside of class — and those disengaged from voluntary reading.

To help children take reading for fun as seriously as they take the academic reading, here are some suggestions that can be helpful:

1)Expand their options — mainly the books that are not part of classical literature or do not carry literary prestige — are often considered less useful, which is a false dichotomy. We need to let children be creative, do what they want and give them plenty of choices.

Providing students with rich and varied reading material can make a difference. Children should read comic books and manga, sports writing and plays, and sci-fi and horror novels. If we want children to build literacy skills, they should

consume dozens of texts that they love, connect with, or feel inspired with.

2)Loosen Up — While children's literacy skill development begins at home, teachers play a profoundly important part in encouraging students to love reading.

We all remember teachers who encouraged us as readers and really lit a fire and those who did the exact opposite. Teachers have immense power in influencing students' attitudes towards reading. They can change something that was once pleasurable and diminish it or model a love of reading.

Teachers who love reading themselves emphasise choice and give students opportunities to read and share during class time.

Even light reading provides a host of benefits. It is essential to teach children how to read; moreover, once we do that, we need to make it worthwhile.

‘Always frightened’: life for Ukrainians in ruined estate

FRANKIE TAGGART

Galyna Chorna sobs as she recounts the Russian rocket strike that obliterated the apartments above hers, shattering her windows, her door and any inkling of safety she still clung to.

The 75-year-old is the only remaining resident of her nine-storey block in Saltivka, one of Europe's largest housing estates that has been ruthlessly and relentlessly shelled by Russia since the start of its invasion of Ukraine in February.

“I’m so afraid because I’m alone here — I’m really alone. I had a daughter, but she died a year ago because she drank too much,” she says, trembling despite the warm sunshine.

“So now I just sit here on this bucket. When a missile comes in, I just fall to the floor, on my front. That’s why maybe I am still alive.”

Saltivka, in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, was once a thriving district, built in the 1960s as a “bedroom community” for Soviet industrial workers, and home to upwards of half a million people.

A relentless barrage of Iskander missiles and unguided rockets began on February 26, hitting apartment blocks at random.

As the war grinds on, much of the neighbourhood now lies in ruins. Early spring was so cold that the nails on Galyna’s hands and feet turned black with the beginnings of frostbite.

There was no running water in the area for the first six weeks of war, and no electricity until last month. The gas only returned this week.

Scorched edifices overlook every street, their broken windows and the gaping holes smashed through masonry testament to the intensity of the bombardment.

Many of the buildings are scarred by deep fissures and look as if they are on the verge of collapse.

Rusting cars with roofs pancaked by fallen rubble and twisted metal decay in the streets. Several apartment blocks appear to have been spared further into the estate, but no corner is genuinely safe, due to the random character of the shelling.

Many of the attacks have been carried out using banned cluster bombs, rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch say, accusations the Kremlin has denied.

Parts of the district have returned to nature, and grass verges grow waist-high.

With most of the children gone, the cherry trees have remained unpicked, their fruit left to drop on the pockmarked pavement.

The residents who stayed eke out what life they can on government handouts of less than \$100 a month and ready meals delivered by police and charity workers. — AFP



SARAH MERVOSH

The writer is a reporter at The New York Times

Trained, armed and ready. To teach kindergarten

Mandi, a kindergarten teacher in Ohio, had already done what she could to secure her classroom against a gunman.

She positioned a bookcase by the doorway, in case she needed a barricade. In an orange bucket, she kept district-issued emergency supplies: wasp spray, to aim at an attacker, and a tube sock, to hold a heavy object and hurl at an assailant.

But after 19 children and two teachers were killed in Uvalde, Texas, she felt a growing desperation. Her school is in an older building, with no automatic locks on classroom doors and no police officer on campus.

“We just feel helpless,” she said. “It’s not enough.”

She decided she needed something far more powerful: a 9 mm pistol.

So she signed up for training that would allow her to carry a gun in school. Like others in this article, she asked to be identified by her first name because of school district rules that restrict information about employees carrying firearms.

A decade ago, it was extremely rare for everyday school employees to carry guns. Today, after a seemingly endless series of mass shootings, the strategy has become a leading solution promoted by Republicans and gun rights advocates, who say that allowing teachers, principals and superintendents to be armed gives schools a fighting chance in case of attack.

At least 29 states allow individuals other than police or security officials to carry guns on school grounds, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. As of 2018, the last year for which statistics were available, federal survey data estimated that 2.6 per cent of public schools had armed faculty.

The count has probably grown.

In Florida, more than 1,300 school staff members serve as armed guardians in 45 school districts, out of 74 in the state, according to state officials. The programme was created after a gunman killed 17 people at

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland in 2018.

In Texas, at least 402 school districts — about one-third in the state — participate in a programme that allows designated people, including school staff members, to be armed, according to the Texas Association of School Boards. Another programme,

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES, AT LEAST 29 STATES ALLOW INDIVIDUALS OTHER THAN POLICE OR SECURITY OFFICIALS TO CARRY GUNS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

which requires more training, is used by a smaller number of districts. Participation in both is up since 2018.

And in the weeks after the Uvalde shooting, lawmakers in Ohio made it easier for teachers and other school

employees to carry guns.

The strategy is fiercely opposed by Democrats, police groups, teachers unions and gun control advocates, who say that concealed-carry programmes in schools — far from solving the problem — will only create more risk. Past polling has shown that the vast majority of teachers do not want to be armed.

The law in Ohio has been especially contentious because it requires no more than 24 hours of training, along with eight hours of recertification annually.

Studies on school employees carrying guns have been limited, and research so far has found little evidence that it is effective. There is also little evidence that school resource officers are broadly effective at preventing school shootings, which are statistically rare. Yet arming school employees is finding appeal — slight majorities among parents and adults in recent polls.

Of the five deadliest school shootings on record, four — in Newtown, Connecticut; Uvalde; Parkland; and Santa Fe, Texas — have happened in the past 10 years.

— The New York Times



Mandi, a teacher at a rural school, attends a three-day gun and active shooter training camp in Rittman, Ohio.

Migration marks religious and historical significance



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

In fact, this occasion marked a turning point in the Islamic history as it led to the foundation of the first Muslim state at that time. Likewise, it was the reason behind having the Islamic Calendar. The first of Muharram stands as the first day in the calendar, representing the time when the Prophet's migration took place. Further, the calendar brings other important dates for Muslims worldwide, including the Month of Ramadhan, Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha, Prophet's Birthday and Prophet's Ascension Day.

Out of religious perspective, every month in this calendar is marked not by the start of a new moon, but by a physical sighting of the curved moon at a given setting. To Muslims, the Islamic Calendar is not just an old system of time calculation and dating important religious occasions such as fasting during Ramadhan and Haj, pilgrimage. Rather, it brings a much deeper religious and historical significance to all Muslims.

THE PROPHET'S MIGRATION TO MADINAH MARKED A NEW ERA FOR HE COULD UNITE ALL BELIEVERS AS IF THEY ALL HAD A HEART OF A SINGLE MAN. IT WAS A DAWN THAT ENTICED MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE UNIVERSE. SINCE THEN STARTED THE NEW STATE OF ISLAM

to clear up all the difficulties and overcome the hardships they come across.

The Almighty Allah has sent the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with guidance to renew the call for Islam; the religion of all the other Prophets and Messengers who came before him. All of them in succession conveyed the religion, which Allah accepts to their respective audiences until the religion was fully completed by revealing the Holy Quran to the last of the Prophets, Muhammad (PBUH).

As the verse confirms: "Say you we believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes of Al Asbat, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we submit to Allah in Islam."

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as a Messenger of Allah, was ordered to ask people convert to Islam and spread its rules among all people in Mecca. At the beginning of his call, only a few people believed in him and the majority rejected his call and denied his prophethood. They used to worship idols, bury their newly born daughters alive and commit many acts of evilness and dishonesty. Such inhumane acts were against Islam, morals and humanity.

Thereafter, the Prophet advised his companions to migrate to another city called Habasha where there was a just Christian king who welcomed Muslims, believed in them and protected them too. When the number of believers increased in Madinah, Allah revealed to the Prophet to migrate and move to Madinah. Hence, all Muslims started migrating one after another in compliance to the order of Allah and in obedience to the order of the Prophet to leave their hometown.

The Prophet's migration to Madinah marked a new era for he could unite all believers as if they all had a heart of a single man. It was a dawn that enticed millions of people from every corner of the universe. Since then started the new state of Islam.



CLASH OF THE TITANS

Pakistan supporters arrive for the Twenty20 cricket match between India and Pakistan on day three of the Commonwealth Games at Edgbaston in Birmingham, central England, on Sunday. – AFP

How a universal basic income helped Kenyans fight Covid

TAVNEET SURI, NIDHI PAREKH

When the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting recession pushed 120 million people worldwide into extreme poverty in 2020, many countries relied on social-protection measures to cushion the blow. By May 2021, a total of 3,333 such schemes had been planned or implemented in 222 countries or territories.

Because the world will face other crises in the coming decades, we must learn how to protect people better against unexpected events – particularly as the effects of climate change become more pronounced and leave many exposed to natural disasters and income shocks. But how?

Social-protection programmes that assist low-income families, insure against shocks, and break poverty traps offer a potential solution. But targeted cash transfers, the most prevalent scheme, might not address supply-side barriers such as shortages of food and other essential goods, particularly during crises. So, can any type of cash transfers mitigate the impact of large shocks? Do crises require new social-protection measures, or can existing policies boost resilience?

An increasingly popular and much-debated form of social protection is a universal basic income (UBI): an unconditional cash transfer that is large enough to meet individuals' basic needs and is delivered to everyone within a community. While the UBI idea is not new, it has recently been gaining traction globally, with pilot programmes launched in countries including Finland, India, and the United States.

