

Oman Sustainability Week will kick off on March 14

Oman Sustainability Week will kick off on March 14 under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. The event will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC). **DETAILS ON P15**



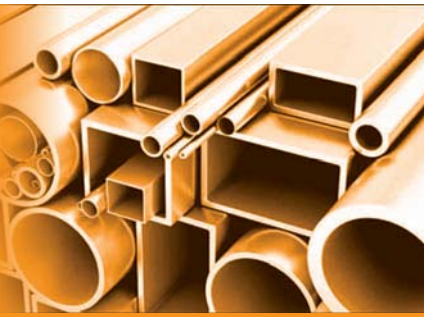
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INDIAN WOMEN UPBEAT FOR WORLD CUP



P13

BRIGHT PROSPECTS FOR STAINLESS STEEL, COPPER PROJECTS



P19

'DUNE', 'LICORICE PIZZA' AND 'WEST SIDE STORY' TOP HOLLYWOOD GUILD NOMS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO CHINESE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Jinping. His Majesty also wished the people of China further progress and prosperity and the historic relations between the two countries further development and growth. — ONA

EMPTY QUARTER CHECKPOINT TO BOOST TRADE

Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, and Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud al Saud, Minister of Interior in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Monday went on tour of the Empty Quarter border checkpoint, which connects the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. During their tour, a commemorative plaque was unveiled. The two ministers inspected the progress of the work and services provided at the checkpoint. The checkpoint, which was opened on December 7, 2021, is considered a bridge that deepens the relations and enhances social communication. **DETAILS ON P2**



GREEN MEWS

BEING MINDFUL



INSIDE



PORTUGAL'S SOCIALISTS WIN SURPRISE MAJORITY

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JOHNSON SORRY AFTER LOCKDOWN PARTY REPORT

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HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO SYRIAN PRESIDENT



President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, who is on an official visit to Damascus. During the meeting, Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes of good health and happiness to President Al Assad, and the friendly Syrian people progress. On his turn, the Syrian President asked Sayyid Badr to convey his sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan, and the Omani people continuous prosperity and welfare. **DETAILS ON P3**

18.3% RISE IN CASES REPORTED IN 2021

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Public Prosecution Department said that the number of cases reported in 2021 stood at 28,201, constituting an increase of 18.3 per cent over 2020. As many as 28,201 crimes were reported in the country in 2021 against 23,831 in 2020. But in 2019, the total number of crimes was 28,920, a fall of 5,089 cases (18 per cent) from the previous year.

Speaking at a press conference held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday, Attorney General Nasr bin Khamis al Sawa'ee said that the Public Prosecution Department is currently coordinating with the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) and other authorities to figure out the cause of the rise in criminal cases in 2021, but he affirmed that "the curve does not constitute a danger in itself".

The press conference reviewed important issues, statistics, judicial discretions and the

NOT ALARMING
Number of cases in 2021 - 28,201
(An increase of 18.3% over 2020)
107 cases of tampering with public funds
1,470 cases of insult
322 of violating the sanctity of private life
270 cases of threatening individuals
29 cases of blackmail
Muscat Governorate accounted for 41.6% of cases
North Al Batinah Governorate recorded 14.5% of cases
Murder cases went up in 2021 (13 cases) as against 9 in 2020

number of suspects and verdicts in 2021.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the media briefing, the Attorney General said crimes

involving information technology and electronic transactions were next to cheque bounce cases and the total number of cases stood at 2,894.

"These crimes are followed by drug trafficking, child molestation and misuse of social media. However, the Sultanate of Oman still holds a very low position in terms of crimes globally", he added.

At the event attended by Dr Ahmed bin Said al Shukaili, Assistant Public Prosecutor, and top official from the Public Prosecution and the Royal Oman Police (ROP), it was revealed that there were 73 cases of indecent assault and 11 cases of abuse in 2021. Also, 33 cases of abuse of public funds by officials, 26 cases of the crimes of misusing the position, 120 cases of nepotism and 9 case of intentional breach of duty.

Al Sawa'ee added that the Public Prosecution Department applied mitigated procedures when gathering data and conducting interrogations prior to trial. **TURN TO P3**

Boost to relations with Hungary

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnasseri](#)

High-ranking Hungarian officials along with a sizable business delegation headed by Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary, are due to arrive in Muscat on Wednesday on an official visit to enhance political, trade and

economic relations between the two friendly countries. One of the highlights of the visit is an Omani-Hungarian Business Forum which will take place on the sidelines of the visit.

Hungary and the Sultanate of Oman established diplomatic relations in 1990 with the Hungarian government opening a permanent representation in

Muscat in 2017. The Hungarian Embassy in Muscat was opened by Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on October 21, 2019, in the presence of high-level Omani government officials. The inauguration of the embassy at a high-level event was welcomed as a vote of trust on deepening ties with Hungary, a Visegrad (V4)... **TURN TO P2**

63,080 job-seekers employed in 2021

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura hosted Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, at its 6th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022), held here on Monday under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura.

The meeting discussed the topic of job-seekers based on a request presented by a group of the members from the Majlis. The discussions centred on three topics: The reality of educational outputs and the labour market, assessing the government's policies, strategies and programmes to bridge the gap between the educational outputs and the labour market and aligning educational outputs to the labour market.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, stated that the statistics show a significant drop in the number of job-seekers which reflects the ministry's efforts in this regard.

A total of 63,080 job-seekers were appointed in 2021, the minister said, explaining some challenges facing the ministry in terms of aligning education outputs to the requirements of the labour market including the lack of a transitional programme from study to the labour market. The minister of Higher Education, Research



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah

The ministry has launched the Idaad programme which is a national training programme for a full academic year targeting the penultimate year undergraduates in both public and private education institutions

and Innovation said that the ministry launched the Idaad programme which is a national training programme for a full academic year targeting the penultimate year undergraduates in both public and private higher education institutions. The programme targets to provide the students with the basic skills by exposing them to the work environment for an adequate period. **TURN TO P2**

A NEW ATTRACTION IN SAUDI



Tourists visit the Nabataean archaeological site of Al Hijr (Hegra), near the northwestern Saudi city of Al Ula, on Monday. Dating back to the first century BC, the archaeological site, which is now open to tourists, includes 111 tombs most of which boast a decorated facade, cave drawings and even some pre-Nabataean inscriptions. — AFP



Oman, Saudi ministers tour Empty Quarter checkpoint



MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, and Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud al Saud, Minister of Interior in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), on Monday went on tour of the Empty Quarter border checkpoint, which connects Oman and the KSA.

During their tour, the commemorative plaque was unveiled. The two ministers inspected the work progress and services provided in the checkpoint.

The checkpoint, which was opened on December 7, 2021, is considered a bridge that deepens relations and enhances social communication. It will also boost shipping and the movement of

goods, resulting in the increase of trade exchange between the two countries. Moreover, it will support activities in various economic, tourism and investment sectors.

On the sidelines of the visit, the two ministers reviewed the bilateral relations and exchanged views on cooperation-related areas. They also discussed several matters of common interest to enhance the march of relations between the two countries.

Several officials from both sides were present during the visit, including the Inspector General of Police and Customs, the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and the ambassadors of the two countries. — ONA



Oman-India Military Cooperation Committee holds meeting



NEW DELHI: The joint Oman-India Military Cooperation Committee held its 11th meeting

in New Delhi, on Monday. The committee discussed ways of enhancing military cooperation

and exchanging expertise between the armed forces of the two countries. — ONA

Oman, Hungary to boost relations

FROM PAGE 1

... Group country and also with Central Eastern European nations within the EU.

The establishment of the Hungary's permanent mission in Muscat just preceded the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which still remains a global challenge. Despite of the pandemic-induced challenges, Hungary and the Sultanate of Oman worked hard to build renewed cooperation capitalising on mutual trust and benefits.

Focusing on the comparative advantages of Hungary and the goals of Oman Vision 2040 under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, two of the major areas identified for

cooperation have been higher education sector and culture.

The two friendly countries signed in 2020 the Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement in the field of higher education (granting 50 MA and PhD scholarships annually for Omani students in various Hungarian universities). They also signed an agreement between the two governments on economic and technical cooperation, while also reaffirming the MoU on political consultations. Both countries also signed an MoU between the Hungarian Institution of Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT) and the Omani Diplomatic Institute (DI).

In the meanwhile, the Royal

Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has established a sound relationship with The Palace of Arts of Hungary (MÚPA) focusing on cultural cooperation.

Hungary and the Sultanate of Oman have reaffirmed their pledge to cooperate through improved trade relations accompanied by investment promotion. The two countries are ready to sign the Intergovernmental Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investments during this week's visit of the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which, along with an agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation already in force, will finalise the legal framework for investors to be active in both countries.

63,080 job-seekers employed in 2021, says minister

FROM PAGE 1

It is hoped that the 'Idaad' programme will provide the students with sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to bridge the gap between the students' skills and the requirements of the labour market in line with one of the most important pillars of Oman Vision 2040, which is building citizens capabilities and preparing them with a high degree of efficiency. The minister added that an international firm was contracted to review the programmes and curricula of the vocational colleges in coordination with the ministry.

The members of Majlis Ash-Shura stressed the importance of opening the paths of vocational and technical education in post-basic education and expediting the implementation of the Royal

directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on taking necessary measures to analyse the needs and requirements necessary

for the application of vocational and technical education in post-basic education.

The members raised

questions about the possibility of reconsidering the university education system in order to upgrade the students'

entrepreneurial skills by offering courses in leadership and introducing new disciplines in this field.

The members reviewed the Singaporean experience, calling for benefiting from it to adopt an economy based on innovation and technology.

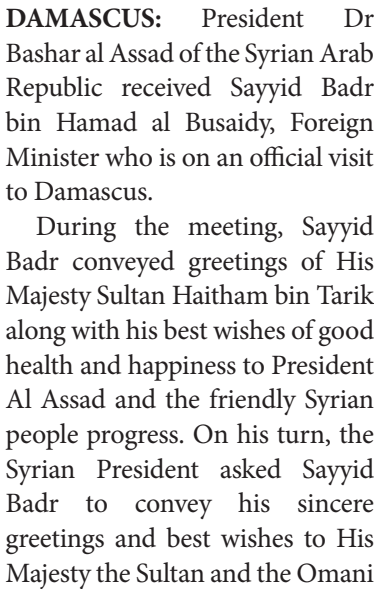
The minister of economy confirmed that the government seeks to benefit from the experience as the new plan depends on transforming some sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries, into industry-based sectors.

In the same context, the members of Majlis Ash-Shura presented several proposals to boost the national economy and generate sustainable job opportunities in various disciplines. The proposals include establishing large strategic projects in all governorates with high added value by the government if not adopted by the private sector.





OCCI explores investment avenues with Finnish team



The meeting reviewed the relations between the two countries. It also laid emphasis on the joint keenness to develop these relations and back the endeavours to restore regional security and stability.

The meeting was attended by Dr Faisal Mekdad, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Sayyid Turki bin Mahmoud al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Syria and the delegation accompanying the Foreign Minister.

Sayyid Badr held here a session of political talks with Dr Faisal Mekdad.

The talks covered the fraternal relations between the two countries and means of promoting cooperation between them in various spheres to enhance joint interests and realise aspirations of the two countries' peoples.

The talks also laid emphasis on the keenness of the two countries' leaderships to enhance and develop these relations in all fields.

The two sides also exchanged views on the latest developments

of current issues of common concern. They also underscored the importance of dialogue and resolving various issues through peaceful political solutions in a manner that serves aspirations of peoples and contributes in prevailing security and stability, as well as realising progress and prosperity in the region.

The talks were attended by Dr Bashar al Jaafari, Syrian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Sayyid Turki bin Mahmoud al Busaidy and the delegation accompanying the Foreign Minister. — ONA

MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) reviewed investment opportunities with a Finnish business delegation led by Ville Skinnari, Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade.

The meeting also highlighted aspects of enhancing cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries, particularly in the fields of industry, technology and services.

Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of OCCI, said that the trade exchange between the two countries is below aspirations as it reached \$ 2.398 billion by June 2021. Exports from the Sultanate of Oman reached \$ 205.095 million whereas imports reached \$ 2.191 billion. Al Saleh added that practical steps are required to enhance trade relations and to boost trade exchange. He hoped that this meeting would contribute towards exploring

areas of partnership in new fields particularly in the mining, real estate, industry, health sectors and transfer of knowledge.

On his turn, the Finnish minister underscored his country's keenness on developing relations between the two countries in various fields. He affirmed the preparedness of Finnish companies in actively contributing to the efforts of economic diversification by setting up partnerships with the Sultanate of Oman's private sector.

A presentation was given on the investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman, which have been launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Of those, 72 opportunities are in the industrial sector and are ready for investment. Moreover, B2B meetings were held between business people from the Sultanate of Oman and Finland.

— ONA



FROM P1

The procedures undertaken included non-application of pretrial arrest or confiscation of documents, he said, noting that this led to quick clearance of claims.

RUMOURS

In reply to a question whether rumours spread in social media had any role in the emergence of behaviour trends alien to Omani society, Al Sawa'ee affirmed the correlation between such rumours and negative behaviour. He said that it is the duty of mainstream media to address this issue.

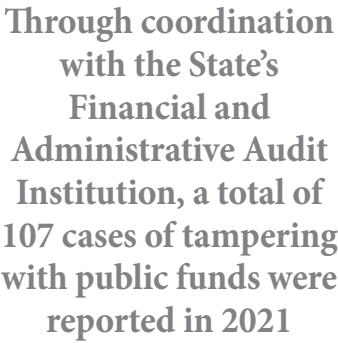
AI Sawa'ee pointed out that, through coordination with the State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI), a total of 107 cases of tampering with public funds were reported in 2021. These include 33 cases of mishandling of public funds by a government official to draw personal benefit, 26 cases of misuse of profession, 120 cases of bringing benefit to other parties and 9 cases of failure to perform one's duties deliberately.

ONLINE INVESTIGATION

Al Sawa'ee said that he looked forward to online investigation and litigation and that the Public Prosecution Department floated a tender for this purpose in 2021.

Common cases include 1,470 cases of insult, 322 cases of violating the sanctity of private life, 270 cases of threatening individuals and 29 cases of blackmail.

Speaking about the indicators of cases in 2021, Dr Ahmed Al Shukaili, Assistant Attorney General and official spokesman of the Public Prosecution Department said that Muscat Governorate accounted for 41.6 per cent of the cases (11,719), followed by North Al Batinah Governorate 4,098 cases or 14.5



NASR BIN KHAMIS
AL SAWA'EE
Attorney General

per cent.

Al Shukaili added that by comparing the total number of cases in 2020 and 2021, it appeared that the greatest percentage of rise in cases occurred in the Governorate of Dhofar (52 per cent), followed by South Al Batinah Governorate (34 per cent).

He said that premeditated murder cases went up in 2021 (13 cases) as against nine cases in 2020. Cases involving public funds and money-laundering reported in 2021 rose slightly to 138 in 2021, compared to 132 in 2020, said Al Shukaili, adding that cases of human trafficking reported in 2021 stood at 17, compared to 7 in 2020.

He pointed out that the number of felonies reported to the Public Prosecution Department in 2021 rose by 73 (to 1,255 cases) or 6.2 per cent higher than the figure in 2020, which was (1,182) cases.

The number of cases of misdemeanours reported to the Public Prosecution Department in 2021 went up by 18.5 per

cent (26,630), compared to 2020, which was (22,468), Dr Al Shukaili further added.

He added that the number of suspects registered in 2021 stood at 34,873 or 16 per cent higher than the figure in 2020, which was (30,069). The number of juveniles in 2021 constituted 2.1 per cent of the total number of suspects.

Gender-wise, he added that the number of males constituted 89.5 per cent of the suspects in 2021, compared to 89.8 per cent in 2020.

Dr Ahmed al Shukaili, Assistant Attorney General and official spokesman of the Public Prosecution Department, said that the total number of verdicts issued in 2021 stood at 10,350 partial verdicts, less by 3.3 per cent or 349 verdicts in 2020.

He said that the number of verdicts enforced in 2020 stood at 10,699 partial verdicts. The number of non-enforced verdicts till the end of 2021 stood at 1,420. The percentage of verdicts enforced in 2021 constituted 87.9 per cent of the total number of verdicts. Only 12.1 per cent of the verdicts on funds collected as “public right” in 2021 are in the process of execution, he said.

He also pointed out the crime of presenting dishonoured cheques (without sufficient funds) top the list of 10 most common crimes in 2021 and they constituted 7,143 cases, followed by crimes of information technology and digital transactions (2,864), violation of expat residency (2,858), the use of drugs and psychotropic substances (2,749), violation of human liberty and human dignity (2,340), violation of the Labour Law (2,166), violation of the Traffic Law (2,034), violation of the Consumer Protection Law (2,002), theft (1,918) and blackmail (1,685).