The concept builds on decades of evidence concerning the impact of cash transfers. For example, contrary to popular opinion, studies show that cash transfers reduce spending on "temptation goods" like alcohol and tobacco, do not discourage work, and have a wide range of positive effects.

But a lack of accurate, dynamic data makes it difficult to direct cash transfers to those most in need. Targeting individuals rather than households is even more complicated, because poor individuals often live in non-poor households.

A UBI could circumvent these issues, because it is not only universal but also can be provided to individuals rather than households. Furthermore, a UBI could help soften the blow of unexpected shocks that might leave some segments of the population vulnerable and in need of government support – although whether it could do so cost-effectively has yet to be determined.

In 2017, a team of researchers – Abhijit Banerjee, Michael Faye, Alan Krueger, Paul Niehaus, and one of us (Suri) – in collaboration with Innovations for Poverty Action and GiveDirectly, began a randomised evaluation in Kenya to test the effect of a digitally transferred UBI. The team focused on two low-income counties, Siaya and Bomet, and evaluated three distinct UBI designs: a large lump sum, equivalent to approximately \$500 (the "lump-sum arm"); a payment of \$0.75 per day for two years, equivalent to about \$500 (the "short-term arm"); and a payment of \$0.75 per day for 12 years (the "long-term arm"). Payments were made to each adult over the age of 18 in the assigned villages.

When the pandemic hit Kenya in 2020, the team quickly realised that they needed to understand whether this UBI was helping people weather the crisis. So, with funding from J-PAL Africa's Digital Identification and Finance Initiative, they conducted phone surveys of the households participating in the programme. By this point, the lump-sum and short-term arms were complete; the long-term arm was ongoing.

The team found that the UBI improved households' food security and physical and mental health, relative to the comparison group of households that did not receive the transfer. UBI recipients also reduced their social interactions, possibly because of the pandemic and perhaps because they did not need to rely on friends and relatives as much during the hungry season (though this is speculative at best). This may have lessened the burden on local public-health systems as UBI recipients were less

likely to fall ill.

Hunger was widespread in the two counties the team studied. But whereas 68% of people in the comparison group reported experiencing hunger in the past 30 days, UBI recipients were 5-11 percentage points less likely to do so. This effect was significantly larger for people in the long-term arm, who expected to continue receiving transfers.

UBI recipients were also 4-6 percentage points less likely to report that a household member had been sick during the past 30 days, as compared to 44 per cent in the comparison group. And while 29 per cent of people in the comparison group had recently sought medical attention at a hospital, UBI beneficiaries were 3-5 percentage points less likely to do so, because they were less likely to be sick.

The researchers also saw how more income can lead people to take greater risks. Before the pandemic, new businesses established by some UBI recipients posted large increases in profits. But such risk-taking does not always pay off. Although these enterprises largely remained open during the Covid-19 crisis, earnings declined to levels similar to those in the comparison group.

This decrease in income for UBI beneficiaries during the pandemic was not a failure of UBI. The grant is designed to maintain a minimum standard of living and, by providing a form of insurance, may encourage recipients to take more risks. But in a crisis of the magnitude of the pandemic, policymakers should also consider protecting incomes (as some high-income countries did).

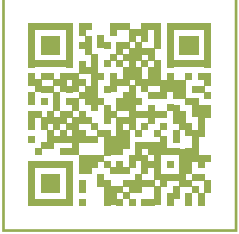
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The concept builds on decades of evidence concerning the impact of cash transfers.

sport

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NEXT GENERATION OF OMANI SAILORS EXCEL



MUSCAT: Sailors from all of Oman Sail's Sailing Schools took to the water in Sur to compete for the national title at the Oman Sailing Championship 2022. Approximately 75 sailors from the Al Mouj Muscat, Marina Bandar Al Rowdha, Mussanah and Sur Sailing Schools competed across six classes to win the trophy and a place in the Oman National Team for international events.

Sailors in the debuting Diam24 and RS Venture Class, composed of athletes from Oman Sail's Para

Sailing programme 'SailFree', joined Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, and iQFOiL classes for four days of racing. The winners received their trophies at a gala awards ceremony attended by HE Jihad Abdullah al Fanna, Member of the Majlis Ash'shura representing the Wilayat of Sur, and Dr Khamis al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO.

THE FINAL PLACINGS WERE:

Optimist Overall

1- Abdullatif al Qasmi – Mussanah Sailing School

2- Hassam al Wahaibi – Marina Bandar Rowdha Sailing School

3- Firas al Nabhani – Mussanah Sailing School

The best young sailor in this Category: Saja al Mukhaini – Sur Sailing School

ILCA 4

1- Elyas al Fudhaili – Mussanah Sailing School

2- Nibras al Oaisi – Mussanah Sailing School

3- Salim al Alawi – Sur Sailing School

ILCA 6

1- Abdulmalik al Hinai – Al Mouj Muscat Sailing School

2- Mohammed al Qasmi – Al Mouj Muscat Sailing School

iQFOiL

1- AbdulMajeed al Hadhrami – Mussanah Sailing School

Diam24

1- Team of Raad al Hadi + Ibtisam al Salmi + Musab al Hadi (Team leader)

2- Team of Abdulrahman al Mashari + Zakaria al Wahabi + Husain al Jabri (Team leader)

RS Venture

1- Team Ghaliya al Jabri + Malik al Qartobi

2- Team Adil al Siyabi + Ahmed al Shukaili

Saleh al Jabri, Event Project Manager, said, "The performance of all of our sailors this week has been exciting to see. Especially those making their debut in new classes. It shows that the pathway is working and the sailors are progressing well. The top performing sailors will now join the national squad and form teams capable of representing

Oman in international competition at youth level. It is our hope that every sailor at our Sailing Schools continues to develop, gain experience and become part of a thriving, successful national team that will proudly fly the flag for Oman around the world for many years to come."

The Oman Sailing Championship 2022 was organised by Oman Sail and held under the authority of the Oman Maritime Sports Committee.

Sultan's AFF Championship's golden stage from today

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

The Sultan's Armed Forces Football League 25 will be held from July 20 to August 3 at Salalah Sports Complex in cooperation with the Oman Football Association.

The Championship is approaching decisive stages on Monday when the Golden Square matches will be held. After the

group stage competitions, the Ministry of Defence, Royal Court Affairs, the Royal Guard of Oman and the Royal Air Force of Oman qualified for the golden round.

The Royal Court Affairs team was able to qualify for the golden square by beating the Royal Navy of Oman team.

Abdul Rahman al Mushafri from the Royal Navy of Oman was the player of the match.

The Royal Army of Oman team won three points after beating the Royal Guard of Oman, and Hareb al Saadi from the Royal Army of Oman team won the award for the best player in the match. In an exciting match, the Royal Air Force of Oman team defeated the Royal Army of Oman by three goals to one.

Shawqi al Raqadi from the Royal Army of Oman was awarded the best player Award.



Shabab al Hafri clinches elite league football title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Shabab al Hafri clinched the title of the Al Raed elite league of Al Shabab Club in Barka after defeating Shabab al Miragh team in penalty as the match ended in a 1-1 at full-time. In a thrilling final attended by thousands of fans, both teams showed top performance which reflected their competence to play the final game.

The first half finished in a goalless draw with a series of missed scoring attempts. Both goals were scored in the second half. Shabab al Miragh took the lead through Mahmood al Balushi who managed to register the



opening goal in the match after a perfect assist from his team-mate Jaweed al Balushi.

The opponent Shabab al Hafri pressed hard with an aim of equalising the result and bringing the match into the origin position. As the match was approaching towards end and after several opportunities, Asad al Mabsali netted the equaliser in the dying minutes to revive his team's chances to compete for the title. Later, both teams went to penalties and Shabab al Hafri saved one of the Shabab al Miragh's penalties to deliver the team the title. Al Sawadi claimed the third place award.

HH Sayyid Malik bin Shihab

bin Tarik al Said, board member of Seeb Club, was the chief guest for the final in presence of Ahmed bin Abdullah al Owaisi, Chairman of Al Shabab Club. After the completion of the final match, the chief guest gave away the trophies and medals to Shabab al Hafri and Shabab al Miragh players.

Issa al Hadi from Shabab al Shati was named as the best player in the tournament. The goalie of Shabab al Hafri, Younis al Owaisi became the best goalkeeper of the event. Monais al Naabi from Al Mazraa grabbed the top-scorer prize. At the end of the awards ceremony, Ahmed al Owaisi presented a memento to the chief guest.





Liverpool players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Community Shield. – Reuters

Nunez outshines Haaland as Liverpool beat Man City

LEICESTER, United Kingdom: Liverpool struck first blood against Manchester City ahead of the new Premier League season as Darwin Nunez made an instant impact for Jurgen Klopp's men to win the Community Shield 3-1 on Saturday.

In a tale of two big summer signings, Nunez came off the bench to win a penalty and score his first goal since a 75-million euro (\$77 million) move from Benfica, while Erling Haaland had a City debut to forget.

"He's good," said Klopp on

Nunez, who has been criticised for his pre-season performances. "Today we played the smart passes. We saw Darwin in dangerous situations. He used the spaces and finished well too."

"All the subs made a real difference. It was the most important thing I learned today, that the boys are ready."

Trent Alexander-Arnold's blistering strike gave Liverpool a deserved half-time lead in Leicester.

But it was City's other new forward who hauled Pep

Guardiola's men back into the game after the break as Julian Alvarez equalised.

Tying down Mohamed Salah to a new three-year deal was Liverpool's other major piece of summer business and the Egyptian was deadly from the penalty spot after Nunez's header was handled by Ruben Dias.

The Uruguayan then got his own glory moment by stooping to head home in stoppage time before tearing off his shirt in celebration.