(With ONA inputs)

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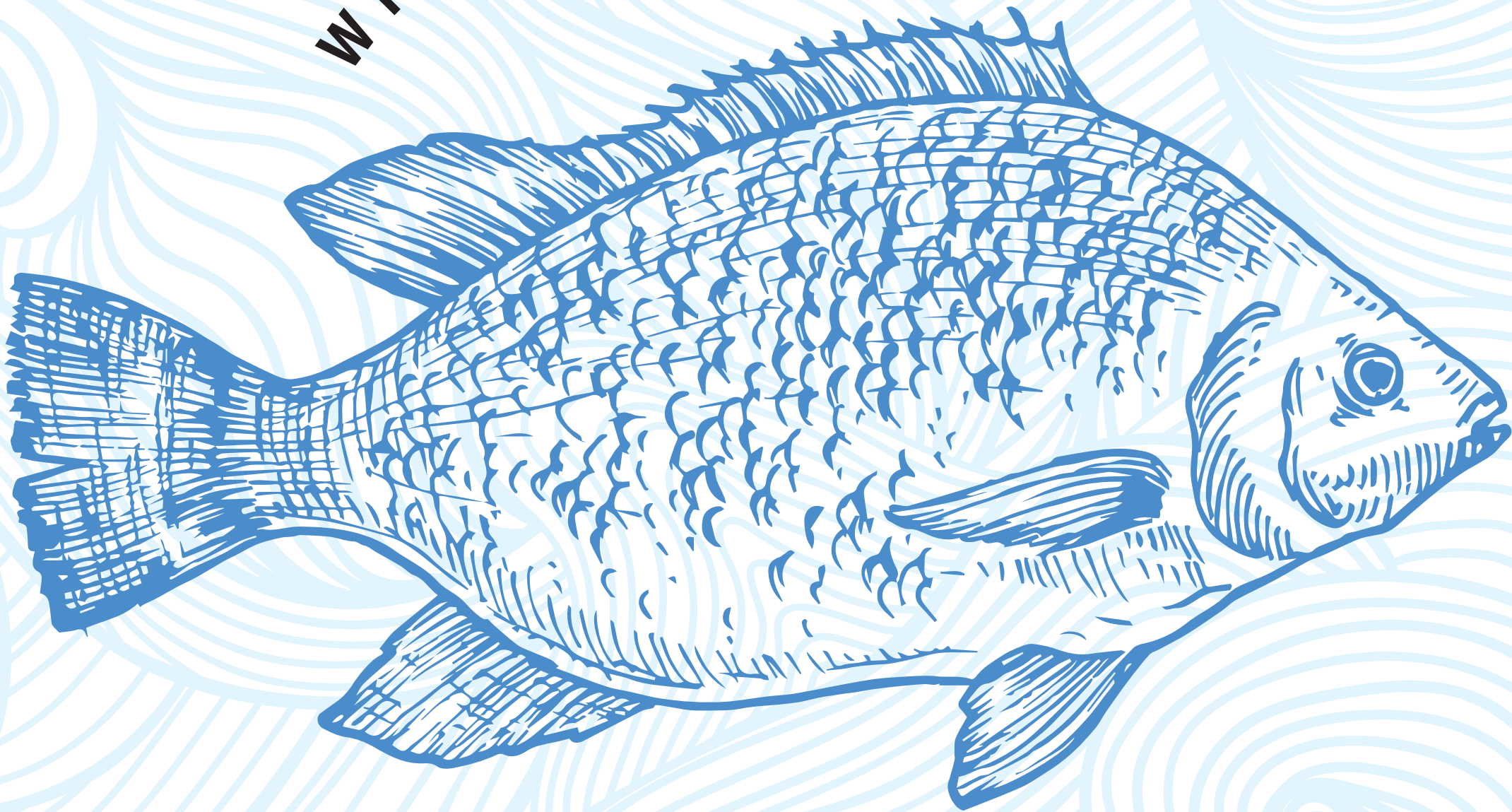



For any queries on the IPO or subscription process, contact Tel.: +968 2480 1155, Email: BDCIPO@bankmuscat.com

This advertisement should be read in relation to the Prospectus of the IPO. All abbreviations have the same meaning as mentioned therein. Investing in shares involves certain risks as described in Chapter 13 (Risk Factors and Methods of Mitigation) of the Prospectus which is available on the company website www.barkadesalination.com.



WHAT'S FISHY ABOUT



TILAPIA

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Tilapia is a tropical freshwater fish that is endemic to Africa and the southwestern Middle East. Red-bellied tilapia, Blue tilapia, Nile tilapia and Mozambique tilapia are among the most common species used in aquaculture.

The tilapia fish ranges from 6 to 28 cm in length, weighs about 4 kilograms, and does not live more than nine years. Some people prefer it due to its delicious taste and many nutrients beneficial to human health.

Since the thirties of the last century, tilapia fish of all kinds have been imported and spread all over the world for the biological control of unwanted aquatic plants and to eliminate mosquito larvae and use them as bait for some fisheries and as ornamental fish.

It has also been recently promoted as a food and an essential source of protein that can provide food security for developing countries. Due to their extreme

tolerance to different and harsh environmental conditions in fresh water and their high tolerance to salinity, in addition to their high reproductive and growth rates and their ability to resist diseases, tilapia fish are very suitable for aquaculture and rapid economic returns.

However, the results of the joint consultative research between Sultan Qaboos University and the Iranian University of Shiraz on Omani freshwater fish confirmed that the biological diversity of local fish is in danger of total disappearance, and the reason is due to the introduction of tilapia fish in the waters of the Sultanate of Oman for one reason or another.

The joint research, funded by Al Mawarid Geological Consulting Company, confirmed that bringing tilapia out of its habitat and inserting it into natural open water bodies in particular, has caused many major environmental problems around the world, threatening local habitats and the diversity of surrounding aquatic

A joint study by SQU and the Iranian University of Shiraz on Omani freshwater fish confirmed that the biological diversity of local fish is in danger of total disappearance, and the reason is due to the introduction of tilapia fish in the waters

Tilapia fish of all kinds have been imported and spread all over the world for the biological control of unwanted aquatic plants and to eliminate mosquito larvae and use them as bait for some fisheries and as ornamental fish

organisms, especially local fish, quantities and even their sizes through unequal competition for food, housing or habitat.

This is because tilapia fish is a very aggressive fish despite its beautiful and attractive shape. It also caused the destruction of habitats by introducing diseases and parasites genetic pollution of some local fish, which caused the disappearance of some local species. Thus, tilapia specialists have concluded that despite the potential or perceived economic benefits to human society in an enclosed environment, "their cultivation or dissemination in open freshwater is an ecological disaster for native fish and biodiversity".

The research indicated that non-native Nile tilapia, and perhaps its hybrid species or subspecies, were introduced to the natural waters of the Sultanate of Oman (wadis and water springs) to control mosquitoes in the early nineties of the last century. Through field visits to many Omani valleys and

water springs, the researchers found that this guest has become the dominant species and has reduced the number of local fish in terms of size, number and type.

"There are valleys where it has become very rare to see local fish", according to the research. On the other hand, the fish diversity is more noticeably in the valleys and springs that tilapia has not yet reached.

"And if the reason for bringing in tilapia fish is to prey on mosquito larvae and reduce the spread of malaria, there are researches that indicate that the Omani locally called "sad" fish also attacks mosquito larvae with the same efficiency", according to the researchers.

The study recommended that the use of open freshwater should be prohibited for tilapia culture. It also recommended that unwanted tilapia fish should not be disposed of in valleys and stagnant waters and that the import of tilapia fish as ornamental fish should be restricted.



National strategy to help farming sector fight climate change



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Climate change is projected to adversely impact agriculture in the Sultanate of Oman and contribute to groundwater deterioration through seawater intrusion, resulting in sharply less cultivable land with access to irrigation using good quality water.

The World Bank Group's Roadmap for Climate Action in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) also seeks to focus on climate action and green recovery in the region.

The action focuses on a climate-smart approach to agriculture and natural resource management to

achieve food security and preserve biodiversity while ensuring peace and stability.

The Sultanate of Oman's National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation for Climate Change (2020-2040) focuses on the use of advanced tools to establish historical climate trends to better understand future climate change.

"The primary goal of this strategy is to identify actions to transition the Sultanate of Oman to low emission and climate-resilient development trajectory. This involves addressing the adverse impacts across all vulnerable sectors due to climate change," as per the strategy report.

The strategy seeks to focus on developing new crop varieties, developing simulation models of different primary crops, and continued economic viability under different climate scenarios.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Environment Authority (EA) have supported the measures needed to reduce the adverse impact of climate change, especially limiting the annual temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century from current predictions of over 2.5 degrees Celsius.

The World Bank roadmap includes decarbonising

energy and transport sectors through renewable energy sources and clean mobility solutions that can create jobs and drive economic growth while preventing health and environmental risks.

The report calls for climate-centric urban planning, strengthening municipal plans to ensure the continuity of public services, and integrated coastal management will help improve the livability of cities and mitigate risks in the face of increased climate hazards.

It will seek to 'unlocking private capital, supporting national budgets and expenditures and strengthening financial institutions for green investments.'

Pandemic hits taxi drivers hard

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkutyyp

Even as business activities are returning to normal despite fears of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, taxi drivers in Muscat say they are still left in the lurch due to lack of passengers.

Most of the minicabs have already taken off the road, and the catch is that the capital's trademark orange taxis still do services, albeit there are not enough passengers to make a good mark in earnings.

Saleh al Yakoobi, who has been driving in the downtown Ruwi and adjoining areas, says the taxis are in a bad way after the outbreak of the pandemic.

"Although there is improvement in the situation as people start coming out on the streets, they are not enough to support our daily income. We are really struggling", he said.

Fare income is less than 50 per cent of pre-Covid levels, he told the *Observer*.

With the public taking extra precautions and being wary of close contact, many taxi drivers are doing everything possible to reduce the risk of infection to passengers, incurring additional losses.

"We have our own supply of disinfectant and clean the car seats, door handles and other areas after every trip. We try as much as possible to disinfect the vehicles every week", said a group of drivers at the Ruwi Plaza taxi stand.

Rashid al Suleimani, a cab driver in Muttrah, said that



during this season of the year, normal situations used to be very lucrative thanks to the tourist arrivals.

"The pandemic, having halted tourism to a large extent, has drastically reduced demand for cab rides. Even if there is a cruiser, tourists do not venture out due to fear of coronavirus and restrictions", he said.

He said that the last two years had depleted their cash balance to the extent that they find it difficult to pay for their loans and other expenditures, which they fear will push them into desperation.

"Fortunately, my pension is a blessing. For many of their counterparts, they are really struggling. Many have already hung their cab licence", he said.

For Khalid al Balushi, the plight is not going to end soon. "With the fall in the number of expatriate workers who form

“Although there is improvement in the situation as people start coming out on the streets, they are not enough to support our daily income. We are really struggling

SALEH AL YAKOObI
Taxi driver

the majority of our customers, there is no certainty that our earnings will be restored to earlier levels", he said.

Establishing his claim is the plummeting number of taxis on the road, as revealed by the data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

According to the state

statistics agency, there has been a fall of over 15 per cent in the number of taxis registered during the last one-year period.

While there were 29,931 taxis registered at the end of December 2020, the number came down to 28,480 by the end of December 2021.

Experts familiar with the transport sector are of the opinion that taxis operated through different apps still are doing good business in Oman.

"Many startups are coming up with innovative ideas and solutions that suit the needs of the passengers. They provide better services and hassle-free ride", said Fares Abdullah, who is associated with a mobile app for taxi service.

Significantly, the ride-hailing app has witnessed steady growth even during the challenges thrown up by the pandemic, he added.

MoH reports 2,420 new Covid cases, three deaths

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Monday reported 2,420 new cases and three deaths.

The total number of cases registered in the country has now reached 338,880, including 4,146 deaths.

The total number of recoveries is 315,150 while the recovery rate is 93 per cent.

In the last 24 hours, 103 patients were

admitted to hospitals across the country, and the total number of inpatients is 320, including 52 in the Intensive Care Units (ICU).



OMAN INSURANCE ASSOCIATION INVITATION ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Board of Directors of **OMAN INSURANCE ASSOCIATION** has the pleasure to invite you to the **ORDINARY GENERAL meeting to be held on Tuesday, 15th March 2022 at 11:30 am online** to discuss and approve the following:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors Report.
2. To consider and approve audited accounts for the period ending 31st January 2021.
3. To appoint auditors and fix their remuneration.
4. To elect the Board of Directors.

Candidates desirous of contesting the election to the Board of Directors are requested to submit their nominations on or before 10th February 2022.

Best Regards
Nassir bin Salim Al Busaidi
Chairman

Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.) P.O. Box 311, Muscat, Postal Code 100, Sultanate of Oman.

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED NOVEMBER 30, 2021

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the business and operations of Sahara Hospitality Company S.A.O.G. (hereinafter referred to as "SHC") for the financial year ended November 30, 2021.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

The financial results achieved during the financial year ended November 30, 2021, are as follows:

Key Financial Indicators	Year ended November 30, 2021	Year ended November 30, 2020
	R.O. 000's	R.O. 000's
Turnover	11,240	12,325
Gross Profit	2,909	3,375

The Net Profit after tax for the year was RO 2,124,062 as against RO 2,547,744 in the year 2020.

As advised earlier, the company's business depends primarily on PDO activities and presence of contractors' staff where our Permanent Accommodation for Contractors (PAC) are located. During the year under review, we are pleased to report that:

- 1) The occupancy levels at Fahud, Nimr and Rima were 81%, 73% and 99% respectively.
- 2) The net asset value per share has decreased from RO 3.622 in 2020 to RO 3.408 in 2021 financial year due to increase in share capital.
- 3) The basic earnings per share in 2021 is RO 0.281 and in 2020 it was RO 0.338.

The COVID 19 pandemic situation has caused an adverse impact on our business during the year ended 30th November 2021 with reported reduced occupancy levels in PAC Fahud & Nimr.

The Board of Directors is pleased to recommend distribution of cash dividend of 15% and stock dividend of 5% on the paid up capital subject to shareholders approval at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Your Company has been adhering to the principles of good Corporate Governance over the years and the Board of Directors supports the broad principles of Corporate Governance as issued by CMA. In addition to the basic governance issues, the Board lays great emphasis on transparency, accountability and integrity and are pleased to state that a report on Code of Corporate Governance including the relevant auditor's certificate regarding compliance with conditions of Corporate Governance as stipulated by CMA is provided in Annexure II.

Once again, the Board of Directors and Management Team would reaffirm their commitment and enthusiasm with proper planning in carrying out the business with an objective to yield attractive returns to the shareholders. On behalf of the Shareholders and Board of Directors, It gives us great honor to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour Al Said for his continued support to the private sector and I pray to the Almighty Allah to shower His everlasting blessings on His Majesty. Furthermore, we would extend our gratitude to His Majesty's government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention for the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotions, Muscat Stock Exchange and Capital Market Authority.

I would like to conclude the report by thanking our company Management Team, my fellow Directors, the Service Provider, Petroleum Development of Oman, our clients and all those who participated in the successful conduct of our Company's business, for their relentless efforts and valuable contribution.

For and on behalf of the Board of Directors of
SAHARA HOSPITALITY CO. (S.A.O.G.)

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position (audited) as at 30 th November 2021		
	2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	15,636,509	16,686,852
Right-of-use assets	82,487	103,108
Financial assets at amortized cost	5,000,000	-
	20,718,996	16,789,960
Current assets		
Inventories	29,778	30,925
Amount due from related parties	5,568	5,261
Trade and other receivables	5,178,021	4,842,366
Cash and bank balances	2,023,456	5,924,473
	7,236,823	10,803,025
Total assets	27,955,819	27,592,985
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	7,546,000	6,737,500
Legal reserve	2,458,239	2,245,833
Retained earnings	15,714,673	15,420,017
Total Equity	25,718,912	24,403,350
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	66,604	86,629
Deferred taxation	134,514	133,028
Employees' end of service benefits	13,758	11,356
	214,876	231,013
Current liabilities		
Current portion of term loan	-	982,724
Current portion of lease liabilities	20,024	19,025
Amounts due to related parties	1,132,762	1,022,419
Trade and other payables	495,569	502,301
Income tax payable	373,676	432,153
	2,022,031	2,958,622
Total liabilities	2,236,907	3,189,635
Total Equity and liabilities	27,955,819	27,592,985
Net assets per share	3.408	3.622

Statement of comprehensive income (audited) for the year ended 30 th November 2021		
	2021 RO	2020 RO
Income from operations	11,240,348	12,326,457
Cost of operations	(8,330,866)	(8,951,083)
Gross profit	2,909,482	3,375,374
Other income	191,219	177,856
Administrative expenses	(410,675)	(404,403)
Allowances for credit losses (net)	(159,728)	(57,282)
Profit from operations	2,530,298	3,091,545
Finance charges	(31,074)	(92,940)
Profit for the year before tax	2,499,224	2,998,605
Taxation	(375,162)	(450,861)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,124,062	2,547,744
Basic earnings per share	0.281	0.338

The complete accounts in either Arabic or English will be delivered to any shareholder within 7 days of receipt of the request. Such requests may be sent to the Board Secretary, Sahara Hospitality Co. (S.A.O.G.), PO Box 311, Postal Code 100, Muscat.