Victory saw Liverpool win the traditional season curtain-raiser

for the first time since 2006 and lay down an early marker in what is expected to be another battle between the sides for the Premier League title.

City held off the Reds to win the Premier League for a fourth time in five years by a point in a thrilling finale to last season.

Guardiola's men had to come from 2-0 down on the final day of the campaign to beat Aston Villa and were again guilty of a slow start.

Salah was the provider for the opening goal as he laid Thiago

Alcantara's crossfield pass back to the edge of the box and Alexander-Arnold smashed in off the post with the aid of a slight deflection off Dias. City had played just two pre-season friendlies to Liverpool's four and took half an hour to find their feet.

HAALAND HOWLER

Haaland was denied by Liverpool stand-in goalkeeper Adrian with his first sight of goal.

However, the Norwegian should have opened his City account moments later as he failed to properly connect with Joao

Cancelo's inviting cross.

"It's good for him to see the reality of the new country, new league," said Guardiola on Haaland's first taste of English football.

"He was there. Today he didn't score — another day he will score."

Nunez was given his chance to shine on the hour mark, but fluffed his first big chance when Ederson prevailed in a one-on-one.

At the other end, City's new South American striker also got his career in England off to a flying start. — AFP

Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers postponed to allow for World Cup preparation



CAPE TOWN:The next round of Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers in September have been postponed to allow the continent's five World Cup-bound teams the opportunity for better preparatory matches before the tournament in Qatar, the Confederation of African Football said on Sunday.

The postponement had been muted for weeks, especially after the date for the next Cup of Nations finals in the Ivory Coast was put back from June next year to January 2024.

Senegal coach Aliou Cisse was among the more vocal critics of the fixtures, which meant his country would have had to play two Cup of Nations qualifiers, home and away against Mozambique, in

the final window of opportunity in September when they wanted to play against opposition from other continents ahead of the World Cup. Senegal are expected to announce alternative fixtures soon.

Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Tunisia are the other African teams who will be playing at the World Cup finals.

The Cup of Nations qualifiers, which started with two rounds of matches in June, still have four rounds remaining.

CAF said match day three and match day four qualifiers have been moved to March 20-28 next year, the fifth round to June 12-20 2023 while match day six will be played on September 4-12 2023.

— Reuters

Mane opens Bayern account in German Super Cup triumph

BERLIN: Sadio Mane opened his competitive goal-scoring account for Bayern Munich as the Bundesliga champions defeated Leipzig 5-3 to capture the German Super Cup for a 10th time on Saturday.

The African Player of the Year, who ended a six-year stint at Liverpool to move to Bavaria in the summer, also had two goals ruled out for offside in the game played at Leipzig's Red Bull Arena.

"I'm really happy to win my first game and first trophy. You can't complain. I'm really happy to be part of this great club," said Mane.

Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann insisted his team deserved the victory.

"We did very well in the first half but from the 60th minute you could see that we were running out of steam," he said.

"We've only been in training for 19 days, you shouldn't forget that. We deserved to win, there's no question about that."

Senegalese star Mane was on target on the half-hour mark for his team's second goal in the German season curtain-raiser.

Jamal Musiala played a perfect pass to unlock the Leipzig offside trap and release Serge Gnabry whose pass across the front of goal was tapped home by Mane.

Bayern, beginning a new era after the departure of star striker Robert Lewandowski to Barcelona, had taken the lead after 14 minutes thanks to Musiala getting the better of Leipzig's Hungarian



Bayern Munich's Sadio Mane celebrates with the trophy after winning the DFL Super Cup. – Reuters

goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi.

The impressive Musiala was at the heart of Bayern's third goal on

the stroke of half-time when the teenager's astute pass was drilled home by French international

Benjamin Pavard.

Marcel Halstenberg headed in on the hour as Leipzig cut the deficit but it only took Bayern five minutes to restore their three-goal advantage.

Thomas Mueller had a shot only half saved by Gulacsi and Gnabry was quickest to react to the loose ball to make the score 4-1.

Another new signing Ryan Gravenberch, who arrived from Ajax, came on to replace Mueller for Bayern before Mane had a goal ruled out by VAR for offside.

In an end-to-end second half, Leipzig grabbed their second goal of the evening courtesy of a Christopher Nkunku penalty after Dani Olmo had been brought down in the area.

As the clock ticked down, Bayern brought on another new signing in Dutch centre-back Matthijs de Ligt who joined from Juventus for 67 million euros (\$68.2 million).

With six minutes left, Mane had a second goal ruled out, again for offside, before Spanish international Olmo pulled another goal back for Leipzig in the 89th minute after a quick breakaway.

Bayern then had to survive a few nervy moments as Leipzig pushed for a fourth but Leroy Sane wrapped up the game with his team's fifth goal in the eighth minute of stoppage time.

Bayern Munich begin the defence of their Bundesliga title away to Eintracht Frankfurt next Friday. — AFP



De Minaur rallies to book Atlanta final against Brooksby

WASHINGTON: Third-seeded Alex de Minaur fought back from a set down for a second straight match on Saturday, downing Ilya Ivashka 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 to reach the final of the ATP Atlanta Open.

De Minaur lined up a title clash with sixth-seeded Jenson Brooksby, who beat fourth-seeded fellow American Frances Tiafoe 6-1, 6-4.

De Minaur, whose five ATP titles include a victory in Atlanta in 2019, is in his first final of 2022.

After battling back from a set down to beat Adrian Mannarino in the quarterfinals, the Australian again surrendered the first set after a lengthy rain delay at 5-5.

“I just found a way to get through,” said de Minaur, who saved two break points to open both the second and third sets before going on to

take control.

“It wasn’t an ideal start but these things happen,” he said. “You adapt, you move on and try to do the best that you can.”

Brooksby took control early against Tiafoe, surging to a 3-0 lead on the way to pocketing the first set.

Brooksby grabbed another early break in the second set and didn’t face a break point until he was serving for the match.

That decisive game went to deuce five times, but Brooksby put it away on his sixth match point to reach his third career ATP final and second of 2022 after his runner-up performance in Dallas.

“I came out really fired up,” Brooksby said. “I think I kept it up in the second, then he started competing, started playing better... I was a little nervous there (at the end of the second set).” — AFP



Jackson takes 100m title in Jamaican clean sweep in Lignano



LIGNANO: Shericka Jackson won the 100 metres title in Lignano, Italy on Saturday, clocking a time of 11.13 seconds ahead of fellow Jamaicans Natasha Morrison and Shokoria Wallace.

Jackson’s win comes after her silver medal at the world championships earlier this month when she ran a personal best of 10.73 and just before the start of the 100m event at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham on Tuesday.

Morrison and Wallace ran 11.31 and 11.36 respectively at the 33rd International Athletics Meeting “Sport Solidarity” event to complete another Jamaican clean sweep after the country became the first to sweep the podium at the worlds in the event.

Jackson, fresh from her 200m world title in Oregon, will also appear at the Silesia Diamond League meeting in Poland next Saturday before running at the Gyulai Istvan Memorial Grand Prix in Hungary on August 8 and Monaco Diamond League two days later. — Reuters



England and South Africa ring changes for T20 decider



SOUTHAMPTON, United Kingdom: Both England and South Africa made changes to their teams for the third and deciding Twenty20 international at Southampton on Sunday.

England recalled left-arm quick David Willey, set to be involved early on at the Ageas Bowl after captain Jos Buttler won the toss and opted to field in overcast conditions.

Willey replaced Richard Gleeson in the only change to England’s XI after South Africa levelled the three-match series at 1-1 with a convincing 58-run win in Cardiff.

“We’ve been really impressed with Richard, he’s done really well, but he’s been carrying a little bit of a shoulder injury,” said Buttler at the toss.

“David has been really well

too so he gets his opportunity today.”

The Proteas made two changes, with Aiden Markram replacing fellow batsman Heinrich Klaasen and Anrich Nortje taking over from fast bowler Kagiso Rabada.

“Aiden Markram is in Heinrich Klaasen and Anrich Nortje is in for Kagiso Rabada, who has a slight ankle injury,” said Proteas captain David Miller, who on Sunday became the first South African man to play 100 T20 internationals.

“Looking back, it’s gone so quickly,” said 33-year-old batsman Miller, closing in on 2,000 runs in the format.

“It’s taken me 13 years to get to reach this milestone, and I’m just really privileged to have represented my country for as long as I have.” — AFP







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Oman’s Islamic banking sector posts double-digit growth in 2021

UPWARD TREND: CBO’s Financial Stability Report 2021 says Islamic banking entities presented about higher profitability in 2021 from the plunge observed in 2020 due to Covid-19

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman, which comprises of two Islamic banks and five Islamic banking windows, has continued its double-digit growth in 2021 despite the adverse economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The apex bank noted in its Financial Stability Report 2021 that the total asset base of Islamic banking sector in Oman reached RO 5.9 billion (versus RO 5.2 billion in 2020) with a growth of 13.6 per cent.

This “corresponds to market share of 15.2 per cent of total banking sector assets, thereby gaining systemic significance as a sector,” the Central Bank stated.

Similarly, as of December 2021, total deposits and total financing of the Islamic banking sector reached RO 4.4 billion and 4.9 billion respectively, with a corresponding share of 17.2 per cent and 17.4 per cent, the report noted.

The asset quality of Islamic banking sector improved during 2021 with non-performing financing (NPF) ratio of 1.8 per cent as of December (2020: 1.9 per cent).

The sector’s capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) also increased to 16.9 per cent as of December 2021 from 15.6 per cent a year earlier, against the regulatory requirement of 12.25 per cent.

Further, Islamic banking entities presented about three times higher profitability in 2021 from the plunge observed in 2020 due to Covid-19.