OMI 1/02/21/7



Portugal’s Socialists in surprise landslide win

LISBON: Portugal’s Prime Minister Antonio Costa prepared on Monday to govern solo after his Socialist party scored a surprise landslide win, with economic recovery from the pandemic among his top priorities.

His party secured a parliamentary majority in Sunday’s snap elections, which also saw the far-right Chega party make significant gains.

The Socialists received 41.7 per cent of the vote in Sunday’s snap polls, giving it 117 seats in the 230-seat parliament, up from 108 in the outgoing assembly.

Four seats still need to be attributed in the coming days from the results of votes cast abroad, but in 2019 the Socialists obtained two.

The results defied final polls which had suggested that the Socialist were in a statistical tie with the main opposition centre-right PSD, which finished second with 76 seats.

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was expected to formally invite Costa, who has headed two minority governments since 2015, later this week to form a new government.

“The conditions have been created to carry out investments and reforms for Portugal to be more prosperous, fairer, more innovative,” Costa said in his victory speech.

The prospect of a stable government is crucial for Portugal



Portugal’s Prime Minister and Socialist Party Secretary General Antonio Costa speaks after winning the general election in Lisbon. — Reuters

to make the most of a €16.6 billion package of EU recovery funds it is due to receive by 2026. Portugal’s economy is starting to recover after shrinking 8.4 per cent in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic hurt its key tourism sector and other businesses. It rose by 4.9 per cent in 2021, its fastest pace since 1990, boosted by growing exports and investment, national statistics institute INE said on Monday.

Costa has said he would like to use the bulk of the EU funds to modernise Portugal’s infrastructure to make it more competitive.

Until now the former Lisbon mayor had to rely on support

The new PM says he would like to use the bulk of the EU funds to modernise Portugal’s infrastructure to make it more competitive

from two far-left parties — the anti-capitalist Left Bloc and the Communist Party — to govern.

“Without being tied down to the radical left, the Socialists and Costa have the opportunity to apply a more centrist and European recipes,” daily newspaper *Publico*

wrote in an editorial.

This is only the second time that Portugal has a Socialist government with an outright majority in parliament since the country returned to democracy in 1974 following the end of a decades-long dictatorship.

Sunday’s polls were called after the two far-left parties that had propped up Costa’s minority government sided with right-wing parties to reject his 2022 draft budget in October.

The radical left had pushed for more social spending and wanted a faster rise in the minimum wage than what was promised by Costa, but both lost seats. — AFP

Suu Kyi to face new trial for electoral fraud

YANGON: Myanmar’s junta has charged Aung San Suu Kyi with influencing election officials during 2020 polls, a source said on Monday, a year after it staged a coup alleging massive voter fraud.

Suu Kyi, 76, has been detained since the February 1 coup last year that triggered mass protests and a bloody crackdown on dissent with more than 1,500 civilians killed, according to a local monitoring group.

The Nobel laureate is facing a raft of charges — including violating the country’s official secrets laws — and if convicted of all of them could face sentences tallying more than 100 years in prison.

She will face a further trial on charges of influencing the country’s election commission during the 2020 polls that saw her party defeat a military-aligned rival, a source with knowledge of the case said.

The case will be wrapped up within six months, the source added.

Former president and stalwart of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party Win Myint will face the same charge, the source said.

Several senior members of the national electoral commission have also been arrested since the coup, accused of masterminding the NLD’s landslide victory.

The junta cancelled the results of the 2020 election in July last year, saying it had found some 11.3 million instances of fraud.

Independent monitors said the



Myanmar’s State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi

polls were largely free and fair.

The junta has promised to hold another election by August 2023 if the country — currently riven by fighting between the military and anti-coup fighters — is restored.

Ahead of the Tuesday anniversary of the putsch, the junta has warned that noisy protests or sharing “propaganda” against the military could be charged with high treason or under the anti-terrorism law.

On Monday ousted Myanmar lawmakers from a shadow “National Unity Government” addressed the media in Paris.

The human rights spokesman Aung Myo Min urged the international community to implement an arms embargo and tighten economic sanctions to cut off all trade with the regime.

Suu Kyi has already been sentenced to six years in jail for illegally importing and owning walkie talkies, incitement against the military and breaking Covid-19 rules. — AFP

Cambodian lion dancers cling to craft amid pandemic

PHNOM PENH: Cambodian dragon and lion dancer Gnuon Virak huddles his troupe together in a circle, before they let out a team cheer and get to work rehearsing for their a Lunar New Year performance — their only one of the pandemic-stricken year.

Gnuon, 28, has loved dancing since he was a child, and grew up near a Chinese-style temple in the capital Phnom Penh. Seven years ago, he asked a master to teach him to dance and joined a troupe, known as the Bodhi Tree Troupe. Eventually he became a team leader.

“We must practice this dancing everyday,” he said during a rehearsal. “This requires complete focus and motivation.”

The transportation company

employee used to supplement his regular income of about \$300 a month with lion and dragon dances, earning about \$20 to perform at local events. That has all but dried up during the pandemic, with the number of performances bottoming out to about one a month instead of five.

The Cambodian Chinese Association estimates there are about eight troupes in Phnom Penh, but Gnuon worries that number may shrink.

“I want the younger generation to hold on to this tradition and make it even more well-known in the future,” he said.

Sino-Khmers have long been an integral part of Cambodian society. Historical records estimate the first Chinese came to the area



Ny Phanith before rehearsing for a lion dance performance ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations at a temple in Phnom Penh. — Reuters

in the 13th Century.

During the Khmer Rouge era in the 1970s, the community devastated, as the regime lashed out against well-educated, urban merchants. But in recent years, the ancestral ties to China have brought prosperity to Sino-Khmers as China aggressively ramps up investment in Cambodia’s economy.

Gnuon said he hopes to introduce some new styles to bring attention to lion and dragon dancing, such as increasing the number of dancers on elevated poles, or using larger poles.

“We’ll keep all our current techniques and also create some new styles in order to make the dancing more well-known, or to be able to compete with other troupes,” he said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

JAKARTA

Bali to reopen to foreign travellers, again

Indonesia’s holiday island of Bali will start welcoming back travellers from all countries from later this week, officials said, more than three months after announcing it was open to selected nationalities. Though Bali officially opened to visitors from China, New Zealand, and Japan among other countries in mid October, there has since been no direct flights, Tourism minister Sandiaga Uno told a briefing.

The reopening follows similar announcements by



Thailand and the Philippines which put quarantine waivers on hold in December over initial uncertainty about vaccine efficacy against the Omicron variant of Covid-19. — Reuters

DUBAI

UAE intercepts missile from Ansar Allah fighters

The UAE shot down a ballistic missile fired by Yemen’s Ansar Allah fighters, the latest attack to rattle the Middle East financial hub. Nobody was hurt in the early-hours attack, the third in consecutive weeks on the Gulf nation that is part of the coalition fighting the insurgents.

“Air defence forces...intercepted and destroyed a ballistic missile launched by the Ansar Allah group at the UAE,” the ministry said, according to the official WAM news agency.



The ministry said it responded by destroying the missile launch site in Yemen’s northern Al Jawf region, releasing black-and-white footage of the explosion. — AFP

SYDNEY

Australian PM to outline A\$2 bn research boost

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a A\$2 billion plan to boost manufacturing by commercialising the country’s research, an initiative that comes against a backdrop of worsening polls months before an election.

Morrison, in an address to the National Press Club in Canberra, will reflect on lessons learned from storms, floods and the Omicron coronavirus wave that disrupted Australians’ summer.

He will also outline his government’s focus on building



health and economic resilience, officials said. Morrison will say efforts to boost manufacturing and supply chain resilience in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic — Reuters



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In brief

■ BERLIN



MERZ OFFICIALLY ELECTED HEAD OF GERMANY'S CDU

Corporate lawyer and party veteran Friedrich Merz was officially elected as the head of Germany's Christian Democrats (CDU). A prominent voice of the CDU's right-wing, he will lead the party as it recovers from its worst-ever election result — and as it finds its feet without Angela Merkel, who did not stand for another term as chancellor in the September 2021 polls. Merz won 95.33 per cent of the ballots in a postal vote.

The 66-year-old, who defeated his other two challengers back in December, was already considered a shoo-in. The postal vote was required legally to confirm the result of an online party conference held on January 22, during which CDU delegates backed Merz by 94.62 per cent. — dpa

■ TOKYO



JAPAN SEARCHES FOR MISSING F15 JET

Japan's military said it was searching for a fighter jet that disappeared from radar shortly after taking off, with media reporting a "red glow" was seen and debris had been found. "The track of an F15 jet disappeared from the data of the Komatsu control tower after take-off", a spokesman for the Japan Air Self-Defence Force (ASDF) said. The plane disappeared about five kilometres from the Komatsu airbase in central Ishikawa region he added. Kyodo news agency reported the fighter was conducting training with a crew of two on board when radar contact was lost at about 5:30 pm. — AFP

■ GRENOBLE



CONVICTED FRENCH MURDERER IN NEW TRIAL

A former French soldier already imprisoned over the brutal beating death of a fellow serviceman appeared in court on Monday on charges of kidnapping and murdering an eight-year-old girl — a killing he has admitted was a "mistake". Nordahl Lelandais, 38, has confessed to killing Maelys De Araujo in August 2017 after she disappeared from a wedding near the Alpine town of Chambery, eastern France, in a case that shook the country.

Police searched for months for the girl before arresting Lelandais, who was also a guest at the wedding. — AFP

Russia, US to hold new Ukraine crisis talks



An Ukrainian Military Forces serviceman stands in front of tanks of the 92nd separate mechanised brigade of Ukrainian Armed Forces parked in their base near Klugino-Bashkirivka village in the Kharkiv region. — AFP

WASHINGTON: The Russian and US foreign ministers are set to hold fresh talks on Tuesday after a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine, with Washington vowing to work with Western allies to beef up sanctions should Moscow decide to invade its neighbour. The Security Council convened later on Monday over the crisis as fears of an imminent incursion grow, despite Kremlin denials.

Russia announced Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will speak with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

"Lavrov and Blinken will have a telephone conversation on Tuesday", Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told a press briefing.

The upcoming call is the latest in a flurry of diplomatic meetings between senior diplomats

from Moscow, Brussels and Washington over the conflict in Ukraine and disagreements over security concerns in Europe.

The United States and Britain on Sunday flagged new and "devastating" economic sanctions against Russia, as Washington and its allies step up efforts to deter any invasion.

With tensions soaring, the United States said it was prepared to push back against any "disinformation" Moscow put forward in what is expected to be one of the most closely watched United Nations sessions in years.

Russia is likely to try to block the 15-member council from holding its US-requested meeting, "but the Security Council is unified. Our voices are unified in calling for the Russians to explain themselves", Washington's UN

envoy Linda Thomas-Greenfield told ABC News.

"We're going to go in the room prepared to listen to them, but we're not going to be distracted by their propaganda", she said on Sunday. "And we're going to be prepared to respond to any disinformation that they attempt to spread during this meeting."

US Under-Secretary of State Victoria Nuland told CBS a proposal on security issues presented last week by the US and Nato to Russia may have stirred interest in Moscow.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, meanwhile, took a tough stance, saying it was crucial Washington send a powerful message to President Vladimir Putin that any aggression against Ukraine would come at a very high cost. — AFP

UK 'partygate' report slams 'failures of leadership'

LONDON: A long-awaited report into claims of lockdown-breaking parties at British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's offices was published in part on Monday, criticising "failures of leadership" that allowed events to go ahead.

Political and public anger at the revelations put Johnson's position as leader under threat, but senior civil servant Sue Gray has been forced not to go into detail on all events due to a separate police probe.

After interviewing more than 70 people about 16 events held in 2020 and last year, Gray said what she could say was "extremely limited" owing to the Metropolitan police's intervention.

But she found that given the demands the government was making of the public to fight the spread of coronavirus, "some of the behaviour surrounding these gatherings is difficult to justify".

Some represented a "serious failure" to observe the high standards expected of those working in government, and "too little thought" was given to how appropriate the events were at the time and how they would be perceived.

"There were failures of leadership and judgement by different parts of No 10 (Downing Street) and the Cabinet Office at different times", Gray wrote in her 12-page report.

"Some of the events should not have been allowed to take place. Other events should not have been allowed to develop as they did"

Gray also criticised the drinking culture at the heart of government in the report, which saw her examine emails, text



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson during a visit to the Tilbury Docks in Tilbury. — AFP

messages, photos and Downing Street's entry and exit logs.

Johnson's immediate future had been in doubt until the Met police said last week it was also looking into 12 of the 16 events for possible breaches of coronavirus regulations.

Scotland Yard's request for Gray not to publish her report in full has given Johnson some breathing space while detectives conduct their own enquiries.

A copy of the redacted report was delivered to Downing Street on Monday morning and Johnson is due to respond to it in parliament at 1530 GMT.

Johnson's opponents have accused him of misleading parliament by insisting the events at Downing Street were within the rules at the time and were work-related. Ministers found to have misled MPs are normally expected to resign. But on a visit on Monday, Johnson told reporters: "I stick absolutely to what I've said in the past." — AFP

India achieves vaccination milestone

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

These are testing times for the countries as the Covid-19 pandemic has created chaos worldwide. Vaccines against Covid-19 brought some hope in 2021 that put a substantial break on the virus spread.

Starting with vaccination to 300 million healthcare workers, frontline workers and priority groups on January 16, 2021; India achieved the milestone of administering one billion Covid-19 vaccine doses on October 21, 2021.

Since then, the country has administered more than 156.76 crores (1.56 billion) doses. Of these, more than 90 crores (900m) got first doses, 650m second doses and 420m precautionary doses. The country's national regulator, the Central Drugs and Standard Control Organisation, granted Covid-19 vaccine manufacturing permissions to six manufacturers in the country, while three vaccines — Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V — are being used currently in the national Covid-19 vaccination programme, a source from the Indian Ministry of Health said.

Besides putting an all-out effort to control the pandemic, India also achieved several path-breaking milestones, including administering over 100 crores (1 billion) doses in less than nine months. The country administered 2.51 crore doses in a single day, and on several occasions, it achieved 1 crore doses per day, which is truly historic.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called it a team success that displayed the country's capability and the strength of the 'sabka prayas' (collective effort) mantra.

Overcoming vaccine hesitancy is a crucial factor in India's successful vaccination drive.

Since the beginning of the vaccination drive on January 16, 2021, the campaign



A health worker inoculates a youth with a coronavirus vaccine during a vaccination drive for people in the 15-18 age group in Mumbai. — AFP

has covered more and more people in seven phases as of now:

January 16, 2021: Vaccination drive began for frontline and healthcare workers

March 1, 2021: Drive began for people above 60 years and those with co-morbidities in the age group of 45-60.

April 1, 2021: All above the age of 45 years became eligible for Covid-19 vaccination

May 1, 2021: All adults (18+) became eligible for Covid vaccination

November, 2021: Government launched Har Ghar Dastak (door-to-door) vaccination campaign to achieve 100 per cent first dose coverage

January 3, 2022: Adolescent population (15-18 years) began receiving Covid-19 vaccine

January 10, 2022: Administration of

'precautionary dose' the third or booster dose for frontline workers and vulnerable people above the age of 60 years.

The third wave of the pandemic — driven by the new variant of Omicron is currently causing disruption in India. However, India is at the forefront in fighting the deadly virus and overcoming its devastating impact.

"It is certainly better prepared than the second wave of the pandemic. Hospitals are better equipped than during the second wave. Importantly the government has increased isolation beds. It is pertinent to note that there has been a substantial increase in isolation and ICU bed capacity Pan-India. Before the first lockdown on March 23, 2020, these numbers were 10,180 and 2,168, respectively. By August 3, 2021, there were 18,03,266 isolation beds and

India is moving with caution under the third wave. There is certainly more planning and less panic

1,24,598 ICU beds in the country", media reports citing MoH report said.

"As far as oxygen facility is concerned, India has attempted to significantly step-up oxygen availability across states. From various sources, a total of 3,236 pressure swing adsorption (PSA) plants were installed on December 23, 2021, with a total commissioned oxygen capacity of 3783 MT", the report said.

"Keeping in mind oxygen crisis during the second wave of the pandemic, 114,000 oxygen concentrators are being provided to states under 'PM Cares' and Covid-19 Emergency Response & Health System Preparedness Package-II, or ECRP-II.

In addition, ECRP-II funds have been sanctioned to the states for installation of 958 liquid medical oxygen storage tanks and medical gas pipeline systems in 1,374 hospitals", the media report said.

At the digital front too online digital solutions such as the Oxygen Demand Aggregation System (ODAS) and Oxygen Digital Tracking System (ODTS) have been developed to ascertain the demand for medical oxygen from all medical facilities and to track their transportation.

"Further to curb the spread of the Omicron, state governments in the country have imposed restrictions on the movement of people during weekends and during holidays. India is moving with caution under the third wave. There is certainly more planning and less panic", says the report.

Opening windows to different worlds, cultures



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Prof, Department of English Language and Literature, Sultan Qaboos University

With a generation of toddlers growing up on endless loops of YouTube videos, actually played out on smartphones, the gap in the children's book sector is an exciting and creative space.

What do we want from children's books? Of course, a combination of entertainment and information would hit the right spot.

The children's book market is still growing exponentially as parents and caregivers try to stimulate and encourage a child's nascent imagination, finding new ways to teach while having fun.

It's definitely a huge challenge, considering the odds against books — colourful moving pictures vying for attention on digital screens, loud and repetitive music in streaming services so common in all homes today, and the fluorescent toys inspired by cartoon characters — books do have a tough fight ahead of them.

It doesn't have to be this way. Educational psychologists have often asserted that of the VAK

(visual, auditory and kinesthetic) learning styles, the visual was the most common, with more than 88 per cent of young learners seen to learn more actively when using the visual medium. As such, pitching books with large visuals, colourful drawings and a combination of known and new vocabulary could go a long way in making a child's interest in books a lifelong passion.

But none of this is likely to work if the books introduced to children say or show nothing of the culture in which they live. Fairy tales of blond girls with blue eyes may be attractive at first sight, but if children cannot see themselves in their stories, they are likely to lose interest and learning can become an uphill task.

It is a reality that children's writers in Sultanate of Oman are also very aware of Jane Jaffer MBE, a poet, novelist and educator who has done much to encourage reading among children in Sultanate of Oman through her popular 'Let's Read Programme', recently published a children's book 'Raifi's Amazing

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK MARKET IS STILL GROWING EXPONENTIALLY AS PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TRY TO STIMULATE AND ENCOURAGE A CHILD'S NASCENT IMAGINATION

Dinosaur Adventure' which received much adulation.

A bilingual book with the story in English and Arabic, it was translated into Arabic by Maythaa al Mandhari, a passionate story teller who lent her experience of interacting with Omani children to this book on an eternal favourite with children: dinosaurs.

'Raifi's Amazing Dinosaur Adventure' is a tale born out of the pandemic. Taking off from her three-year-old grandson's passion for dinosaurs, Jaffer narrates the adventures of a young boy Raifi who comes across a cave while walking along the Al Hajar Mountains. There, he sees a baby dinosaur,

Iggy, and together they walk along and find other, larger dinosaurs. Some are vegetarian with spikes on their back while others are huge and fly. The short story ends with information on various kinds of dinosaurs as well as photographs of bones now exhibited in The Natural History Museum in Muscat.

The book is targeted at very young learners who could be told the story, with large colourful paintings by the author herself. At the same time, it is also an early-stage reading book which children can use to learn to spell, using strategies like repetition and dialogue. Simple in narrative with short crisp sentences and plenty of action, the story gradually introduces more complex words and concepts.

What adds charm to this book is the fact that it is bilingual. Both ends of the book open up to the story, and both use vocabulary and information building strategies for a range of readers. In this way, this book is also targeted at second or third language learners of Arabic who can practice

the script, enjoy the story and build upon their Arabic vocabulary.

Translating the book, Maythaa says, was an adventure in itself.

"I had to decide what words I should translate and what to leave as it is (like sandwich)," she said, adding that she would often take each sentence to translate separately before reading the whole story to make sure it made sense.

Speaking of the bilingual nature, Jaffer says, "There's nothing like reading in your own language, so this time I decided to make the book bilingual as children would like to have something that reflects their own life".

She further added that having a good Omani translator made the book very relatable to children as the Arabic which was used was closer to that used in the Sultanate of Oman. Jane and Maythaa both also hope to continue on this adventure of writing and translating, opening the window to different worlds and cultures, while introducing Sultanate of Oman to the world.

Long haul Covid patients find hope in recovery clinics

CAITLIN WILSON

When Stephanie Hedrick realised she was still suffering from shortness of breath, blurry vision and brain fog months after recovering from Covid-19, she knew she needed more help than her primary care doctor alone could provide.

"Not every doctor knows everything," said the 62-year-old, a retired teacher from the US state of Virginia.

After months of rehabilitative therapy at a specialised clinic in the nearby capital Washington, Hedrick was finally able to play in the waves with her five grandkids this summer.

The MedStar Covid Recovery Programme that she turned to is part of a new wave of clinics specifically treating patients suffering from long Covid — a post-infection syndrome that can affect nearly every system in the body, causing sometimes debilitating symptoms.

"The clinic gave me hope that life was going to go on," Hedrick said.

Similar clinics have popped up across the US as thousands of people who recovered from coronavirus infections — even mild ones — have found themselves still struggling.

Doctors have known for years that some patients who recover from viral infections go on to develop post-viral syndromes, but the exact cause is unknown.

"There's something happening. It's very clearly not in people's heads," said Hana Akselrod, co-director of the Covid-19 Recovery Clinic with the George Washington University health system.

Estimates of long Covid's prevalence vary widely from study to study, from as little as 10 per cent of people who recover from a Covid infection, to as high as 35 or even 50 per cent.

After her infection, Hedrick — who described herself as otherwise "active" — was suddenly having irregular heart rhythms, joint pain and shortness of breath.

"It's like somebody took all of your energy and strength and motivation to be able to do something," she said.

Eric Wisotzky, head of the MedStar clinic, said he works with patients on strategies to manage their complaints — a "delicate balance" of exercise and rest.

Some even regain a lost sense of smell through a regimen of sniffing essential oils several times a day. — AFP

The hard-line Russian advisers who have Putin's ear



ANTON TROIANOVSKI

The writer is a Russian-born American journalist, Moscow bureau chief for *The NYT* and former Moscow bureau chief for *The Washington Post*

The West is legalising marriage between people and animals. Ukraine's leaders are as bad as Adolf Hitler, and the country's nationalists are "nonhumans."

These are the views found in President Vladimir Putin's inner circle, among the top Russian security officials who are likely to be at the table as their leader decides whether to launch an open war against Ukraine.

In remarks published by the Russian news media in the past year, these powerful men — largely born in the 1950s Soviet Union, as Putin was — have staked out even more reactionary positions than their president has, a sign of the harder-line turn that the Kremlin is taking as it escalates its fight with perceived enemies at home and abroad.

The rise of the security officials in the president's orbit traces Putin's evolution from a young leader who showed a friendly face to the West in the early 2000s — while surrounding himself with advisers who included prominent liberals — to the man now implicitly threatening to start a major war in Europe.

It is also a story of the Kremlin's yearlong struggle to craft an ideology to underpin Putin's rule: one that increasingly relies on a picture of the West as an enemy, of Ukraine as a threat and of Russia as a bulwark of "traditional values."

"This is an attempt collectively to form a counter ideology, since Putin doesn't have an ideology," Konstantin Remchukov, a Moscow newspaper editor with Kremlin ties, said of what he called the "conservative-reactionary" worldview of Russia's security elite. "The key postulate is that everyone is against Russia."

No one really knows how Putin makes his decisions or whom he listens to most as he considers his next steps. The Russian president, the Kremlin says, is reviewing written responses the United States and Nato delivered this past week to Moscow on its security demands — including a guarantee that Ukraine never become a member of

Nato.

On Friday, the Kremlin said the West's responses did not address Russia's biggest security concerns. But Putin himself has kept silent, avoiding public comment on Ukraine since December, despite on-camera appearances nearly every day.

That leaves the hawks around him to offer clues to his thinking. Some of them first met Putin working with him in the Soviet KGB and have been accused by Western officials of overseeing the assassinations, influence operations, cyberespionage and brutal warfare that have helped estrange the Kremlin from Europe and the US.

Putin is known for indulging misleading, anti-Western tropes, but his main national security adviser, Nikolai Patrushev, espouses them with even greater ardor. Putin paints a picture of enemies bent on falsifying Russia's glorious past, but his foreign intelligence chief, Sergei Naryshkin, has taken on the fight over history as a special priority.

Putin has embraced more state involvement in the economy, but his defence minister, Sergei K Shoigu, has taken that trend to an extreme by pitching a huge state-led effort to build new cities in Siberia.

"Some kind of time machine is taking us back into the worst years of Hitler's occupation," Naryshkin said of Ukraine this month, describing its pro-Western government as a "true dictatorship." He was opening an exhibit in Moscow titled "Human Rights Abuses in Ukraine."

Shoigu last month called Ukrainian nationalists "non humans." Patrushev has described the "Russophobia" in Ukraine as the outgrowth of a Western propaganda campaign dating to jealous European scribes who besmirched Ivan the Terrible.

"They didn't like that the Russian czar didn't recognise their political and moral leadership," Patrushev said of the 16th-century tyrant known for his fearsome secret police.

Now, as Putin weighs how far to raise the stakes in Ukraine, the question is how much he adopts the conspiratorial mindset of his hawks. In Moscow, some analysts still see a pragmatic streak in Putin.

He weighs the grievances and paranoia promoted by confidants like Patrushev, they say, against the more sober input of people like Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, a technocrat charged with keeping the economy running.

— The New York Times



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a flower-laying ceremony marking the 78th anniversary of lifting of the Leningrad siege during World War Two at the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery in Saint Petersburg. — Reuters

Life is a river...
and can't be
stagnant!



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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Who doesn't come across problems in life? If we expect life to be of comfort and easy then we are not living. So does it have to be one filled with twists and turns? My friend simply said, problems and issues will come and go but one will keep moving forward because rivers cannot be stagnant and dirty only puddles and small pools can be so.

Let's reflect on that thought — a wonderful compliment to the one in reference, but there is a bit of motivation in it too.

If we are going to let one problem stagnate us then we are losing focus on the concept of life. But is it possible to maintain parallel thoughts and stay hopeful?

Interestingly enough just the other day I met a person who is just 42 years old and has been to 56 countries and is now in the Sultanate of Oman. He is calm as he goes about his work and made me wonder about 56 nations and why he left the place where he was?

"Stress," he replied.

Sheriff explained he left his home very early after losing his mother while he was young and paying for his own school fees he felt life was not moving fast enough. While his siblings stayed on Sheriff just had to move forward.

Saw eyes turn tearful for a moment but he seems an expert and a tear drop was never formed as he said, "You do not want to hear it all, it will hurt you."

It is not like he never went back to his country in the African continent. He went back to his family only to travel out again.

Asked him why?

"Looking for life," he replied.

There are so many questions to ask him because so many of us would dare not to venture out to chase life. He may not have still found the life or the answer to the definition of life but he knew he needed a break from the stress and he took it.

"There was a lot of fear, plenty of it, over the years," he reflected.

The roaring river is now on a gentle flow in a reflecting mode. But remember still river runs deep. He has worked in so many places and is probably an expert on various working styles and rules.

And here we are probably stepping out for higher education or work in a foreign country after many considerations. But how about gate crashing and struggling to make a living with fear in the back of the mind yet succeeding to find a life partner and holding on to the will to see better days — all to seek the meaning of life.

I wonder if it is the loss of his mother, his world, at such a young age that made him rush out to meet life. Maybe he has more insight on life than most of us can ever comprehend.

"The fear I have seen makes me confident to do any work whether it is even just washing," he pointed out.

One thing I have already learnt from him is to never fear to take steps because the fact is he has never stopped and he has survived all the situations to narrate the story.

This is just the beginning of our conversation and there would be much more to learn from him — this is beauty of having conversations. And it still can start with, "Hello, what is your name?"

A question my teacher in Kindergarten taught. We practiced it endlessly asking each other in the classroom.

"See," I told another friend, "this is why I believe everyone has a story to tell"

To that my friend said, "And I believe everyone has their own battle."

And when it comes to my new friend, Sheriff, his story needs to be a book.

IF WE EXPECT LIFE TO BE OF COMFORT AND EASY THEN WE ARE NOT LIVING. SO DOES IT HAVE TO BE ONE FILLED WITH TWISTS AND TURNS?



UPSIDE DOWN!

People pose for photos outside the upside-down house, in Guatavita, near Bogota. The house was designed by its Austrian owner Fritz Schall. — AFP

See your new normal with
scenario planning



MIRIAM KUGEL
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The writer is a partner of New Metrics Academy, Muscat

As the world is trying to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, many company leaders are starting to prepare for the new reality of business. But what will business-as-usual look like post-pandemic? And how can we be sure we are preparing for the most likely scenario ahead – including potentially disruptive events like the pandemic? To get a grip on possible outcomes, many leaders are opting for scenario planning exercises as a useful tool to help steer their company confidently into the (many possible) future(s) ahead.

Woody Wade, renowned book author and Associate Scenario Planning Expert at New Metrics, and Philippe Georgiou, Associate Crisis Management Expert at New Metrics, share some of their views in an interview after recently running a scenario planning workshop for a financial services client in the Sultanate of Oman.

In a nutshell, what is scenario planning and how is it different from, say, forecasting?

Woody Wade explains: "They both look at the future, but in different ways. Scenario planning is a methodology that helps you foresee how your "big picture" might change — and recognise that it might not evolve only in the direction you expected. That's because completely different futures are always possible, depending on how key uncertainties play out. With scenario planning, you identify what these uncertainties are for your organisation, and what the different futures could realistically be, based on how they might resolve themselves. You go through a structured process that reveals alternative outcomes that are different but still entirely plausible."

"Forecasting, on the other hand, has more to do with trying to predict the future, usually in quantitative terms. Scenario planning is about foreseeing entire landscapes — so it's primarily qualitative. Of course, you can also quantify how various KPIs would be likely to evolve in those landscapes. But scenario planning isn't about trying to get the numbers right. You're not trying to predict or project what will happen but explore what could happen. The reason for doing this is simple: If you can foresee how more than one future might plausibly develop for your business, you can prepare yourself earlier for the opportunities — and challenges — that could arise in each one."

Philippe Georgiou adds: "Scenario Planning falls into the overall context of Crisis Management. By identifying

possible scenarios around critical uncertainties within a specific time frame, Scenario Planning complements the operational components of risk assessment, contingency planning, and business continuity planning by adding a strategic dimension to the forecasting exercise."

Woody, do you see this approach as relevant to businesses in the Sultanate of Oman?

AS A BUSINESS LEADER, IT IS IMPERATIVE TO THINK AHEAD, ANTICIPATE NOT ONE POSSIBLE FUTURE BUT A RANGE OF POSSIBLE FUTURES WITH THE BUSINESSES' POSITION IN THIS "NEW NORMAL" VIVIDLY EXPLORED AND REIMAGINED

"Absolutely. Leaders in every industry and every country share a common burden. It was Jeff Immelt, the former CEO of GE, who said, "I have to manage for tomorrow's world." If you're responsible for the future success — of an entire company or even just a single project — you have to make decisions today that may only play out in a year, or two years, or even longer. And millions may be on the line. So, you really need to have an idea how the future landscape could change, because that's where your decisions today will play out."

So, what can a company do to kick-start the planning process, especially when they don't know how to start?

Philippe Georgiou explains: "For

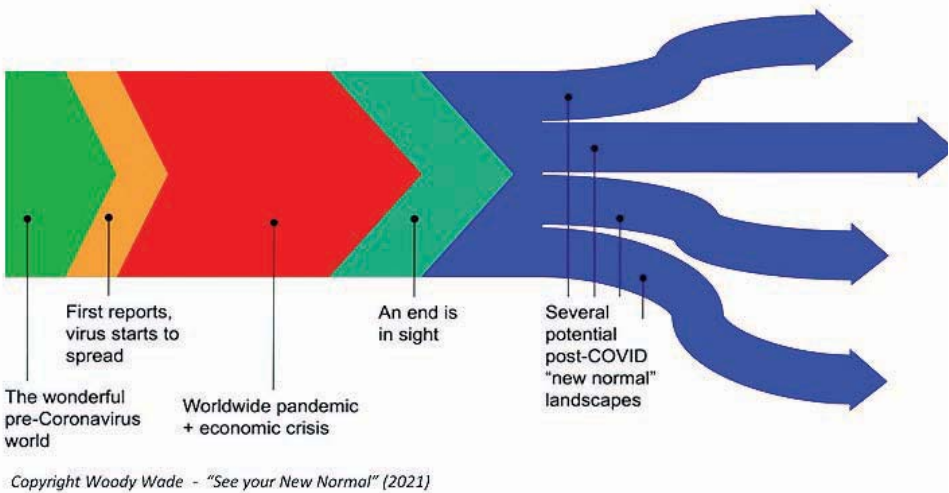
companies that like to explore Business Scenario Planning in the future, it is recommended to start with a 1–2-day co-creation workshop organised for the cross-functional management team. The workshop follows a logical, very structured process where the group of 10-15 managers will walk through the practical "how-to" aspects, with each part of the process underlined with the best examples applicable to the wider context of the business."

What is the expected outcome of such an exercise, Woody?

"The exercise's core objective is to generate a portfolio of possible scenarios and visualise them in a degree of relevant detail. In a final optional session — one that can take place immediately following the first session or after some time — we then work with the business leaders to develop a strategic response to each of the scenarios. Besides gaining practical know-how, the approach gives managers permission to try a completely new way of thinking. You're going to emerge with an appreciation for visualising the future in terms of alternative possibilities rather than the conventional way people think about the future, which is to assume that things will evolve in a linear, predictable way."

We all know that the future is going to be different. That's a given. But how will it be different? Scenario planning helps you foresee this. So as a business leader, it is imperative to think ahead, anticipate not one possible future but a range of possible futures with the businesses' position in this "new normal" vividly explored and reimaged.