During 2021, the sector exhibited a pre-tax profit of RO 82 million against RO 27.4 million a year ago, which improved the return-on-assets (ROA) and return-on-equity (ROE) of the sector to 1.00 per cent (2020: 0.53 per cent) and 8.02 per cent (2020: 4.40 per cent) respectively, the report pointed out.

Looking at segment-wise financing of Islamic banking



Total deposits and total financing of the Islamic banking sector reached RO 4.4 billion and 4.9 billion respectively as of Dec 2021

sector, as of December 2021, 55.5 per cent of gross financing went to the corporate sector, followed by 40.5 per cent (2020: 41.5 per cent) to household/retail and 4.1 per cent to small and medium enterprises.

Most of the personal financing comprises of low-risk housing finance (31.1 per cent of total credit).

These contributions were followed by the construction and manufacturing sectors with a 14.3 per cent (2020: 18.2 per cent) and 8.1 per cent (2020: 9.8 per cent) in total gross financing respectively.

“Due to high concentration of house financing in the asset portfolio of Islamic banking entities, diminishing Musharaka and Ijarah remained the most frequently used Shari’ah compliant contracts during 2021, contributing 49.4 per cent (2020: 48.8 per cent) and 21.2 per cent (2020: 23.8 per cent) of the total.

The use of Wakalah Bil Istithmar further increased to 16.5 per cent, from 14.1 per cent in 2020. These three contracts, together with about 10 per cent contribution of Murabahah

contribute more than 97 per cent of the total Islamic bank financing in Oman,” the report noted.

Significantly, to ensure robust and sustained growth of the Islamic banking sector, CBO is finalising its medium-term Islamic Banking Strategy, which is built on five pillars, namely: (1) sustain the momentum 2) enhance the stability 3) expand the outreach 4) nurture the talent; and 5) boost the awareness.

Each pillar of the Strategy is supported by several ‘goals’, with a total of 40 ‘initiatives’ in the Strategy, about half of which are to be undertaken by the CBO and rest by the Islamic banking sector, the Central Bank stated.

“In addition, CBO is progressing on the introduction of a range of Islamic money market instruments to meet the liquidity needs of the sector.”

“These included, among others, providing Shari’ah compliant emergency liquidity support and LOLR facility and offering Wakalah-based remunerative deposit facility to Islamic banking entities,” it added.

New malicious campaign hunts Discord messenger users

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Kaspersky researchers using the internal automated system for monitoring open-source repositories have identified a malicious campaign dubbed LofyLife.

The campaign employs four malicious packages spreading Volt Stealer and Lofy Stealer malware in the open-source npm repository to gather various information from victims, including Discord tokens and credit card information.

The npm repository is a public collection of open-source code packages widely used in front-end web apps, mobile apps, robots and routers, and also to serve



countless needs of the JavaScript community. Its popularity makes the LofyLife campaign even more dangerous, as it could potentially have affected numerous users of the repository.

The identified malicious repositories appeared to be packages used for ordinary tasks such as formatting headlines or certain gaming functions, however they contained highly obfuscated malicious JavaScript and Python code. This made them

harder to analyse when being uploaded to the repository.

The malicious payload consisted of malware written in Python dubbed Volt Stealer, and a JavaScript malware dubbed Lofy Stealer, which possesses numerous features.

Volt Stealer was used to steal Discord tokens from the infected machines along with the victim’s IP address, and upload them via HTTP. The Lofy Stealer, a new development from the attackers, is able to infect Discord client files and monitor the victim’s actions - detecting when a user logs in, changes email or password details, enables or disables multi-factor authentication and adds new payment methods, including full credit card details.

البنك الوطني العماني
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

ملحق

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report

For the quarter ending
30th June 2022

The continued geo-political issue and rising inflation and interest rates especially in US impacted the market sentiments globally. GCC markets reported bearishness after 2 years of positive performance impacted by tightening of liquidity and concerns of global slowdown. Brent Oil continued to remain volatile, ending the quarter with a 3% gain. On the other hand, Chinese economy is coming out of lock downs and may need more stimulus to come back on track.

The meltdown in Q2 also impacted the NBO GCC FUND as it lost most of its gains and ended with 0.17%. Firstly, the US positions impacted negatively in the Jan-Apr period, during which the GCC markets were buoyant. Secondly, the switch from US to GCC in the months of May and June also impacted negatively as the GCC markets came down sharply in these months.

Higher crude prices have been positive for the GCC economies as they could post surpluses and bring down the borrowings. Saudi economy grew 9.6% in Q1, marking the best quarter in 10 years. Dubai economy grew 5.9% aided by post pandemic tourism boom while Qatar grew 2.5% in Q1. Most GCC Central banks raised interest rates in the range of 25 bps to 75 bps, in response to US Fed's 75 bps hike in June.

On a YTD basis, all US indices ended in the red, however most GCC markets have corrected from highs but remain positive on a YTD basis except for MSM. ADX continues to lead the GCC pack with 10.4% rise, followed by Kuwait and Qatar at 5.2% and 4.9% gain respectively. Saudi is up 2.1% while DFM is up 0.9%. Bahrain has gained 2.4% for the year while MSM ended with 0.2% loss.

Going forward, we believe that markets could remain challenging amidst lower liquidity and impact the stretched valuations. We also believe that sectors like banking and real estate could continue to lead. Eventually, improved corporate performance and fundamental strength of the market could lead and see pockets of improved performance. We remain cautiously optimistic for 2nd half of the year 2022.

INTERIM FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	30 June 2022	30 June 2021	31 December 2021
	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	10,278,577	10,613,548	12,001,496
Cash and cash equivalents	789,116	81,106	134,577
Dividend receivable	646	692	306
Total assets	11,068,339	10,695,346	12,136,379

LIABILITIES

Current liabilities

Accruals and other payables	52,194	51,716	247,959
Total liabilities	52,194	51,716	247,959

Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	11,016,145	10,643,630	11,888,420
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Net asset value per unit	0.929	0.830	0.928
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STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	30 June 2022	30 June 2021	31 December 2021
	RO	RO	RO
	(6 months)	(6 months)	(12 months)
INCOME			
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	(93,055)	963,508	2,241,695
Net realised gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	90,669	204,905	408,787
Dividend income	264,598	199,542	264,173
Interest income	942	6,880	6,030
Foreign exchange gain	--	252	--
Other income	78	--	1,079
	263,232	1,375,087	2,921,764

Expenses

Management fees	73,186	54,465	117,592
Fund Management Body fees	24,068	21,000	35,000
Brokerage expenses	19,226	24,122	34,068
Foreign exchange loss	16,544	--	2,169
General and administration	10,350	5,234	17,373
Administrator fees	9,980	7,565	16,173
Custodian fees	4,886	4,760	9,600
Performance fees	--	--	181,462
	158,240	117,146	413,437

Net profit and total comprehensive income for the period / year	104,993	1,257,941	2,508,327
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Net profit per unit	0.008	0.098	0.196
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Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box,751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

Omantel crowned Middle East Best Regional Operator

MUSCAT: Omantel has emerged winner in two categories at the CC-Global Awards 2022, presented by the Carrier Community, which is one of the most active and prestigious forums in the wholesale industry. The awards were recently presented in Berlin.

Omantel won in the Middle East Best Regional Operator and Best Regional Data Centre Operator categories, reiterating its regional wholesale prominence and capabilities that have contributed towards making Oman a strategic point in the global communications domain.

Sohail Qadir, Vice President of Wholesale at Omantel, said, “Omantel has been consistently winning at the CC Global Awards, which is a remarkable achievement. We thank the Carrier Community for recognising Omantel’s efforts to push the boundaries of telecommunications and ICT services in Oman, the MENA region and beyond.”

“Winning these awards proves to us that we are on the right path, as they are an encouragement to each milestone we reach. Omantel’s role as the leader and enabler of digital transformation and a facilitator of fast-paced



global communication networks will only grow in the time to come. These awards keep fuelling our ambitious journey.”

Wida Schmidt, the Co-Founder of the Carrier Community commented “We had a successful awards ceremony with a significantly increased participation this year. This means that the competition was even higher this time and our award judging panel, formed by reputable and neutral industry experts, had a challenging task to

decide on the winners.”

“Omantel emerged as the winner in two categories, which demonstrates its retained leadership in the MENA region and reflects its successful journey of growth and innovation. The company was named the Middle East Best Regional Operator for the third year in a row and recognised for changing the wholesale landscape in the region through global connectivity investments and tech services offerings.”

Teller mobile application to make money transfers easier

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 31

An Oman-based company has launched a new app, Teller, which will assist people in the Sultanate of Oman to transfer funds from their account to any other bank account instantly with simplicity.

Teller app has been developed in cooperation with Bank Dhofar and has the approval of the Central Bank of Oman, according to the company

Hosted in the Sultanate of Oman, the app has been audited and verified as PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards).

“Teller is one of the few Apps that has achieved this comprehensive security certification in Oman. In addition to the trademark by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.”

By using Teller App, any user in Oman can transfer money safely and instantly to any other customer in Oman irrespective of whichever bank the sender and the beneficiary has an account in.

The registration to the App is simple and straightforward.

All that a user needs is his or her debit card and to transfer money to someone all what is needed is their debit card number. The receiver does not need to have



Ahmed al Rahbi, CEO, Teller Fintech States

Teller App and that is part of the simplicity. Above all the money gets credited directly into the receiver’s bank account instantly.

Teller App is also a handy App in case you have multiple cards belonging to different banks. You can register multiple bankcards in the App and thus Teller becomes your single App to process transfers from all your accounts irrespective of whichever bank it belongs to. So, no more hassle of switching to a particular bank’s App to transact with the card of that bank and then to another bank’s app for a different card.