(If you would like to connect with Woody or Philippe about Scenario Planning or Crisis Management or like to find out more about scenario planning workshops, please reach out to mkugel@newmetrics.net)



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SCHOPMAN EYES GREATER RESULTS AFTER ASIA CUP BRONZE

Indian women upbeat for World Cup

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 31

India women's hockey team is determined to reach their peak form for the upcoming Women's World Cup 2022. The talented bunch of players missed out on the Asia Cup title in Muscat last week when they lost narrowly to South Korea in the semifinal. Japan, who had beaten India 2-0 in the group stage, emerged champions after a comeback 4-2 win in the final against a hardworking South Korea. India head coach Janneke Schopman said the overall

performance of the team was satisfactory. "Yes, we had a great outing in the Tokyo Olympics. But under the epidemic circumstances, things are not smooth for the players." "We have performed our best in the Asia Cup, though it was not the result which we wanted", she told *Observer*. India blanked China 2-0 in the third place play-off of the Women's Asia Cup in Muscat on Friday. For India, Sharmila Devi found the target from a penalty corner in the 13th minute. The second goal was scored by Gurjit Kaur from another penalty corner in the 19th minute. "I would say we are overall

satisfied with the performance though we would have loved to be in the final. Result wise, we are not completely happy but performance-wise we are." Next up will be Women's World Cup 2022 in the Netherlands and Spain for India in June and the coach said they are looking forward to it. "World Cup will be great fun. We all are looking forward to it." "We have good experience in playing European teams. I think we will evolve better before the global showdown. There are some more players from whom we would choose from", Schopman replied to a query on the preparations for the World Cup. She said the

Asian Cup has come up well and the tournament showed more standard than expected. "The Asian teams have progressed well during the years. In the Tokyo Olympics, Japan had put up a good show and the same they are showing in Muscat", she said. **INDIA THRASH CHINA IN PRO-LEAGUE** The India head coach had told about better performance in the FIH Pro-League match against China on Monday. The team put that into reality as they thrashed China 7-1 in the first of the Pro-League match against Asia Cup semifinalists

China at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Navneet Kaur opened the scoring for India in the fifth minute with a field goal. Neha made it 2-0 in the 12th minute with another field goal. Vandana Katariya opened her Pro-League scoring with a field goal in the 40th minute. China made some serious efforts in the third quarter to take possession and attack more. In the 43rd minute, Xue Deng's cross to the box resulted in a wrong clearance by Indian defender Grace and rolled into the net for the first goal for China. Then after India pressed for more goals and goals came

aplenty. Player of the match Sharmila Devi scored a brace next as India led 5-1. Devi first converted a penalty stroke in the 47th minute and then found the target with a sharp second shot after her first hit was saved by China goalkeeper Surong Wu. India piled more misery to China by adding two more goals as goal-mouth raids earned them two penalty strokes. Gurjit Kaur (50th) and Pukhrambam Sushila (52) Chanu made no mistake from the spot as India wrapped up proceedings with a 7-1 margin. India will take on China in the second match on Tuesday.

Do-or-die clash for 'Red Warriors' against the 'Socceroos'

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 31

The Sultanate of Oman football team will eye only a victory as they face Australia on Tuesday to keep their hopes alive in advancing to the playoff spot in the Asian qualifiers — Road to Qatar 2022 for Group B. The match will kick off at 8:00 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex without attendance of the spectators in line with the decisions made by the Supreme Committee of Covid-19. 'Red Warriors' have no other

option unless snatching three points from the Socceroos as it is a do or die clash to revive the chances of ending in third place. Sultanate of Oman have only seven points from two victories, four defeats and one draw. Coach Branko Ivankovic's men performed a top show against Saudi Arabia last week in Jeddah despite the 1-0 defeat. Australia defeated Oman 3-1 in Doha in an away game and the Red Warriors will be chasing three points in the home game. **CRUCIAL GAME** The head coach of national football

team, Branko Ivankovic, said that the game is crucial for both teams. "Australia will look for a direct qualification and target the win in today's match. We will also continue fighting for the playoff spot and will aim for the victory. Seven players are in quarantine due to positive cases of Covid-19. Many other PCR tests took place on Monday to confirm the health status of the players and decide for the line-up", he added. The Croatian coach showed his full satisfaction on players' performance in the previous games. "I am confident with the

players' capabilities and they have a lot to deliver. We knew that Australia is a strong team but the players will fight for the winning. We showed top performance in the last games but could not score and lost the matches", he said. Responding to an inquiry on finishing the scoring attempts to goals, he said: "The strikers are the most significant part in football. We are working hard to prepare them during the training sessions and do many practices to ensure proper scoring tactics. Moreover, the team is playing with balance in all lines including defence, middle and the

attacking sides. The team now is a combination of young faces and experienced players and we are working in different short and long plans to prepare the team for the forthcoming assignment including AFC Asia Cup in China", he said. **TARGETING WIN** The national football team player, Ahmed al Khamisi, commenced his speech in the press meet wishing speed recovery for his team-mates and re-join the team soon. "It is a tough match and we knew the importance of this game for us. We will enter the pitch targeting

the result only. The spectators are always our supporters and will miss them in today's game. However, this is a good step to maintain their safety. We will deliver top efforts to spread joy among the audience", he concluded. Coach Graham Arnold, Head Coach of the Socceroos, said that the game will not be easy for both sides. "We will focus on this game and will forget the previous match. Absence of Sultanate of Oman's fans is a good advantage but the Sultanate of Oman team is well known in playing as a group and we aim for the win", he said.



United States' Antonee Robinson (5) battles for the ball with Canada defender Richie Laryea (22) during a CONCACAF Fifa World Cup Qualifier. — USA Today Sports

Canada stun US to close in on World Cup berth

HAMILTON, Canada: Canada took a giant step towards their first World Cup qualification in 36 years on Sunday after scoring an upset 2-0 victory over arch-rivals the United States in CONCACAF qualifiers.

A Cyle Larin goal after just seven minutes and an injury time effort from Sam Adekugbe secured all three points for the Canadians at a frigid Tim Hortons Field in Hamilton to extend the home side's lead at the top of the CONCACAF standings.

The unbeaten Canadians now have 22 points from four games with four fixtures remaining, pulling four points clear of the US who are second with 18 points.

Canada have emerged as the surprise package from the Central America, North America and the Caribbean qualifying region, and are now firmly on course for only their second trip to the World Cup after reaching the Mexico finals in 1986.

"We're turning into a football country," Canada's jubilant English coach John Herdman said afterwards.

"(The US) are a great team, a very good team, they had great quality today. But we matched their spirit.

"And that's what I said to our lads — we've got our own quality, and it came through."

Goalscorer Larin admitted a World Cup berth was within

reach.

"We're almost there," he said. "But we never settle for anything. We'll keep pushing."

Mexico are third in the standings level with the US on 18 points after drawing 0-0 with Costa Rica in Mexico City on Sunday.

The top three sides in the eight-team round-robin table qualify automatically for this year's finals in Qatar.

'RESULT HURTS'

But the defeat piles pressure on US coach Gregg Berhalter, whose team face Honduras at home on Wednesday before a tricky final three games in March which includes away trips to Mexico and Costa Rica and a home game against Panama.

"It's hard for me to remember a performance away from home this dominant without getting a result," Berhalter said afterwards. "The result hurts, the performance doesn't hurt."

The United States, aiming to atone for their shock failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, dominated possession and territory on Sunday but fell behind after a defensive lapse that allowed Turkey-based striker Larin to fire the hosts into the lead.

A Matt Turner goal kick was won by Kamal David who headed forward. — AFP

HOLDER

FINISHES OFF ENGLAND AS WINDIES WIN T20 SERIES



Jason Holder of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Chris Jordan of England during the 5th and final T20I in Barbados. — AFP

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados:

Local hero Jason Holder took four wickets in successive balls during a dramatic last over as the West Indies beat England by 17 runs in the fifth and deciding Twenty20 international at the Kensington Oval on Sunday for a 3-2 series win.

Akeal Hosein had already slowed England's progress with a format-best four for 30.

James Vince, who holed out for an innings top-score of 55, was among those who fell to the left-arm spinner.

England, however, were still in the game, needing 20 runs to reach a target of 180 when all-rounder Holder began to bowl the final over of the match at his Barbados home ground.

Despite starting the over with a no-ball, the towering paceman removed Chris Jordan and Sam Billings with his second and third legitimate deliveries via the aid of catches at deep midwicket by substitute fielder Hayden Walsh Jr.

Holder then had Adil Rashid

I pride myself on (not bowling) no-balls, pleased with how I came back, bowled a dot ball next up and then they had to come hard so I got the four wickets

JASON HOLDER

West Indies bowler

taken at deep square leg before ending the match when he bowled Saqib Mahmood, with both batsmen out for golden ducks.

Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga, Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Ireland's Curtis Campher are the only other men to take four wickets in four balls during a T20 international.

Holder finished with a career-best return of five for 27 in 2.5 overs, having already removed England stand-in captain Moeen

Ali.

"I pride myself on (not bowling) no-balls, pleased with how I came back, bowled a dot ball next up and then they had to come hard so I got the four wickets," said Holder.

The former West Indies captain was named both player of the match and series after taking 15 wickets across the five games — all at the Kensington Oval.

"I'm pumped up for the moment, I love playing at Kensington Oval," he added. "It's the best place in the world to play cricket."

'HOLDER'S TOWN'

Billings kept England in the game before falling for 41 off 28 balls as the tourists were dismissed for 162 in 19.5 overs.

West Indies captain Kieron Pollard led a late run-spree with a rapid 41 not out in a total of 179 for four.

His bowlers then finished the job as West Indies, beaten by 34 runs in the fourth T20 on Saturday, enjoyed a much-needed success after a one-day international series

loss at home to Ireland earlier this month.

"This was a different game from last night and we capitalised with the bat in the last four overs," said Pollard, who shared an unbroken stand of 74 in five overs with midweek century-maker Rovman Powell (35 not out).

"This is Jason Holder's ground, his town, but it was total team effort from us."

Moeen was again leading an England side missing injured captain Eoin Morgan, with the tourists deprived all series of T20 regulars Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes following their Ashes exertions.

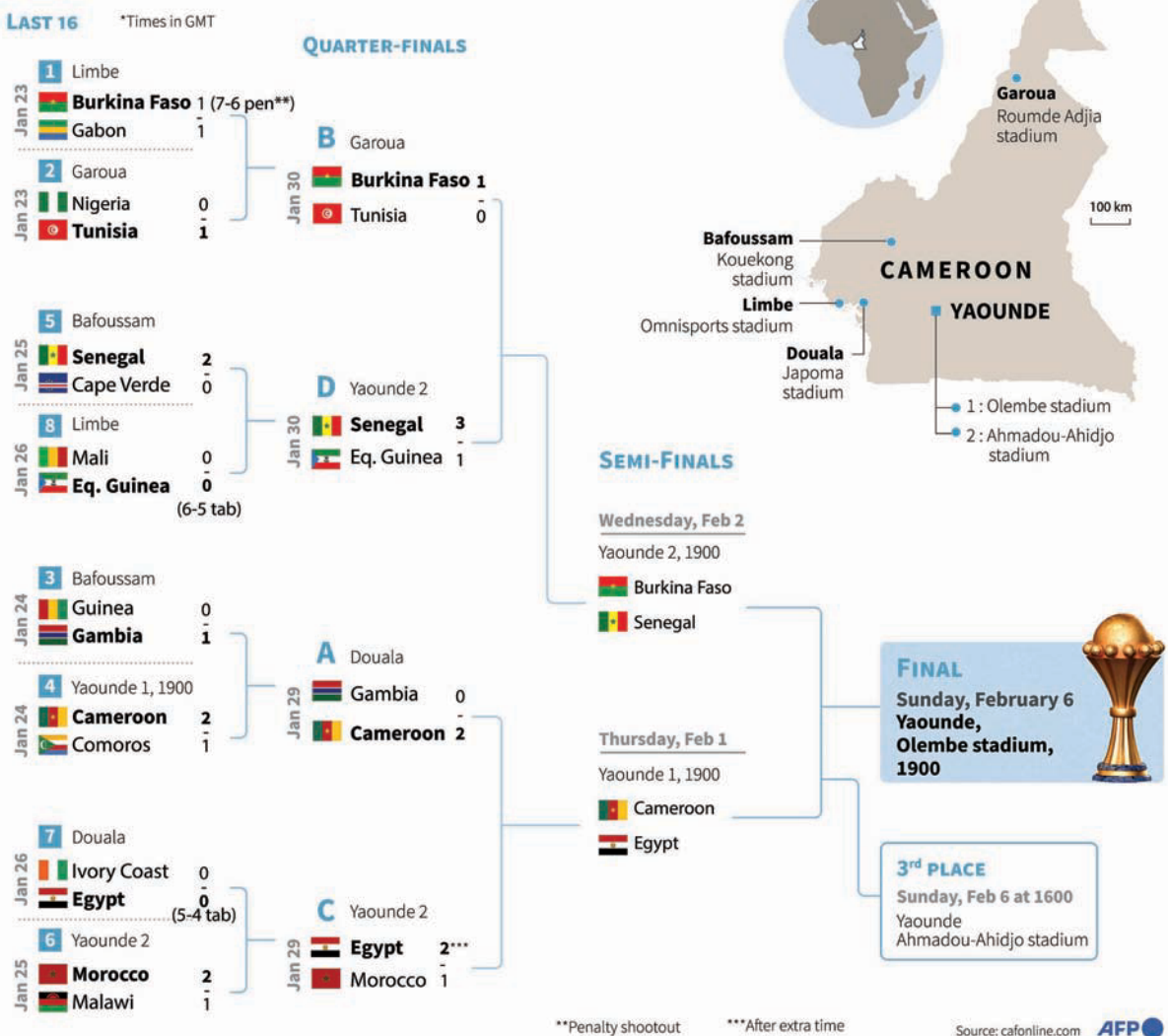
But Moeen was in no mood for excuses.

"I thought West Indies were the better team," he said, adding: "They were smarter than us today with bat and ball."

Brief scores: West Indies 179-4 in 20 overs (Kieron Pollard 41 no, Rovman Powell 35 no; Adil Rashid 2-17, Liam Livingstone 2-17) bt England 162 in 19.5 overs (James Vince 55, Sam Billings 41; Jason Holder 5-27, Akeal Hosein 4-30)

Africa Cup of Nations 2021

FINALS STAGE



Prathiesh bowls MCCC Yellow to victory; ISAS win big

MUSCAT: Prathiesh Hema picked up 4 for 26 to power MCCC Yellow to a 65-run win over Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) in a Junior League 30-over Under-16 clash at OAC 3 ground in Seeb on Saturday.

MCCC posted 177 for 9 on the board with major contributions coming from Sumanasekera (29), Mustaqeem Asif (26) and Prathiesh (24). Rahildaniyal Habibulla and Kriv Rajesh took two wickets each.

OCA failed to mount a challenge, folding up for a disappointing 112 in 22.3 overs due to brilliant bowling by Prathiesh (4 for 26) and Harshil Dinesh (2 for 16). Matoo Aleem topscored for OCA with 35 whereas Aaryan Punja scored 20.

Brief Scores (Junior Division U16): MCCC Yellow 177 for 9 in 30 overs (Sumanasekera Thineth

29 – 1x4, Mustaqeem Asif 26 – 2x4, Prathiesh Hema 24 – 2x4. Rahildaniyal Habibulla 2-33, Kriv Rajesh 2-29) beat OCA 112 all out in 22.3 overs (Matto Aleem 35 – 3x4, Prathiesh Hema 4-26, Harshil Dinesh 2-16) by 65 runs.

ISAS too good for PSM

In another Under-16 encounter, magnificent centuries by Lakshmi Narayana (168 off 100) and Vishwash (106 not out off 65) steered Indian School Al Seeb (ISAS) to a massive 128-run victory against Pakistan School Muscat at Muscat Municipality ground 3 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

ISAS amassed 321 for 5 in 30 overs thanks to top knocks by the two centurions and then went on to restrict PSM to 193 for 5 for an emphatic victory.

Brief Scores (Junior Division U16): ISAS 321 for 5 in 30 overs (Lakshmi Narayana 168 – 20x4, 1x6,

Vishwash 106 not out – 14x4) beat PSM 193 for 5 in 30 overs (Ahsan Hayat 76 – 12x4, Muhammad Asad 58 – 10x4) by 128 runs.

Brief Scores (Junior Division U13):

BSC 107 all out in 27.1 overs (Suresh Kiran 40 – 3x4, Noronha Nihal 3-11, Shetty Ayush 3-12, Midhun Gautham 2-12) lost to ISWK B 108 for 3 in 8.2 overs (Nadendla Nitish 47 – 5x4, 1x6, Damni Jinansh 37 – 6x4, Rahman Abdul 2-10) by 7 wickets.

Brief Scores (Junior Division U16):

ISWK A 238 for 5 in 30 overs (Krishhang Srivastava 64 – 7x4, Aum Nrupen 57 – 9x4, Saumyabhavin Sampat 38 – 4x4, Khasbage Toyash 2-35) beat MCCC Blue 159 all out in 26.4 overs (Khasbage Toyash 75 – 7x4, Saumyabhavin Sampat 3-31) by 79 runs.