Another Innovative feature is the ability to quickly pay to anyone if you are to make instant payments to your service

providers, helpers, etc, there is no need to spend time in registering the beneficiary.

Use the Teller App “Quick pay” option and all you need is beneficiary card number and money can be transferred instantly with no waiting time. In addition, the charges in Teller App is competitive and cheaper when transferring certain values.

Ahmed al Rahbi, CEO (pictured) of Teller Fintech States, said, “We encourage everyone in Oman to download the Teller App from Google Play or the App store and also to check out our social media channels to know the latest happenings and more innovative solutions that we will be bringing to the market.”

Impact of high oil prices on petrochemical and chemical sector



APARAJITH
BALAN

Global Practice Leader,
Chemicals & Materials,
Frost & Sullivan



DIYA MENON
Consulting Manager,
Chemicals & Materials,
Frost & Sullivan

About two years ago, oil prices fell below zero for the first time in history. The crash of oil prices was something that the industry had never predicted or witnessed before. Through the resilience of governments all over the world and initiatives by oil companies, economies began to recover as demand across sectors witnessed strong improvement.

However, with changing geopolitical scenarios, oil prices increased above \$110 per barrel in March 2022. From a positive outlook predicted at the beginning of the year, concerns regarding inflation and overall global economic slowdown have started to grow. In the US, more than 1.3 million bpd of refinery capacity has been shut down since 2019 due to the impact of Covid-19 on demand, damages due to hurricanes, stricter regulations, and higher operating costs, among others.

With the current sanctions, fear of shortage is further impacting the volatility of crude oil prices. But how have these changes impacted the chemicals segment?

Substantial changes in oil prices have always resulted in significant implications for the petrochemicals and chemicals sector.

The world underestimates its dependence on chemicals and, therefore, on oil.

For example, apart from the more obvious transportation fuels, the food that we eat is grown using fertilisers, a chemical segment that heavily depends on coke formed from the refining of oil to produce products such as ammonia.

Plastic packaging that is extensively used across sectors such as food and beverage and consumer products is also derived majorly from crude oil, and paints require various raw materials that



are petroleum based.

Overall, the increasing price of oil results in a cascading effect on the production cost of chemicals and petrochemicals.

With the rise in oil prices, there has been a significant increase in inflation. Inflation leads to increased prices for products that are used by consumers, which results in reduced spending and therefore slowing demand.

However, the impact on each product varies depending on the demand-supply dynamics for end sectors where these chemicals are used.

About 40 per cent of polypropylene is used in the production of white goods and automotive components, both of which will witness sluggish growth with higher inflation. Polyethylene, on the other hand, is majorly used for packaging film, food and beverage packaging and grocery bags, among others, which are less impacted.

With rising inflation, investment in real estate has also slowed down, thus impacting products such as paints and plastics used in the

construction industry.

Along with rising oil prices, China particularly has witnessed the dual impact of “common prosperity” policies aimed at the real estate sector to reduce the wealth gap between different regions within the country.

China’s real estate sector has been in decline, with a threat of a crisis since 2021, when China Evergrande Group, one of the largest real estate companies, officially declared to default on its debt. With the growth of the real estate and construction sectors in question, demand for chemicals related to the industry, such as polymers, would be at risk. This would be further accelerated by the implementation of China’s “Zero Covid Policy,” which brings about uncertainty regarding strict lockdowns, quarantines and travel restrictions, which would further weaken demand.

While the decline in consumer confidence has impacted demand, it represents just one variable in the equation. The rise in prices of end products has not been proportional to the increase in

production costs for chemical companies.

In March 2022, Bloomberg reported that while ethylene was being sold for \$1,200 per MT during the first week, the cost of production with naphtha as the source was \$1,200-1,300 per MT.

Europe, another region that is highly dependent on naphtha (of which ~50 per cent is sourced from Russia), would witness major production disruptions. About 10 per cent-13 per cent of the total European capacity for ethylene and 10 per cent-12 per cent of total European propylene capacity depend on refineries located along the Druzhba pipeline, which would be impacted by increasing sanctions.

This would result in downward pressure on margins for producers in the region. Germany, the Netherlands and Austria plan to revert to coal to hedge against the possibility of a reduction of imports of natural gas from Russia.

Another significant impact of high oil prices on the chemical industry is the rise in transportation

and freight costs that were already substantially higher in 2022 than pre-Covid levels.

This was due to various factors, including the lockdown in Shanghai, rising crude prices, shortage of container ships in Asia and shortage of drivers in Europe, among others. In February 2022, it was estimated that buyers of diesel in Europe were spending ~40 per cent more on fuel compared to December 2020.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the increase in shipping costs is a vital driver of inflation. Its impact is much more long term, generally peaking after one year and lasting up to 18 months. With the current state of affairs globally, this would increase the complexity of economic recovery.

With the fear of global recession looming and lockdowns in China, oil prices dropped below the \$100 per barrel mark in the first week of July 2022. However, there is increasing scepticism regarding what the future might hold. Tightening sanctions, Chinese demand, inflation, supply risks, and the probability of hurricanes in the US would be paramount in influencing crude oil prices and global demand for chemicals across end sectors over the next few months.

Petrochemical margins would differ regionally based on the impact of these factors combined with the dominant source of raw material, which would dictate the price that can be passed on to the consumer.

In such an uncertain and constantly evolving environment, it is critical for producers to analyse various possible outcomes and plan for disruptions to target the right markets and adapt to changing trade dynamics that may arise.

(Courtesy: GPCA)

Germany’s skilled trades sector struggling with high costs, shortages

ANDREAS HOENIG

Germany’s skilled trades sector is struggling amid soaring prices, shortages of materials and inflation, according to Hans Peter Wollseifer, the president of an industry association that spans civil engineering to the car business.

“Companies and businesses in the skilled trades are greatly unsettled by the situation as a whole, especially by the shortage of materials and exorbitant price increases, by dramatic energy price increases and inflation,” he said, calling on the government to provide support.

Two months ago, almost half of the businesses in the sector reported that their energy costs had at least doubled, he said, adding that costs have increased even more since then.

It is difficult for those in the sector to calculate their costs, he said, noting that the amounts companies were facing could not simply be passed on directly to customers, particularly in the public sector.

That means companies are making losses on the orders they fill, he said, creating a situation that is not sustainable in the longer term.

Orders for civil engineering companies are being delayed or postponed due to the lack of supplies of materials such as steel and bitumen.

“We have big problems in the motor trade because spare parts are not available. All this is bringing many businesses to the brink of survival,” he said.

The government needs to do everything possible to support the companies affected and enable them to survive this difficult time, he said. “We do not expect the state to be able to cushion all risks. It cannot dampen all price developments with public money,” he said.

However, help is needed for small and medium-sized businesses, particularly with soaring energy costs. Prices for wood, plastics and insulation materials are all high, Wollseifer said, noting companies could not handle this in the long term.

Meanwhile, German Finance Minister Christian Lindner has called for a halt to electricity production using gas, amid fears that the country will run out, as Moscow reduces supplies. — dpa

We do not expect the state to be able to cushion all risks. It cannot dampen all price developments with public money

HANS PETER WOLLSEIFER
President of an industry association



RECESSION FEARS

Clothing hangs on displays in a store in Arlington, Virginia. The US economy contracted for a second straight quarter between April and June, government data showed last week, adding fuel to recession fears in a headache for President Joe Biden ahead of midterm elections. — AFP

The true meaning of cybersecurity



MARTIN IGNACIO DÍAZ VELÁSQUEZ

The writer is an ambassador for One Young World, Co-Founder and CEO of the Knowmad Institut

When we talk about cybersecurity, we usually think of commercial antivirus software, ransomware attacks on large corporations, or leaks of politically scandalous emails.

But little is said about public security in the digital realm, and that is a big problem when we increasingly depend on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the Internet of Things to carry out our ordinary daily activities.

Moreover, these technologies’ rapid development has led to a hybridisation of crime.

Many illicit activities now straddle the physical and virtual worlds, which has introduced new trade-offs and calls for a reconsideration of longstanding law-enforcement strategies.

Consider illegal recreational substances. Many people now seek to acquire these over the internet, because buying online is generally seen as safer than meeting a stranger in a dark alley. But online channels tend to put people into direct contact with the organised crime groups that control most of the distribution of illicit substances.

When people hand over money to these groups, they are unwittingly helping to fund the global networks that also finance terrorism and traffic in arms, people, and human organs and tissues.

AS MORE ACTIVITIES MOVE ONLINE, THE UNDERSTANDING OF CYBERSECURITY MUST EVOLVE TO STAY AHEAD OF EMERGING THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND SECURITY. THE DIGITAL MARKET FOR ILLEGAL RECREATIONAL SUBSTANCES SHOWS WHY LONGSTANDING LAW-ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES WILL NEED TO BE RECONSIDERED

It is well known that the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated many forms of digital innovation and adaptability, and online drug purchases are no exception. Amphetamine-type stimulants and new psychoactive substances are increasingly available on the darknet, the open web, crypto markets, and even social media.

There are both risks and potential benefits associated with these new distribution channels. On a positive note, analysing digital data flows could allow for faster detection of novel psychoactive substances that pose a threat to public health. And, of course, transacting on crypto markets or through similar digital channels can protect

individual users from physical violence, theft, sexual exploitation, and abduction.

Moreover, recent studies show that people who use drugs and acquire substances through ICTs are more likely to adopt harm-reduction practices and promote responsible use, generally because they are operating from the privacy of their homes or other safe settings.

Governments and law-enforcement authorities should keep these findings in mind as they seek to create safe public spaces online. While the state alone is responsible for defining what counts as a crime, policing criminal activity is not its sole purpose; it also must ensure public health and uphold fundamental rights such as privacy. And in the case of drugs, specifically, it will need to be more thoughtful about who is really a criminal, and who is a victim.