Brief Scores (Junior Division U13):

IS Al Seeb 153 for 5 in 20 overs (Sujay 60 – 4x4, Shezin 30 – 3x4) lost to BSC A 154 for 4 in 15.1 overs (Dhuri Nimish 55 – 8x4, Vignesh Karthikeyan 40 – 6x4) by 6 wickets



A combination image shows Spain's Rafael Nadal with his 21 Grand Slam title trophies. – Reuters

NADAL TRIUMPH SLAMS DOOR ON YOUNG PRETENDERS AGAIN



ROGER FEDERER,
20-TIME GRAND
SLAM WINNER

“What a match! To my friend and great rival, Rafael Nadal. Heartfelt congratulations on becoming the first man to win 21 Grand Slam singles titles. “A few months ago we were joking about both being on crutches. Amazing. Never underestimate a great champion. Your incredible work ethic, dedication and fighting spirit are an inspiration to me and countless others around the world. “I am proud to share this era with you and honoured to play a role in pushing you to achieve more. As you have done for me for the past 18 years. “I am sure you have more achievements ahead but for now enjoy this one!”



NOVAK DJOKOVIC,
20-TIME GRAND
SLAM WINNER

“Congratulations to@rafaelNadal for 21st GS. Amazing achievement. Always impressive fighting spirit that prevailed another time.”



DANIIL MEDVEDEV
2-TIME GRAND
SLAM WINNER

“It was insane. The level was very high. You (Nadal) raised your level after two sets... I thought you are going to get tired, maybe just a little, but you won the match. “You’re an amazing champion and I think you guys (Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Nadal) have a good rivalry still. It’s not over yet. “Congratulations, it was unbelievable.”



Spain's Rafael Nadal sits alongside the trophy during a press conference after winning the final against Russia's Daniil Medvedev. – Reuters

MELBOURNE: Not only did Rafael Nadal's staggering comeback victory over Daniil Medvedev in the Australian Open final earn him a men's record 21st Grand Slam title it also showed once again the folly of assuming a new order is seizing power in men's tennis.

When Medvedev ambushed Novak Djokovic's hopes of reaching 21 and a first men's calendar-year Slam since 1969 in last year's US Open final, it felt like a seismic shift with the Russian leading a takeover at the top.

That looked even more likely when the 35-year-old Nadal arrived in Melbourne after almost six months out with a foot injury as the lone rider of the fabled “big three”.

Roger Federer was back in Switzerland rehabilitating his injured knee while nine-times Australian Open champion Djokovic was embroiled in a visa row sparked by his decision not to have a Covid-19 vaccine and was eventually be deported.

It left Spaniard Nadal, battle-scarred and having recently tested positive for Covid, to fight off the young vanguard single-handed — surely a task too much for even the greatest warrior tennis has ever seen.

Djokovic's self-inflicted exile left Medvedev as the red-hot favourite, and if it wasn't him to lift his second Grand Slam title, surely one of Olympic champion Alexander Zverev or Stefanos Tsitsipas would step up to make his big breakthrough.

Nadal, seeded six, had never flown so low under the radar leading into a Grand Slam tournament, even if he had won a warm-up event in Melbourne the week before.

Yet the warrior-like instincts kicked in and we were all reminded that Nadal, as long as he is standing, remains a physical and psychological force of nature on a tennis court.

Russian powerhouse Karen Khachanov (25), Canadian Denis Shapovalov (22) and Italian

Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini (25) all succumbed as Nadal surged through the draw, before completing the greatest comeback of his career to outlast Medvedev in a five-hour 24 minute epic.

It means Nadal, a few months after doubting whether he would return at all, is now leading the race to end with the most Grand Slam titles, when the assumption had been that Djokovic would be the one to reach uncharted territory.

NEXT TARGET

The French Open will be Nadal's next target and after his astonishing feats in Melbourne, few would dismiss his chances of adding a 14th title on the Parisian clay — the surface that has underpinned his career.

Win that and he would move two clear of Federer and Djokovic and while Grand Slam titles are not the only metric used in a G.O.A.T (greatest of all time) debate many think is frivolous, it would make him difficult to catch.

“I have to say that I thought he lost the race when he lost to Novak Djokovic in the semis of Roland Garros last year,” seven-times Grand Slam champion Mats Wilander told Eurosport.

“That was it, I thought: Nadal is out of the race. He's not going to be able. Maybe he wins another French, but most probably not, and he's not going to win the other tournaments. And suddenly we're here. It's incredible.”

Throughout their careers, Nadal, Federer and Djokovic have inspired each other to even greater heights, however, and Nadal's resurgence could have that effect again.

Djokovic has taken a beating in the past month but watching Nadal claim the major title he imagined he would celebrate in Melbourne will surely drive him on.

And Federer may be 40, but he remains capable of providing the sport with one last magical hurrah. — Reuters



BORIS BECKER,
SIX-TIME GRAND
SLAM CHAMPION

“It was a day made for tennis history. We didn't have Nadal at the top of our list a fortnight ago. He was fit, won the preparation tournament in Melbourne. “Before that, Nadal was injured for half a year. Now we are wiser and Rafa has broken the record of Federer and Djokovic. “You make a mistake if you still call Rafa the clay court king. He has won on every surface and every Grand Slam tournament at least twice. He is the most successful player of all time, we can say that loud and clear.”



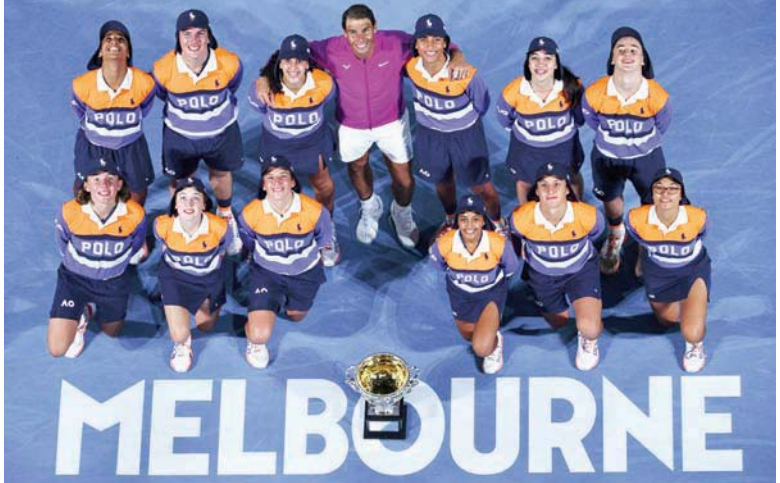
BILLIE JEAN KING,
12-TIME SINGLES
GRAND SLAM WINNER

“The mental and physical marathon of a 5-hour Grand Slam final requires grit, guts, spirit, & determination. Congratulations to @RafaelNadal on his 21st Grand Slam! What a comeback!”



ROD LAVER,
AUSTRALIAN
TENNIS GREAT

“Two AO (Australian Open) crowns and 21 majors, given everything you have endured this historic victory is so special Rafa. “It has been a privilege to watch you doing what you love. Congratulations.”



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates with the trophy and ball kids after winning the men's singles final against Russia's Daniil Medvedev. – Reuters

business

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Bright prospects for stainless steel, copper projects

NEW PROSPECTS: Sohar Port and Freezone spells out opportunities for metals-related investments in stainless steel, copper concentration and downstream processing, and aluminium processing

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Sohar Port and Freezone (SOHAR) has invited local and international investors to consider opportunities for investment downstream of its thriving, multibillion dollar metals cluster currently centred around iron and steel production, and ferrochrome and aluminium smelting.

At a joint webinar organised by the port in partnership with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), SOHAR representatives highlighted

investment opportunities in three specific metals-related processing activities: stainless steel manufacturing, copper concentration and processing, and aluminium downstream processing.

SOHAR Commercial Officer Mohammed al Kindi noted that feedstock from the industrial port's metals cluster, combined with the abundant availability of key minerals, represent attractive opportunities for metals-based downstream investments in SOHAR.

"Oman has an abundance of metal deposits ready to be mined and processed; SOHAR already an established and developed metals cluster. There are multiple opportunities to join this sector and to develop downstream activities based on the upstream investments we currently have," Al Kindi stated.

Particularly promising, he said, is the potential for stainless steel manufacturing capacity

— the absence of which currently leaves the Sultanate of Oman dependent on imports estimated at around 500,000 tonnes of stainless steel products annually.

With iron/steel and ferrochrome — two key ingredients in the production of stainless steel — presently produced in sizable quantities within SOHAR, investments in a stainless steel plant would make good business sense, he noted.

Brazilian miner Vale's iron ore processing complex at Sohar Port can be a source of iron ore pellets for any stainless steel plant, while Al Tamman IndSil — which operates a 75,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) capacity ferrochrome smelter at the freezone — can supply the required ferrochrome, he explained.

Additionally, the Sultanate of Oman is endowed with chromite ore and iron ore mines, which

Oman has an abundance of metal deposits ready to be mined and processed; SOHAR already an established and developed metals cluster. There are multiple opportunities to join this sector and to develop downstream activities based on the upstream investments we currently have

MOHAMMED AL KINDI
Commercial Officer, SOHAR

can be exploited for the required feedstock to supply any stainless steel project planned at SOHAR, Al Kindi pointed out.

Equally prospective are opportunities for investment in copper concentration activities in SOHAR, said the official.

A concentrator project, he said, will prove valuable in processing raw copper ore generated from copper mines located in North Al Batinah Governorate, among other locations, in line with the government's localisation objectives. With exports of copper ore curtailed by authorities with a view to supporting In-Country Value (ICV) creation, a copper concentration plant represents a promising investment opportunity, he said.

Concentration will result in

the production of copper ingots, which can either be exported or offered to downstream industries for further processing into wires or other copper products — activities that will contribute to job creation and GDP growth, he further noted.

Likewise, hot metal or ingots from Sohar Aluminium's giant smelter at SOHAR can serve as feedstock for a range of downstream applications, such as automotive parts and wheels (for transportation), aluminium cans (for packaging), oil and gas equipment, and machinery, said Al Kindi.

Sohar Aluminium currently allocates a sizable proportion of its hotel metal output to a range of downstream plants operating in the vicinity of the smelter.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS

The Rural Areas Electricity Company (S.A.O.C) invites following tenders:

Tender No	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 02/2022	Extension of Power Supply to Nimer Area At Wilayat Al Jazzier - Al Wusta Governorate	383/=	"C" and above	15/02/2022	28/02/2022
Tanweer - 03/2022	11 kV Power Extension Project for Light Industries and Showroom Area at Wilayat Duqm- AL Wusta Governorate	95/=	"C" and above	15/02/2022	28/02/2022
Tanweer - 04/2022	Supply Extension of HV Works to Feed Power Supply to Fishery Port at Duqm in Al Duqm Wilayat (SEZAD) - Al Wusta Governorate	46/=	"C" and above	15/02/2022	28/02/2022

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board (valid certificate), Tanweer and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer).
- Offers Submission:**
 - Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tenders No. Tanweer -02/2022 to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Tanweer.
 - Tender No. Tanweer -03/2022 & Tanweer -04/2022, to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Purchase Committee**, Tanweer.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Tanweer without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787

Tanweer
P.O Box 1166, P.C. 133, Al Seeb, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800, Fax: +968 24250892
info@tanweer.nama.om | www.tanweer.om

Mechanism for aligning financial performance with budget estimates

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance held a workshop, via video-conferencing, focusing on the mechanism to be adopted by various government ministries and agencies for aligning their financial performance with the allocations of the State Budget.

The event, which saw the participation of representatives of government units, aims to clarify the mechanism used within the initiative of adjusting the financial performance of the State Budget.

The mechanism targets ensuring that government units stick to the plan approved to

achieve efficiency in executing the State Budget 2022, as well reaching the envisaged economic and social objectives. The workshop compared the procedures and challenges faced during the past years and ways of enhancing and

developing mechanisms of adjusting financial performance for the State Budget 2022.

The Ministry of Finance urged government units to submit a statement on a monthly basis to disburse financial liquidity for the approved budget. The ministry will also review the monthly financial performance of each unit and give comments.

The ministry reaffirmed the importance of commitment and submitting monthly reports and comments to ensure achieving controls and fundamentals sought by the State Budget during 2022. — ONA

Bank Nizwa offers instant auto finance



MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leadings and most trusted Islamic bank, has announced a tie-up with Islamic Finance Initiation Network (IFIN) — the first-of-its-kind Shariah-compliant fintech solution — allowing customers to finance their desired items instantly.

The new liaison will commence with 'Instant Car Finance', making Bank Nizwa the first in the country to offer on-the-spot approval to finance cars. It will allow Bank customers to complete their car financing procedures while visiting the showrooms of participating car dealers'.

This will eliminate the need to visit the Bank's branches and provide customers a faster solution to obtaining their auto finance. This is expected to further fuel the auto industry and enhance customers' purchasing power.

Strategised as a '10-minute financing process', the instant approval service will translate as easy and simple application process and time-saving instant financing.

Commenting on the new tie-up, Arif al Zaabi, AGM retail of Bank Nizwa, said, "As the financial partner of choice for the people and enterprises in the country, it is our responsibility keep our fingers on the pulse of the market and adapt to the changing times.

With this new initiative, we are providing a much needed breakthrough for the auto industry and consumers who have car purchase on their wish list.

We have consistently endeavoured to provide innovative digital finance solutions for our customers, and our partnership with IFIN is an extension of our ongoing work in that direction."

OIFC partners with Bank Muscat for transaction banking platform

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate and Oman Investment & Finance Co Khedmah (OIFC), the leading billing and collection services provider for utilities in the Sultanate of Oman, have tied up to enable OIFC to use the bank's Transaction Banking platform, especially to manage its liquidity needs. The agreement was signed by Ilham bint Murtadha al Hamaid, General Manager — Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat and Saud bin Ahmed al Siyabi, Chief Operating Officer, OIFC Khedmah. OIFC, which already uses Online Banking and Remote Deposit Capture (RDC), will now also use the bank's Liquidity Management Solution of automated 'Sweeps' for managing its various liquidity needs efficiently.

The bank's automated Sweep solution involves the rule-based physical movement of funds between different bank accounts for the purpose of efficient utilisation of funds. This allows the bank's corporate customers to optimise liquidity available across multiple bank accounts and currencies.

Some of the main benefits of the Liquidity Management Solution include: Better visibility of funds



position, increased control over the use and allocation of internal resources, increase in operational efficiency by automating cash concentration and better insights through various information reports.

Speaking on the occasion, Ilham bint Murtadha al Hamaid, General Manager — Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "Over the past few years, Bank Muscat has been spearheading the digitalisation trend in the Sultanate, which is helping our Corporate customers transact quickly and efficiently, while minimising the data-entry related

risks in the payment process and improving overall security. We are pleased to strengthen our existing partnership with OIFC and offer our state-of-the-art automated Sweep solution, which will optimise cash flows and offer real-time insights for greater transparency and control, thereby enabling better-informed decisions." Saud bin Ahmed al Siyabi, Chief Operating Officer, OIFC Khedmah said: "OIFC Khedmah is the leading company in the Sultanate of Oman in the field of billing and collections for four decades, and today has outlets, branches and bill-

payment machines located across the country. We are delighted to partner with Oman's leading financial services provider as part of the overall strategy of digitalisation of the economy. The new Liquidity Management solution provided by Bank Muscat will enable complete control and visibility of funds; superior cash flow management; improved predictability of cash flows and efficient conversion of cash balances lying in our different group accounts. This will in turn lead to better operating efficiencies and customer satisfaction for OIFC."

Khimji Ramdas ICT and Motori announce strategic alliance

MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas Information & Communication Technology (Khimji Ramdas ICT) and Motori for Smart Services Limited (Motori) are pleased to announce their strategic alliance to digitally transform the automotive insurance claims industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Motori pioneered the creation of intelligent platforms for the automotive insurance claims industry, connecting stakeholders such as insurance companies, policy holders, vehicle licensing authority, agencies/workshops, loss adjusters and others under a single "one-stop shop" digital umbrella. This digitisation allows for a seamless and automated claims process resulting in a faster processing time, transparency, and cost enhancements for stakeholders.

Ahmed Eissa, Chief Executive



Officer for Motori commented: "Oman is an important market for Motori's regional expansion plans. We believe we can add tremendous value for the stakeholders in the automotive insurance claims industry in the Sultanate of Oman by providing customised solutions for the Omani market and the success in managing such platforms given our experience. We look forward to introducing Motori to the Omani market with Khimji Ramdas ICT as one of the leading business groups in Oman."

"Our strategic alliance

with Motori allows us to offer innovative solutions to the Omani market and to be a lead partner to the stakeholders in the motor insurance industry in the Sultanate of Oman. With decades of experience across a breadth of industries in the Sultanate of Oman through its parent company Khimji Ramdas LLC, Khimji Ramdas ICT division is dedicated to offering technology solutions to the Omani market," commented Meenal Madavi, Division Head of ICT Infrastructure Cluster at Khimji Ramdas LLC.

OAB, Visa to launch 'Advantage'

MUSCAT: In line with its continuous endeavours to provide high-quality services to all its customers across various segments, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently signed up with the world's leader in digital payments, Visa, to collaborate for its new 'Advantage' segment.

This is aimed at offering Visa Platinum debit and credit cards to the upper mass segment, which are customers with salaries ranging from RO 1,000 – RO 3,499 or deposit RO 10,000 –34,999. Setting itself apart from competitors, the debit card offers a limited time 1 per cent cashback on all digital and POS transactions for the first time in the Sultanate, alongside hosting attractive rates, exclusive travel benefits and more. Commenting on the signing and the launch of 'Advantage', Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, "At OAB,

we believe that all the facilities we offer must be inclusive and customised to best meet the needs of our large customer base, especially with regard to their respective earning tiers.

Targeted towards customers within the mid-salary range (from RO 1,000 – RO 3,499 or deposit RO 10,000 –34,999), 'Advantage' seeks to provide them with a myriad of opportunities and enrich their overall banking experience with OAB. A unique aspect of the new facility that places it ahead of its competitors is that it is the first debit card in the Sultanate of Oman to provide a 1 per cent cashback on all digital and POS transactions, while also opening the door for our customers to step into a world of incredible advantages." From her side, Dr Saeeda Jaffar, Visa's Group Country Manager for GCC, said, "Visa is delighted to partner with

OAB to launch their new Visa Platinum card with a unique proposition tailored for their 'Advantage' segment customers. Our cardholders in the Sultanate of Oman enjoy the security, convenience and reliability of their Visa cards — and now, with this new Visa Platinum card from OAB, they will also be rewarded every time they pay. This product is a great way to expose more consumers to the benefits of digital commerce and encourage business at our merchant partners in the Sultanate of Oman. We look forward to growing our partnership with OAB by developing more innovative digital payment products and enabling the bank to deliver the secure, frictionless and rewarding payment experiences our Visa cardholders in the Sultanate of Oman increasingly expect and deserve."

Experience distinctive luxury with Lincoln range

MUSCAT: Owning a Lincoln is now an even more delightful experience with exclusive benefits across the range. Enthusiasts can now look forward service 5 years / 100,000 kms, 1 year registration and 3M window tint. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom.) The campaign is valid until March 9, 2022.

Luxury automotive enthusiasts can choose from an exciting range of vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman. They include the family-size Lincoln Navigator, Lincoln Nautilus, the Lincoln Aviator and

the Lincoln Corsair.

The Navigator, combines modern luxury with advanced technology — elevating family travel to first class. A twin-turbo V6 engine that can produce 450 horsepower provides smooth power whenever you need it, delivered through a 10-speed transmission. Navigator's lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride.

The Aviator is packed with advanced technologies that let the luxury SUV rise up to greet you,



and scan the road ahead to glide through an uneven pavement. Aviator offers the kind of capability premium clients require in a

three-row SUV, with available all-wheel drive. The standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine, paired with a 10-speed SelectShift

automatic transmission, it delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration. The Corsair embraces elements of both the full-size Lincoln Navigator and three-row Lincoln Aviator while building on these cues with even more flair. Painstakingly sculpted in clay, Corsair features exquisite contouring throughout the body section of the door, offering a deep landscape of curvature and relief with a fast-falling roofline. Staying true to its Quiet Flight DNA, Corsair is engineered to deliver

the effortless drive experience and sensation of gliding over the road. A standard 2.0-litre with a targeted 245 horsepower is mated to a new 8-speed automatic transmission for agile performance.

The attractive and luxurious Lincoln Nautilus is bold, stylish and powerful. The Lincoln Nautilus is equipped with a turbocharged engine line-up. Delivering a luxurious driver environment with SUV flexibility, the Nautilus offers a stunning exterior design. Inside, the cabin is welcoming and keeps all occupants comfortable.



India forecasts world-beating economic growth in 2022

MUMBAI: India expects to lead the world in economic growth this year in a post-pandemic bounceback, government forecasts showed, but with expansion slowing despite widespread vaccine coverage and recovering exports. Covid pummelled Asia's third-largest economy, which suffered its worst recession since independence in 1947 after a drastic lockdown brought factories and consumer spending to a standstill.

Last year saw the economy bounce back to pre-pandemic levels despite a devastating virus outbreak that overwhelmed hospitals, with 9.2 per cent growth estimated for the 12 months to March 2022.

But with the recovery now tapering, India expects slower growth of 8.0-8.5 per cent for the following financial year, according to the annual economic survey presented to parliament on Monday.

"The economy is in a good place to grow strongly into the next year or two and all the macro stability indicators suggest that there is a fair amount of buffer", said Sanjeev Sanyal, the finance ministry's principal economic adviser.

The report puts India well ahead of the IMF's 2022 calendar year forecasts for other major economies, with neighbouring China expected to grow 4.8 per cent in the year to December. — **AFP**

Oman reinforces commitment to sustainable development



KEY FORUM: Oman Sustainability Week to take place from March 13 - 17, 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 31

Acknowledging the need for sustainable development to achieve economic growth, attain social inclusion and protect the country's environment, the Sultanate of Oman has been committed to the principles of sustainability and has spearheaded innovative programmes that advocate its quintessential role in the development of the country.

At a press conference on January 31, 2022 at Crowne Plaza Qurum, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), CONNECT (Oman Exhibitions Organising Company LLC), in partnership with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) announced the dates for the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) event to be organised under the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

A national-level event dedicated to sustainability, OSW will be hosted under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin



bin Haitham al Said who will inaugurate the week on March 14, 2022, at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

The press conference highlighted the role of sustainable development and the Sultanate of Oman's stance in the matter and also featured distinguished panellists including Abdul-Amir bin Ajmi al Ajmi, External Affairs and Value Creation Director at PDO, Dr Mohab al Hinai, Head of the Centre for Sustainability and Circular Economy, be'ah, Chokri Ben Amor, Committee Chairperson of the Gaia Summit, Muhanad al Kiyumi, Business Partner — CEO Alternative Energy from OQ, Ghada al Yousef, Executive Manager of Nama Group and Malak al Shaibani, External Relations Country General Manager of Shell Development Oman.

"Sustainable development is not a choice but a prerequisite for development. It is essential that we strike the right balance between economic growth and conservation of our environment",

said Al Ajmi.

"In line with the goals laid out in Oman Vision 2040 to achieve a developed, diversified and sustainable national economy, there has been an immense concentration on the efficient utilisation of technology and optimisation of resources to ensure a sustainable approach to increasing consumption and GDP.

Strategic national events like OSW will reinforce sustainable development as a key feature of governance and highlight its critical role in the diversification of the economy. With several projects already under way, Oman has been dedicated to achieving a green economy through green strategies and renewable energy production."

Aligning itself to the UN Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and engaging the national development stakeholders to present Oman as a model for sustainable development, the week-long event will comprise of an exhibition, conference,

thought leadership summit, site visits and awards.

While the Oman Sustainability Week Expo will showcase an exhibition featuring the latest sustainability technologies, solutions and initiatives from across the world, the International Sustainability Resources and Technology Conference (ISRTC), which is set to be held from March 14 to 16, will connect local and global stakeholders to foster constructive debate and enhance cross-collaboration.

The C-level thought leadership, Gaia Summit, will be scheduled from March 13 to 14, and the OSW site visits on the final day of the week will offer attendees an opportunity to visit projects that are at the forefront of building a sustainable environment across the country.

Meanwhile, the OSW Awards, which is slated to be held on March 13, will honour the vital contributions to sustainability that have helped businesses to set themselves apart from competitors.

Oil prices rise, hover near 7-year highs on supply fears



A worker fills a vehicle with petrol at a gas station in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — **AFP**

TOKYO: Oil rose 1 per cent on Monday, hovering near 7-year highs hit in the previous session, amid concerns over tight supply as well as geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Brent crude rose 92 cents, or 1.0 per cent, to \$90.95 a barrel at 0051 GMT, after adding 69 cents on Friday. The front-month contract for March delivery expires later in the day.

The most-active Brent contract, for April delivery, was trading at \$89.69, up \$1.17 or 1.3 per cent. US West Texas Intermediate crude rose 99 cents, or 1.1 per cent, to

\$87.81 a barrel, having gained 21 cents on Friday.

Both benchmarks recorded their highest since October 2014 on Friday, \$91.70 and \$88.84, respectively, and a sixth straight weekly gain.

"Underlying anxiety about global supply shortages, coupled with ongoing geopolitical risks, have caused the market to start the week on a strong note", said Toshitaka Tazawa, an analyst at Fujitomi Securities Co Ltd.

"With an expectation that Opec+ will keep the existing policy of gradual increase of production, oil prices will likely

stay on a bullish sentiment this week", he said, predicting Brent to remain above \$90 a barrel and WTI to head toward \$90.

Major producers in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allies led by Russia, collectively known as Opec+, have raised their output target each month since August by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) as they unwind record production cuts made in 2020.

But they have failed to meet their production targets as some members have struggled with capacity constraints. — **Reuters**

Euro zone economy rebounded in 2021 after Covid crash

BRUSSELS: The euro zone economy posted robust growth last year, official data showed on Monday, but fallout from the Omicron variant and an energy crunch have raised doubts about the bloc's ability to sustain the pace.

While historic, the 5.2 per cent expansion failed to regain all the ground lost to the crash suffered in 2020, when the first shock of the coronavirus pandemic saw the euro zone contract by a cataclysmic 6.4 per cent.

The strength of the euro zone's recovery trailed the boom in the United States, which grew by 5.6 per cent in 2021. China's leapt by 8.1 per cent, according to government data.

The Eurostat data office said the full 27-country EU economy, which includes several large economies that do not use the euro such as Poland and Sweden, grew by 5.9 per cent. Analysts said the rebound showed strong divergences especially late in the year, with export powerhouse Germany seeing negative growth in the final quarter, and France, Spain and Italy expanding healthily.

Jessica Hinds of Capital Economics warned that for the euro zone's core economies, where Germany is essential, "further gains will be much harder going, particularly against a backdrop of still acute supply shortages". — **AFP**



A vial and a syringe are seen in front of a displayed EU flag and words "Omicron SARS-CoV-2" in illustration. — **AFP**

China factory activity growth slows, demand wanes

BEIJING: Growth in China's factory activity slowed in January as a resurgence of Covid-19 cases and tough lockdowns hit production and demand, but the slight expansion offered some signs of resilience as the world's second-largest economy enters a likely bumpy new year.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) registered 50.1 in January, remaining above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction, but slowing from 50.3 in December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Sunday.

Analysts had expected the PMI to fall to 50.

The official results contrasted with those in a private survey of mostly small manufacturers in coastal regions, which showed activity fell at the fastest rate in 23 months.

China's economy started last year strong, reviving from a sharp pandemic-induced slump, but it started losing momentum in the summer, weighed down by debt problems in the property market and strict anti-virus measures that hit consumer confidence and spending. Rising raw material costs and



Workers are seen at a production line manufacturing solar photovoltaic components at a factory in Huzhou, Zhejiang province, China. — **Reuters**

soft demand have also eroded corporate profit margins.

Profits at industrial firms rose at their slowest pace in December for more than a year and a half.

With the real estate slump expected to drag on through at least the first half of this year and the emergence of more infectious Covid-19 variants, China's central bank has started cutting interest rates and pumping more cash into the financial system to lower borrowing costs.

Further modest easing steps are expected in coming weeks. Stability will trump everything ahead of a once-in-five-years

Communist Party congress this year, with policymakers looking to ward off a sharper slowdown that could undermine job creation.

But such easing carries risks, as other global central banks like the US Federal Reserve are preparing to raise interest rates, which could spur potentially destabilising capital outflows from emerging markets like China.

The IMF cut its China 2022 growth forecast to 4.8 per cent, from 5.6 per cent previously, reflecting the property woes and the hit to consumption from strict Covid-19 curbs. — **Reuters**

It’s hard to tell when the crypto bubble will burst, or if there is one

EMILY FLITTER AND KARL RUSSELL

Since late November, some of the world’s savviest cryptocurrency investors have been hooked on a game that has cartoon sheep, cartoon wolves, a digital currency called \$wool — and the potential to make real money.

Graham Friedman, a self-described crypto evangelist, is among them. Friedman put up more than \$20,000 of his own money to buy one wolf and one sheep — or, rather, unique digital images of them called non-fungible tokens.

“I’m like, dude, the narrative is so cool,” said Friedman, a director at Republic Crypto, a digital asset strategy company. “I’m here for the waltz.”

Wolf Game, as it is called, applies some familiar financial principles to a mysterious digital world. Players can buy sheep from the creator of the game, identified only as “the Shepherd,” and lend them back to “the barn” — essentially a storehouse — to earn interest.

The payments are in \$wool, a digital token that can be used as a form of payment anywhere on the Ethereum blockchain, on which the game is built.

To get a sheep back from the barn, players must pay a 20 per cent tax in \$wool to those who bought digital images of cartoon wolves.

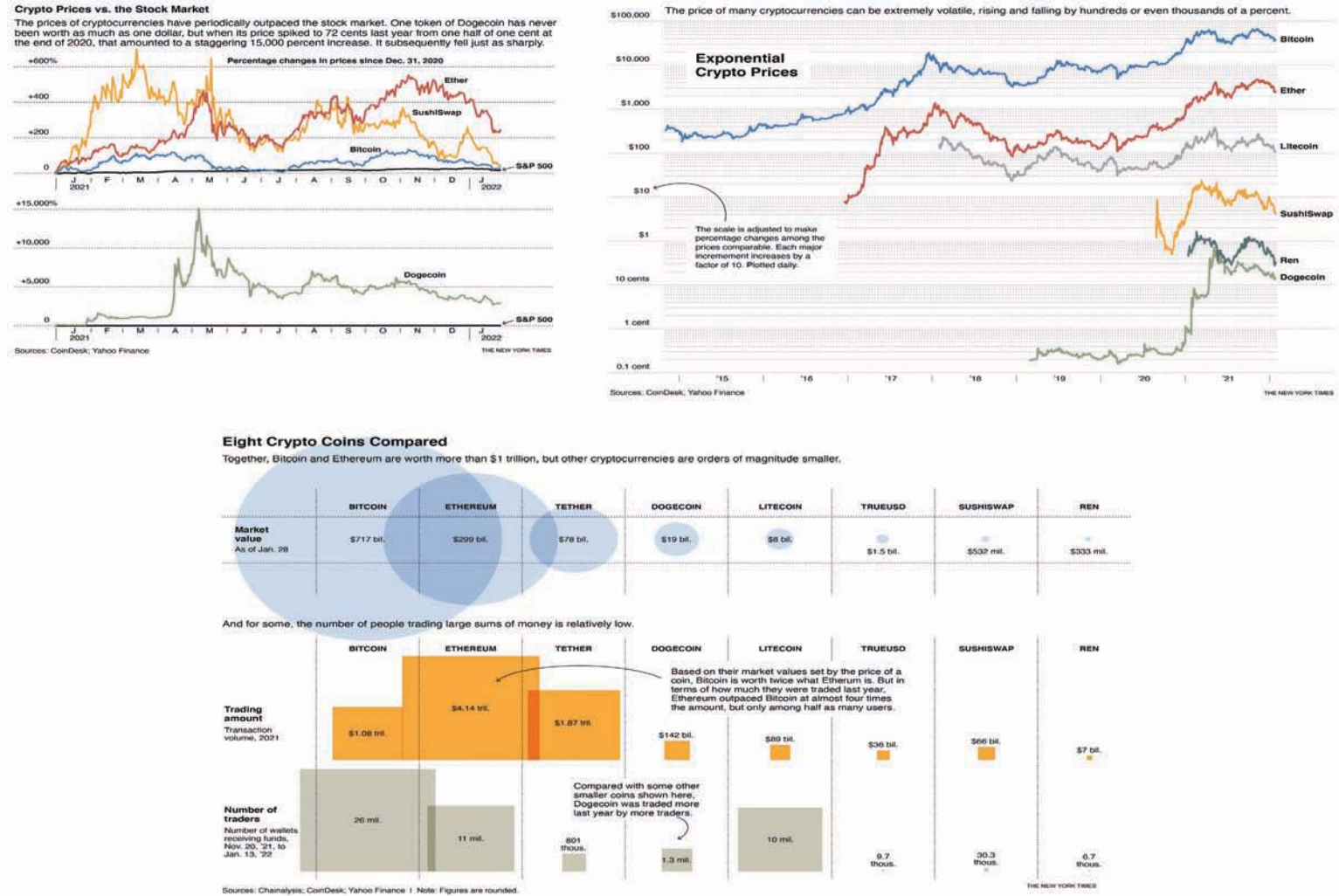
When Wolf Game’s creator discovered that the game was vulnerable to hackers and shut it down temporarily to fix its code, freezing everyone’s assets, players had little recourse. They simply had to wait and hope that the game would come back online and that they would be able to retrieve their holdings.

This spooked some participants, who got out as fast as they could once the game was running again. But others, including Friedman, kept playing.

“Getting in there when it looked sort of damaged and reputationally unsure turned out to be very smart,” Friedman said. By essentially buying the dip, he had tripled his investment to \$60,000 as of January.