Accordingly, many law-enforcement strategies should be reconsidered, and resources should be redirected toward strengthening the competencies of nascent cybercrime units. Rather than pursuing recreational substance users and markets, investigative efforts should focus primarily on ICT-mediated criminal activities and operations that pose a significant threat to the general public.

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Cyprus tourism rebounds despite sanctions-hit Russia plunge



CHLOE EMMANOULIDIS

The writer is a freelance journalist working for AFP based in Nicosia

Beside sparkling Mediterranean waters at the Cypriot resort town of Ayia Napa, the bars are bouncing with foam dance parties as tourist numbers rebound following two tough years of pandemic.

But one key nationality is effectively missing: Russian visitors, as the once lucrative market has been hit by European Union sanctions imposed after Moscow attacked Ukraine.

“This year, we expected 800,000 Russian tourists,” said Haris Loizides, head of the Cyprus Hotel Association.

The Russian market “was wiped out from one day to the next,” said Christos Angelides, head of the Pancyprian Association of Hotel Managers. “Nobody was prepared for this huge change.”

The key tourism sector, which had contributed \$2.72 billion in 2019, 15 per cent of GDP, is still counting the cost of the disastrous years of Covid travel chaos.

In 2019, before the start of the

Covid-19 pandemic, a fifth of tourists were Russian — 782,000 out of 3.9 million — making it the holiday island’s second largest market after Britain.

Last year, despite tough Covid travel restrictions, that share rose to more than 25 per cent, with arrivals from Russia totalling nearly 520,000 out of 1.93 million.

Operators had hoped this summer would see Russian numbers return to pre-pandemic levels.

Some 18,000 Russians are resident in Cyprus, many in the seaside town of Limassol — dubbed by some “Moscow on the Med.”

But, with EU sanctions on Russia continuing and with no let-up in the bloodshed on Ukraine’s battlefields, just 17,000 Russian tourists came to Cyprus between January and June.

“Our hotel is doing well, but others — who had 100 per cent Russian clientele — are not,” said Angelides, who is also manager of

TOURIST ARRIVALS IN CYPRUS ARE BOUNCING BACK, THANKS TO STRONG DEMAND IN OTHER KEY MARKETS FOLLOWING THE LIFTING OF CORONAVIRUS RESTRICTIONS

the Napa Mermaid Hotel.

Nicosia and Moscow have close political and cultural ties, but when Russia sent troops into Ukraine, the Cypriot parliament unanimously passed a resolution condemning the attack.

Cyprus, the EU’s most easterly member, backed the bloc’s actions on Moscow, including a flight ban and sanctions barring some Russian banks from the SWIFT financial system.

The tourism ministry says fewer Russian visitors could mean some \$600 million in potential lost

earnings.

Overall, tourist arrivals in Cyprus are bouncing back, thanks to strong demand in other key markets following the lifting of coronavirus restrictions.

From January to June, Cyprus recorded 1.2 million visitors, nearly five times the level last year, and the white sand beaches at Ayia Napa are crowded with sun-seekers and party-goers.

But that is still 25 per cent down on the same period of 2019, when 1.63 million tourists came to Cyprus.

“We have somewhat limited the damage, but it is impossible to replace this huge number of customers,” Angelides added.

In the first half of this year, British tourists made up nearly two-fifths of visitors, followed by Israelis, making up seven per cent of visitors, then Poland, Germany and Greece.

“There have been many attempts by several sectors to encourage

tourists from other markets, such as the German, Polish, Italian and French markets,” said Charis Papacharalambous, spokesman of the Association of Cyprus Travel Agents (ACTA).

But it was still “very difficult to fill the big gap” left by Russian tourists, he added, with industry experts fearing the impact may still worsen, since many Russians previously preferred to visit later in the year.

For Loizides, from the island’s Hotel Association, the war in Ukraine has also provided another problem. Surging global costs of fuel sparked by the conflict have driven electricity prices higher.

With tourists turning air conditioning on full blast to counter the sweltering heat of Cyprus, hotels are struggling with “astronomical bills”, Loizides said.

“The EU must remedy this situation and help companies, especially at a time when inflation is raging,” he added. — AFP

Classifieds

Omani cinematic make-up artist aims to break international film scene

In the movie world, cinematic make-up artists are highly valued for their ability to help bring characters to life and with the use of masks, prosthetics or other special effects and tools of their trade, they make the movie experience believable. Haifa al Ajmi is one of the pioneering film make-up artists in Oman that hopes she'll get an opportunity to showcase her skills internationally... **P20**

US Authors Dominate Booker Prize Nominees

ELIZABETH STROUT, Karen Joy Fowler and Leila Mottley are among six American authors nominated for this year's Booker Prize, which announced its nominees in a news release on Tuesday.

Strout, the highest-profile author on the 13-strong list, is nominated for "Oh William!" a novel about a grief-stricken woman who helps her ex-husband investigate his family past; Fowler, for "Booth," a fictional family portrait of the clan of Abraham Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth; and Mottley, for "Nightcrawling," a bestseller about a desperate Black teenager in California who ends up in a sex-trafficking ring.

The other Americans nominated are Hernan Diaz for "Trust," Selby

Wynn Schwartz for "After Sappho," and Percival Everett for "The Trees."

The Booker Prize, one of the world's most prestigious literary awards, is given each year to the author of a novel written in English and published in Britain or Ireland. It is well known for capping literary careers and making new stars, with recent winners including Margaret Atwood, Bernardine Evaristo and Douglas Stuart.

Before 2014, the prize was only open to authors from Britain, Ireland, the Commonwealth and Zimbabwe, but since that year, when it expanded to include authors of any nationality, Britain's literary establishment has regularly agonised over the dominance of American authors on the Booker list.



Tuesday's announcement is likely to reinvigorate those concerns, although the nominees also include three British and two Irish authors, as well as NoViolet Bulawayo, from Zimbabwe, and Shehan Karunatilaka, of Sri Lanka.

The British writers on the list include Alan Garner, 87, who the Booker says is its oldest-ever nominee, and who is well known in Britain as a pioneering author of children's fantasy novels in the 1960s and 1970s.

and the cancer that is killing her.

Neil MacGregor, the former director of the British Museum and the chair of this year's judges, highlighted that variety in a news release announcing the nominees, saying the books included "story, fable and parable, fantasy, meditation and thriller." Nevertheless, he said, two main themes were apparent: how "individual lives are shaped and determined by long historical processes," and "the elusive nature of truth."

The nominated novels are wildly diverse in subject matter. Bulawayo is nominated for "Glory," an animal fable that follows the fall of a dictatorship; M a d d i e Mortimer is nominated for "Maps of our Spectacular Bodies," a novel whose narrators include both a dying mother

"The extent to which we can trust the word, spoken or written, is in many of these books the real subject," MacGregor said.

The Booker judges, who also include critic Shahidha Bari and novelist Alain Mabanckou, will now reread all the nominated books before whittling the selection to a six-title shortlist, scheduled to be announced on September 6. The winning novel, whose author will receive a prize of 50,000 pounds, or about \$60,000, will be announced on October 17 at a ceremony in London.

THE FULL LONGLIST IS:

- NoViolet Bulawayo, "Glory"
- Hernan Diaz, "Trust"
- Percival Everett, "The Trees"
- Karen Joy Fowler, "Booth"
- Alan Garner, "Treachle Walker"
- Shehan Karunatilaka, "The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida"
- Claire Keegan, "Small Things Like These"
- Graeme Macrae Burnet, "Case Study"
- Audrey Magee, "The Colony"
- Maddie Mortimer, "Maps of our Spectacular Bodies"
- Leila Mottley, "Nightcrawling"
- Selby Wynn Schwartz, "After Sappho"
- Elizabeth Strout, "Oh William!" — NYT

READ

TANQUERAY

BY STEPHANIE JOHNSON AND BRANDON STANTON

A profile of a performer who was a well-known burlesque dancer in New York City.



THE AFFAIR AT SALZBURG

German actress Lena Schwarz and Dutch actress Yodit Tariqwa (R) during a dress rehearsal of the play "Reigen" (The Round Dance, La Ronde) after Arthur Schnitzler during the Salzburg Culture Festival (Salzburger Festspiele) in Salzburg, Austria. — AFP



A MEXICAN CELEBRATION

A member of a cultural group of pre-Hispanic identity participates in the celebration of the 697th anniversary of the founding of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire or Mexicas, at Zocalo square in Mexico City. — AFP





Drought threatens Spain's 'green gold' harvest

IN THE SCORCHING heat, Felipe Elvira inspects the branches of his olive trees, planted as far as the eye can see on a dusty hillside in southern Spain.

"There are no olives on these. Everything is dry," the 68-year-old said. He and his son own a 100-hectare (250-acre) olive farm in the southern province of Jaen in sun-drenched Andalusia, a region which produces the bulk of the country's olive oil.

But a severe drought gripping much of Spain threatens to shrivel their harvest this year.

"We are used to a lack of water, but not to this point," said Elvira.

The region used to get 800 litres (210 gallons) of rainfall per square metre, but is set to get around half that amount this year, he said.

"Every year it's worse," Elvira said.

Global warming is hitting Spain harder than most European nations.

The country has suffered three intense heatwaves since May, damaging crops already grappling with an unusually dry winter.

"Olive trees are very resistant to water scarcity," said Juan Carlos Hervas, an expert with the COAG farmers' union.

But when droughts become extreme, the trees "activate mechanisms to protect themselves. They don't die but no longer produce anything," he added.

ABSOLUTELY DRAMATIC

Hervas predicts the olive harvest from unirrigated land will come in at less than 20 per cent of the average of the last five years.

The harvest from irrigated land

will be just 50 to 60 per cent of this average, he said.

But water reserves are dwindling.

The Guadalquivir river, which provides Andalusia with a large

up," said Jimenez.

Farmers have also noticed changes in recent years.

"Not only does it rain less, but when it falls, it does so torrentially. The water flows without penetrat-

At stake is a key export: Spain supplies nearly half of the world's olive oil. Its exports of this "green gold" are worth some 3.6 billion euros (\$3.7 billion) per year.

OLIVE DEPENDENCE

Olive oil has been an essential part of the Mediterranean diet for thousands of years and olive trees cover many hillsides in southern Spain, which are often unsuitable for other crops.

"Many villages here depend entirely on olive trees. Without olives, there is no more revenue," said Hervas.

Seven out of 10 hectares of olive farmland in Spain are not irrigated, according to the COAG farmers' union.

With the rise in temperatures, 80 per cent of Andalusia's unirrigated olive tree plantations may no longer be suitable to grow olives, or at least some varieties of the crop, it added.

The quality could also decline because farmers will have to pick the fruit early, before it is fully mature, the union said in a recent report.

Some farmers may be tempted to start irrigating their plots, but this would deplete stretched reservoirs even further.

Agriculture already consumes up to four-fifths of Spain's water resources, said Jimenez.

"Not all land can be irrigated," she said.

Back at his farm, Elvira is all too aware of the problem.

"We can't exhaust resources, everyone needs water. Honestly, I don't know how we are going to manage," he said. — AFP



part of its water, is in "an absolutely dramatic situation" due to the lack of rain, said Rosario Jimenez, a hydrology professor at the University of Jaen.

Reservoirs fed by the river are at just 30 per cent of their capacity, according to Spain's ecological transition ministry.

"Some are even at 10 per cent capacity — that is practically dried

ing the earth," said Hervas.

Parts of Portugal and Spain are the driest they have been in a thousand years due to an atmospheric high-pressure system driven by climate change, according to a study published this month in the journal Nature Geoscience.

The phenomenon is set to increase, jeopardising crops like olives and grapes.

ENTERTAINMENT

Classical Music Has a Hazy Future in Lincoln Center's Summers



THE DAY HAD been hot and muggy. But a mild breeze was blowing at Lincoln Center by the time the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra took the stage in Damrosch Park on Tuesday evening.

The pianist Conrad Tao played an elegantly unruffled Mozart concerto and a day-dreamy "Rhapsody in Blue." Apart from a sprinkling of small performances last summer, this orchestra hadn't been assembled since 2019, but it sounded comfortable and spirited.

In just three years, the group has become an anachronism. The festival whose name it bears — Lincoln

carefully built and expensive group whose music director, Louis Langrée, has been on its podium since 2002. Though Thake told the orchestra on Friday that it would be a part of the summer next year, things get hazier beyond that. And while her vision for the season is still developing, this first iteration seems to have intentionally moved away from swaths of music and performance that have been central to the centre's identity for decades.

Which is not to say that Lincoln Center's summers have been just one thing. As Joseph W Polisi, a longtime president of the Juilliard



Center's premier summertime event before the pandemic — is no more. The centre's summer, once a messy assortment of competing series and festivals, has finally been streamlined under a single label: "Summer for the City."

Planned by Lincoln Center's president, Henry Timms, and its artistic chief since last year, Shanta Thake, Summer for the City has hoisted a 10-foot disco ball over the plaza fountain and includes outdoor film screenings, spoken word, social dance, comedy shows and an ASL version of "Sweeney Todd."

Five of New York's dance companies will come together next month for a few days of performances. And starting on Friday, the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra moves inside to Alice Tully Hall for five programmes: 10 concerts over two weeks.

But despite that packed little orchestral season, other musical experiences that once appeared under the Mostly Mozart rubric have vanished along with the name — including guest ensembles, intimate recitals, and the new music that flows out of the classical tradition and is embodied by the International Contemporary Ensemble, long in residence at the festival but absent this year.

Up in the air is the ultimate fate of the Mostly Mozart orchestra, a high-quality,

School, describes in "Beacon to the World: A History of Lincoln Center," recently published by Yale University Press, the initial thought was that the center's own programming would happen primarily in the summertime, so as not to compete in fall and spring with the constituent organisations for which it serves as a landlord, like the Metropolitan Opera and New York Philharmonic.

As the campus was being conceived, summer was imagined to be a good time for folk-ish operas and musicals, like "Oklahoma!" or Copland's "The Tender Land," or perhaps a film festival; it's in the DNA for the centre's summer offerings to be ambitious but accessible, populist but serious.

Though Summer for the City is taking place largely outdoors, the novelty in those early years was being inside: Midsummer Serenades — A Mozart Festival, which started in 1966 and was renamed Mostly Mozart six years later, was the first festival in New York to take place in an air-conditioned hall.

The campus' Community/Street Theater Festival of the early 1970s morphed, a few years later, into Lincoln Center Out of Doors, a free, outdoor, eclectic mélange: Ballet Hispánico and bluegrass, string quartets and a doo-wop opera, and eventually a helping of social dance as Midsummer Night's Swing.



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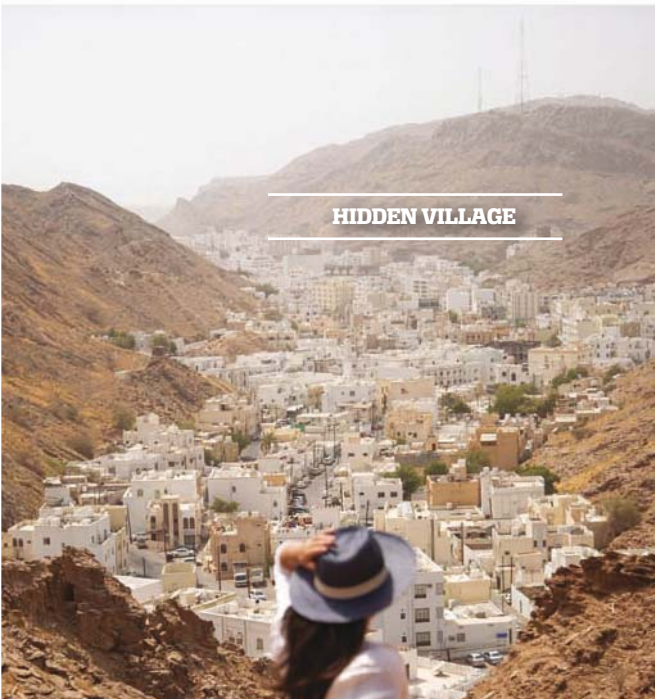
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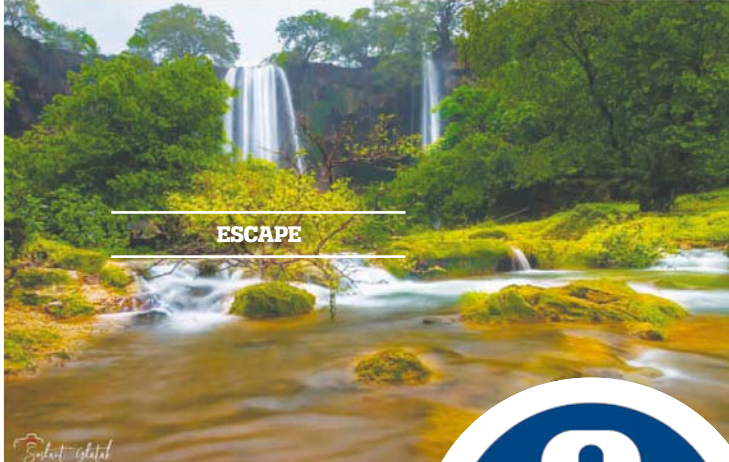
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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Miners unearth pink diamond believed to be largest seen in 300 years



MINERS IN ANGOLA have unearthed a rare pure pink diamond that is believed to be the largest found in 300 years, the Australian site operator announced on Wednesday.

A 170 carat pink diamond — dubbed The Lulo Rose — was discovered at Lulo mine in the country's diamond-rich northeast and is among the largest pink diamonds ever found, the Lucapa Diamond Company said in a statement to investors.



The "historic" find of the Type IIa diamond, one of the rarest and purest forms of natural stones, was welcomed by the Angolan government, which is also a partner in the mine.

"This record and spectacular pink diamond recovered from Lulo continues to showcase Angola as an important player on the world stage," Angola's Mineral Resources Minister Diamantino Azevedo said.

The diamond will be sold at international tender, likely at a dazzling price.

Although The Lulo Rose would have to be cut and polished to realise its true value, in a process that can see a stone lose 50 per cent of its weight, similar pink diamonds have sold for record-breaking prices.

The 59.6 carat Pink Star was sold at a Hong Kong auction in 2017 for 71.2 million US dollars. It remains the most expensive diamond ever sold. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

Go North for Active Days and Appetising Nights



YOU CAN GET FROM Seattle to Bellingham, Washington, by driving 90 miles straight up the interstate, but you shouldn't. The best route to this small city tucked where the mighty Cascade mountain range meets the sea can be more scenic and pleasurable. Veer off Interstate 5 about 15 miles south of Bellingham to make the final approach via Chuckanut Drive, one of the state's more than 20 official Scenic Byways.

The interstate highway exit for Chuckanut, first drops you into the town of Bow. It's part of Bow-Edison, which is split between two tiny commercial districts, but for a baked-goods-lover like me, it's imperative to stop by both. In Bow, the Farm To Market bakery, across from a vintage, light-blue cinder block post office, offers triple chocolate pecan brownies, polenta cakes and other delights to accompany freshly brewed coffee on cheerfully painted tables in the bakery's rhododendron garden. Two and a half miles down rural Bow Hill Road West, the Bread Farm in Edison offers sweets and fresh bread at the walk-up bakery window. A handful of galleries and shops invite visitors to linger in town.

Returning to Chuckanut Drive, the sea-level Skagit Valley farmlands lie before you with views to the west of the San Juan Islands before the road starts rising. More than 10 curvy miles hug the cliffs of the Chuckanut Mountains, flashing views of the Salish Sea bays and islands below as you wind your way through the towering evergreen forest. The route was used during Prohibition by bootleggers coming in from Canada.

Chuckanut ends north in the historic Fairhaven section of Bellingham, with its eclectic shops, restaurants, and Victorian-era architecture. But if it's Saturday, the priority should be to make it to the lively Farmers Market before it closes at 2 pm. More than 100 vendors display a terrific variety of food and wares,



including kimchi, honey and cheeses, grow-at-home mushroom kits, houseplants, artisan crafts and handmade clothing. The stalls spill over the official market footprint onto and around the sidewalk nearby. Samples of beef jerky from Carnal, a local restaurant, enticed me to buy both regular and spicy versions to take home.

EXPLORE BY LAND AND SEA

Bellingham has increasingly become a magnet for people looking to escape Seattle's rapid development and cost. But the compact coastal city also is an ideal place for a weekend visit. On a recent trip there, I easily enjoyed two full days with just a one-night hotel stay.

Popular with outdoor enthusiasts, Bellingham has gorgeous walking, hiking and biking trails. A few minutes from the town centre, Whatcom Falls Park offers easy hiking on its 4-mile trail network. Passing the salmon hatchery and playground, a WPA-era stone bridge and splashing waterfall await. The sweet scent of Douglas fir groves, moss-covered rocks and a profusion of sword ferns contribute to an excellent session of

"forest bathing."

For more structured recreational activities, nearby Cornwall Memorial Park is home to a Disc Golf course, horseshoe pits and pickleball courts along with a playground and spray park. If you don't have your own equipment, it's still fun to watch the players there, or just explore walking trails through soaring woodlands.

Another terrific place to meander is Western Washington University. The hilltop campus, with expansive views of Bellingham Bay, was founded in 1893 and is now home to 15,000 students. It also hosts 70 species of trees and a world-class outdoor sculpture collection. You can't miss the bright red, 27-foot-tall steel creation, by Mark di Suvero, or giant tipped cube by Isamu Noguchi, but there are many other works by artists, including Richard Serra and Beverly Pepper. Washington state takes its trees seriously and the university offers online tree tours so you can learn about the campus flora, including the umbrella tree with its 20-inch leaves. One of the largest Giant Sequoias in the state stands there at 120 feet.

Getting on the water in Bellingham is easy, too. The Community Boating Center near the Fairhaven district rents small craft and runs guided kayaking tours. Looking for bioluminescent sea creatures highlights the evening excursions. For a longer aquatic adventure, five- to six-hour whale-watching trips run from the adjacent Bellingham Cruise terminal, where ferries also embark for destinations like Juneau and Sitka in southeast Alaska. Ferry-riders will have to have patience though — the first stop, Ketchikan, is a 36-hour ride.

— NYT

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Do Eye Creams Actually Work for Wrinkles?



Q: DOES EYE CREAM REALLY PREVENT WRINKLES?

A: Whether it's from aging, sun exposure, smoking or repetitive squinting, smiling, laughing or frowning, nobody is immune to the skin creases and fine lines that come with age. And the area around the eyes is particularly susceptible to such changes. "The skin under and around the eyes is delicate and thinner," said Dr Sara Perkins, an assistant professor of dermatology at the Yale University School of Medicine. "It is a place where wrinkling and lines can show up more prominently than other areas of the skin."

While some people don't care much about their eye wrinkles, others may want to slow down that aging process and keep their skin looking younger. This may lead them to wonder: Are those tiny, expensive jars of eye cream worth it? Here's what the experts say.

Q: CAN EYE CREAM OR OTHER FACIAL SKIN CARE PRODUCTS HELP WITH WRINKLES?

A: Perkins and Dr Zakia Rahman, a clinical professor of dermatology at Stanford University, said there is evidence that eye creams — and even regular facial moisturisers — can help prevent and repair wrinkles. But there's one big caveat: They must contain some key active ingredients: retinols (or prescription retinoids) or vitamin C.

"When we're talking about the efficacy of eye creams, it's not fair to lump all eye creams together," Perkins said. "Because some of them may just be glorified moisturisers without any biologically active ingredients in them."

Retinols and prescription retinoids are closely related chemical compounds derived from vitamin A. Retinoids are typically prescription strength, while retinols are generally found in over-the-counter products. These substances can increase cell turnover, prevent collagen breakdown, produce new collagen and create more hyaluronic acid (a substance the body produces naturally that helps keep the skin hydrated). Experts say there is good evidence that these compounds can help prevent and improve wrinkling. "Every dermatologist I know, myself included, uses these as part of their skin care regimen," Rahman said.

The two experts noted that both retinols and retinoids — but particularly retinoids, which are more potent — can cause skin irritation, though that should diminish over time. If you're buying an over-the-counter

product with retinol, Perkins recommended looking for one with at least 0.25% to 1% retinol. Perkins also cautioned that these products can worsen sunburns, so she recommended applying them at night and wearing sunscreen during the day. (She also mentioned that they are made less effective when exposed to sunlight.) And both experts emphasised that if you're pregnant, you should not use products with retinol or retinoid.

There's also moderate evidence that topical vitamin C helps to inhibit and repair wrinkles. "It's a potent antioxidant," Rahman said, which means vitamin C neutralises harmful molecules called free radicals that can damage the skin. It also helps with collagen production, she said. However, Perkins noted that while there is "compelling evidence" that topical vitamin C helps with wrinkles, the data is more robust for retinols and retinoids. If you're choosing between the two, both experts recommended using a retinol or retinoid rather than a topical vitamin C. And as with retinols and retinoids, there is a potential that vitamin C could cause skin irritation.

Q: ARE EYE CREAMS SUPERIOR TO REGULAR FACIAL MOISTURISERS FOR WRINKLE PREVENTION OR REPAIR?

A: "Eye cream as a category is one of my biggest pet peeves," Perkins said, adding that the ingredients in eye creams are generally the same as those found in facial moisturisers.

Rahman agreed. Eye creams may be a bit thicker or have a lower strength of active ingredients compared with other facial skin care products, since they're tailored for the sensitive eyelid skin. But overall, "they tend to cost much more per ounce than regular moisturisers used for the face, and they often don't have ingredients that are much different," Rahman said. Personally, she uses regular facial moisturiser for the skin around her eyes.

Q: SO IS EYE CREAM WORTH IT?

A: Unless you prefer to use an eye cream, a regular facial moisturiser that contains the key active ingredients mentioned above should work the same on wrinkles. If you buy an eye cream with those ingredients, you're probably just paying more money for less product that has similar benefits.

But with any of these skin care products, you also shouldn't expect a miracle, and the results can take time. The effects "take months, not days," Rahman said. As for the best eye wrinkle prevention method? Both experts unequivocally agreed: Sun protection is key.

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Local Scene

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Omani cinematic make-up artist aims to break international film scene

By Qusai al Abri

Artists usually can produce fascinating works and film make-up artists take their art to another level by totally transforming a person into something else just by using their brushes, some after-effects and a whole lot of colour and imagination.

In the movie world, these make-up artists are highly valued for their ability to bring characters to life and with the use of masks, prosthetics or other special effects and tools of their trade, they make the movie experience believable.

For Haifa al Ajmi, it wasn't always smooth to get herself engaged in such a modern field of art, especially in Oman. Haifa faced many challenges in a community that doesn't consider her talent something to fight for. It took her a long time to convince people that arts come in different forms and while she's usually armed with make-up and brushes, it is art all the same.

Despite the challenges, Haifa held on to her dream believing that there would come a time when people would understand what she does and find her own niche in an industry that is yet to embrace change. Fast forward six years later, Haifa is now considered one of the most popular film make-up artists in

Oman and has become a role model to others. On top of what she does, she's also able to balance it with becoming a successful interior designer.

Haifa shared that loving what you do is half of the battle that will lead you to success and one should have the state of mind to understand what a scene is calling for.

"As make-up artists, our role is to make actors look believable. If a film is about zombies, the moviegoers should be able to see horrifying dead zombies and not an army of extras wearing pounds of make-up and prosthetics," she explained.

"Working as a film make-up artist or special effects make-up artist isn't simple. It requires years of training and unwavering dedication to work regularly and successfully," Haifa said.

Touching on the challenges she faced, Haifa said there was a silver lining in her experience.

"Luckily, in Oman, most of the make-up artists are women. When the community began to accept this art, it wasn't an issue for me to show myself among the prominent artists in the field. Supported by my family, which is my only army in life, I could only think forward to success. I wasn't allowed to look behind, because my father, my biggest supporter, was always standing in the front of my career," she shared.

"Since my childhood, I

could remember my father pushing me forward to continue and move ahead. He was the first fan, the first teacher and the first believer in my abilities," she noted.

Haifa's long-term goal is to make her mark in the international film-making industry. She also hopes that what she does will spread in Oman and will gain greater acceptance.

To make this possible, Haifa is working towards becoming a certified make-up trainer in Oman and looks forward to the day that she can conduct practical workshops that would show students what it is like working in cinematic make-up.

Haifa recently participated in the 968 Gamez, a unique comic, games and pop-up event for the youth, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Haifa demonstrated her talent in cinematic make-up through this event. She said she hoped she'd be able to participate in international gatherings as well.

Haifa remains positive that given the opportunity, she feels that international communities will embrace the speciality she does.

"I reached out to a well-known expert in the field and he showed some interest in my works describing me as a "hidden talent" that will grow one day," she shared. This has inspired her to better her craft.