So it goes in the world of cryptocurrency — a market full of faceless users with nonsensical names who are just as likely to post animated pictures of dogs doing backflips on the moon as they are to buy or sell something of enduring value.

There is big money to be made, but a



Crypto prices are highly volatile, as this week’s sell-off showed. But die-hard enthusiasts believe prices will keep soaring in a world where traditional notions of value don’t apply.

billionaire investor can get swindled just as easily as a newbie buying a tiny sliver of a single Bitcoin.

Got an idea? Issue a digital coin to fund it — all you need are believers.

And it’s getting wilder.

As stocks were sold off early this week, crypto prices also plunged. Bitcoin dropped nearly 13 per cent before rebounding along with stocks. Ethereum’s own coin, Ether, was briefly down 15 per cent.

Their price declines have dragged down other digital asset prices, too. Analysts attribute the decline to investors who are pulling their money out of higher-growth, risky assets — including technology stocks — as interest rates are set to rise.

That has put a dent in the argument, promoted by crypto boosters, that digital assets offer a hedge against losses in other markets.

Despite their volatile and occasionally inscrutable nature, cryptocurrencies are becoming more widely traded, used

and held — El Salvador recently started accepting Bitcoin as legal tender, the Federal Reserve is studying whether to issue its own digital coin, and wealth managers are encouraging clients to explore crypto assets.

So how does a new investor make sense of crypto and its constantly changing landscape?

The short answer: It’s impossible. There are so few reliable measures of value that it is hard to tell whether the excitement around a particular cryptocurrency is justified — or a bubble about to burst.

Traditional financial analysis does not apply here. A stock analyst, for instance, determines whether a company’s shares are expensive or cheap by assessing its business model, future prospects and leadership. But few, if any, of those metrics translate to cryptocurrency valuation. Belief alone can drive value.

It is hard to even know what counts as a “cryptocurrency.”

Bitcoin and Ether are widely regarded as currencies because, like the dollar or the pound, they are used to buy and sell many goods and services. Another 11,000 or more digital coins and tokens also exist, many of them vying to gain enough acceptance to become the next Bitcoin or Ether.

(Coins operate on their own digital backbones, called blockchains. Tokens rely on other blockchains to get around in cyberspace. Coins, tokens and other assets are stored in wallets, which are comparable to online bank accounts except that their holdings are visible to all.)

By standard measures of value, the prices of Bitcoin and Ether are understandable.

They are priced highly — with market capitalisations on Wednesday of nearly \$690 billion and \$290 billion — because they are well established and liquid, with broad user bases. Bitcoin is held in nearly 9 million wallets, according to Chainalysis, a data provider.

Coins operate on their own digital backbones, called blockchains. Tokens rely on other blockchains to get around in cyberspace. Coins, tokens and other assets are stored in wallets, which are comparable to online bank accounts except that their holdings are visible to all

Inflation runs at fastest pace since 1982 and wages rise

Inflation came in strong and wage growth remained elevated at the end of 2021, setting the stage for a challenging economic year in which the Federal Reserve and White House will try to maintain momentum in the job market while wrestling price gains under control.

The personal consumption expenditures index, the Fed’s preferred inflation gauge, came in at 5.8 per cent in December, up from 5.7 per cent the prior month. That beat out the prior month to become the fastest pace since 1982.

Inflation is moderating somewhat on a monthly basis, but its still-high annual readings come at a moment when pay is picking up briskly. While robust wage growth is good news for workers, it also increases the risk of sustained high inflation: Companies may raise prices to try to cover rising labour costs.

The Employment Cost Index, a measure of pay and benefits the Fed watches closely, picked up 1 per cent in the final quarter of 2021 from the prior year. While that was less of a gain than the 1.2 per cent economists in a Bloomberg survey had forecast, it capped a robust year of increases: The gauge climbed 4 per cent in the year through the fourth quarter, with its wages and salaries measure picking up 4.5 per cent.

That marked the fastest pace of increase for both the overall compensation and the wages and salaries measure since the data series started two decades ago.

Price gains are eating away at consumer confidence even as wages rise, making inflation a political liability for the Biden administration and Democrats during a midterm election year.

We are attentive to the risks that persistent real wage growth in excess of productivity could put upward pressure on inflation

JEROME POWELL
CHAIRMAN
US FEDERAL RESERVE

While the White House has taken steps aimed at relieving pressure on choked supply chains, the job of slowing down demand to bring prices under control rests primarily with the Fed.

The Fed’s policymakers have signalled that they will likely begin to raise interest rates at their March meeting as they try to prevent today’s quick price increases from becoming a more permanent feature of the economic landscape.

Markets are nervously eyeing the Fed’s next steps, trying to gauge how much it will raise rates and how rapidly. Higher borrowing costs could slow down economic growth and lower stock prices, taking some of the buoyancy out of the US expansion.

Economists do expect inflation to fade this year, though tangled supply chains make it difficult to gauge when that will happen. The world’s trade system remains under pronounced stress, based on various measures — including one produced by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York that incorporates backlogs, delivery times and inventories.

Inflation has sped up as people buy more goods, aided by repeated government relief checks and other federal benefits. The world’s factories and shipping lines have struggled to keep up with demand, resulting in rising prices for cars, lumber and clothing.

Rents have also begun to pick up recently, a sign that price gains are broadening and may last longer than economists had anticipated. Rising food and gas costs may offer less insight into the future, given how much prices in those categories bounce around, but they are

making this a painful moment for households.

As inflation uncertainty lingers and another wave of the coronavirus prevents a return to normal life, several measures of consumer confidence have shown that people are becoming less optimistic.

The University of Michigan survey has shown sentiment faltering as prices have risen and The Conference Board’s index ticked down in January.

“You have very high inflation, so people are seeing an erosion of their purchasing power,” said Dana M Peterson, chief economist at The Conference Board, noting that the resurgent virus is also to blame.

“People will have higher confidence once we’re beyond omicron.”

Fed officials and Wall Street economists alike expect price gains to fade this year, but it is not clear how much or how quickly they will do so. The central bank forecast 2.6 per cent inflation by the end of the year as of its December meeting, but Fed Chair Jerome Powell said this week that the situation has probably slightly worsened since then.

“We are attentive to the risks that persistent real wage growth in excess of productivity could put upward pressure on inflation,” Powell said during a news conference on Wednesday.

Powell had in December specifically cited the previously Employment Cost Index reading — which came in high during the third quarter — as one reason that the Fed had decided to shift from stoking growth to preparing to fight back if inflation becomes long-lasting.

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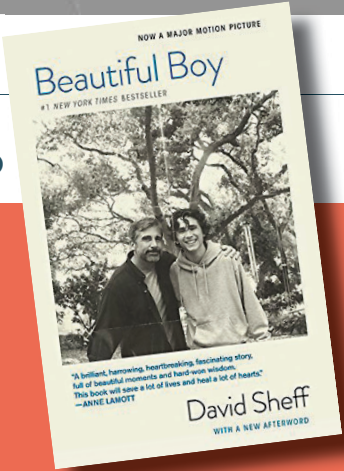
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Catch them young

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Based on the best-selling pair of memoirs from father and son David and Nic Sheff, *Beautiful Boy* chronicles the heartbreaking and inspiring experience of survival, relapse and recovery in a family coping with addiction over many years.

AT THE OPERA

ROHM presents Anastasia, a ballet by Vyacheslav Kuznetsov, on February 3-5

THE ROYAL OPERA House Muscat is delighted to present Anastasia from the acclaimed National Academic Bolshoi Opera and Ballet Theatre at 7:00pm on February 3 and 4 and 4:00pm on February 5, 2022.

Inspired by the legendary love story of a prince and a princess in times long past, the ballet portrays a snapshot of the cultural history of Belarus. Drama, betrayal, masterfully

choreographed battles and magnificent court scenes are the backdrop for this story of loyalty and love.

Anastasia opens the ballet with a scene depicting her as a young girl falling in love for the first time and sharing her first kiss with Mikhail, a young man who is on the cusp of adventure. He leaves her bereft and heart-broken.

Years later, Anastasia marries Prince Simeon and Mikhail



reappears at court after a long time at war and realises his love and loss. Time passes again and the fighting spills over into the court, Mikhail is embroiled in the attack and the king, Simeon is killed. Anastasia

is taken prisoner by the war-lord and given to Mikhail as spoils of war. He, out of love and pity, gives her her freedom. Anastasia raises an army and takes back her country. Mikhail fights on her side finally.

The strong tradition of ballet in Belarus has been evolving progressively since the nineteenth century and is now one of the finest in the world. The Bolshoi Theatre of Belarus is a landmark in the country, as well as on the international landscape. Anastasia premiered in October 2018 and reflects the National Bolshoi Theatre's ongoing commitment to the creation of new works in the classical tradition.

All visits to the opera house are conducted under the guidelines of the Supreme Committee responsible for measures to tackle the development of Covid-19. Social distancing is maintained throughout the building and the wearing of facemasks is mandatory.

For details, you can download the app or check the ROHM website. A Pre-Performance Talk for ticket holders only will be held an hour prior to each performance.



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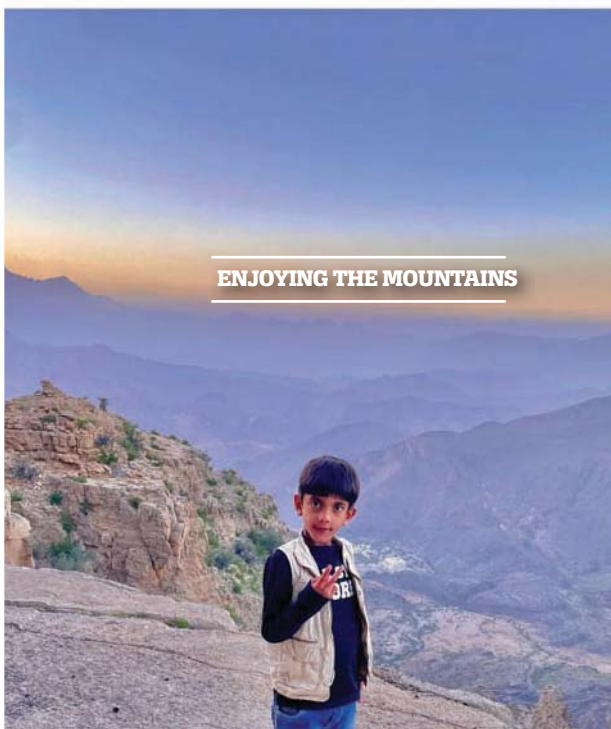
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

'Dune', 'Licorice Pizza' and 'West Side Story' top Hollywood guild noms



SCI-FI EPIC "DUNE", coming-of-age drama "Licorice Pizza" and musical remake "West Side Story" received major boosts in Hollywood's awards season race on Thursday as several of the film industry's top guilds unveiled their nominees.

The movies earned nods from Tinseltown's directors', producers' and writers' unions, putting them in contention alongside presumed early Oscars frontrunners "Belfast" and "The Power of the Dog" — which also secured multiple nominations.

But hopes that mainstream crowd pleasers such as superhero blockbuster "Spider-Man: No Way Home" or 007 instalment "No Time To Die" might enter the awards race were thwarted.

Hollywood's guilds each host their own annual ceremonies to honour the year's best films ahead of the season-capping Academy Awards.

The guild awards are often considered bellwethers for the Oscars and, by coincidence this year, Academy members also began voting for their own nominees on Thursday.

The Directors Guild of America's top award-winner in particular has a strong track record of predicting the Oscar for best director — the same victor has been selected for both prizes on 16 of the last 18 years.

This year, the DGA shortlisted Kenneth Branagh for "Belfast", Jane Campion for "The Power of the Dog", Denis Villeneuve for "Dune", Paul Thomas Anderson for "Licorice Pizza" and Steven Spielberg for "West Side Story".

Those same five films also featured in the 10-strong shortlist unveiled by the Producers Guild of America on Thursday.

There has only been one best picture Oscar winner in the 31 years of the PGAs which did not start off with a nomination from Hollywood's producers — "Braveheart" in 1996.

Notably absent from any of Thursday's nominations were Joel Coen's "The Tragedy of Macbeth" and Ridley Scott's "House of Gucci."

LONG AWARDS SEASON

Thursday's nominations provided a particular boost to films such as "Dune", a star-studded adaptation of Frank Herbert's sprawling novel set on a desert planet plagued by monstrous sandworms.

"Dune" had failed to land any major nominations from the Screen Actors Guild earlier this month.

"Licorice Pizza", a nostalgic 1970s love letter to Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, and "West Side Story" had also missed out in the leading SAG categories.

The Writers Guild of America announced its own nominees on Thursday, again including "Dune", "Licorice Pizza" and "West Side Story."

"Belfast", which captures the outbreak of violence in 1969 Northern Ireland from a child's perspective, and "The Power of the Dog", a gothic Western set in 1920s Montana, were not eligible under the WGA's rules, but have scored strongly in nearly all other nominations.

This year's awards season has been elongated after the Oscars were pushed back to March 27, reportedly to avoid clashing with February's Winter Olympics and the Super Bowl in Los Angeles.

Several other awards shows were also postponed due to the surge in coronavirus cases sparked by the highly contagious Omicron variant. — AFP

CULTURE

Taiwan family helps keep hand-made 'ghost money' tradition alive



PAINSTAKINGLY, WOMEN of retirement age adorn sheet after sheet of yellow joss paper with gold and silver leaf and red paint to satisfy last orders for sacrificial cash offerings ahead of next month's Lunar New Year festival.

Taiwan's Chen Kun-huei, 82, is determined to keep alive an ancient tradition of making the "ghost money" by hand even as others have shifted to automated production at factories.

"I will continue making ghost money until I can't move anymore", said Chen, the third-generation owner of his family's business in northwestern Taiwan's Miaoli.

Altogether, the Chens have been making ghost money for around 100 years.

Also called joss paper in English, ghost money is one of the most common offerings in Taiwan, burned at temples and outside homes to honour deities and ancestors while praying for many children, prosperity and longevity.

It is used during all holidays in Taiwan — Chen says there is only one month of downtime in a year — with the most offerings made during Lunar New Year and the "ghost month", or the seventh

month of the lunar calendar.

"There are just too many temples in Taiwan", said Chen's daughter, Chen Miao-fang, explaining why demand for ghost money remains high. After grow-

ing up in and around the workshop, Miao-fang is now in charge of taking orders.

The Chens' way of making ghost money is fading quickly due to a lack of people willing to do the repetitive work and competition from big commercial printers producing cheaper, col-



ourful alternatives. Only a few other workshops also still make the sacrificial paper by hand.

"In the future this might all be replaced by machines", Miao-fang said, looking around wistfully at

the family's small-scale operation. For now, the Chens have a loyal base of customers who value the high quality of their product.

The week-long Lunar New Year holiday begins on Monday in Taiwan.

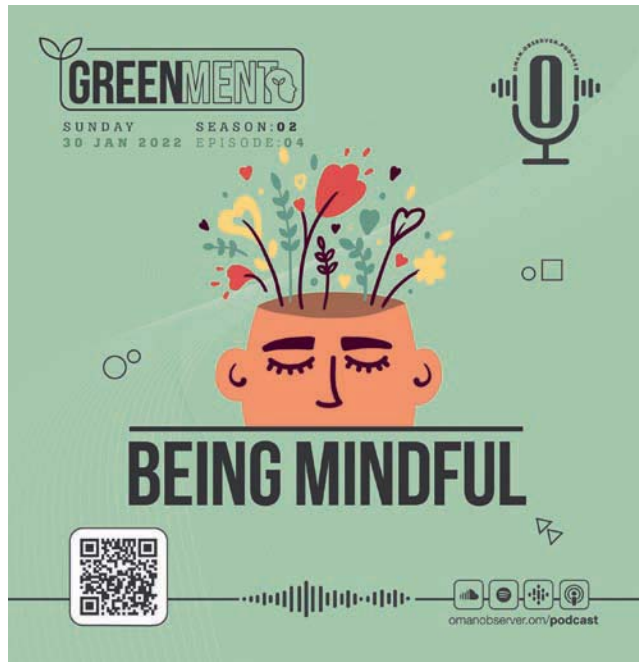
— Reuters

GREENMENT — THE PODCAST



Lakshmi Kothaneth

Here and now — practising mindfulness



HAVE YOU EVER felt that you are in autopilot mode?

Driving and reaching a destination without even realising it, not even focusing on the street (especially if it is a daily trip).

The brain has been programmed, says Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Psychiatrist and guest on GreenMent, Oman Observer Podcast.

What we probably need is mindfulness.

So what is mindfulness? Mindfulness is about being in the present moment, explained Dr Hamed — It is about being aware of your surroundings, your body, your senses without judging the situation.

"As you know in life today we are constantly in a rush. Most of the time we are blaming ourselves for the past or worry about the future. This is where mindfulness comes — it is about here and now. When you are relaxing, for example, you have the candle and you can sense the fragrance, colour of the flame and the warmth of it", he noted.

A lot of people today are living through stress, not eating healthy and are unable to sleep well.

"Now the research has come up with mindful eating where you are eating and you are aware of the texture, aroma and flavour of the food while taking time to enjoy the process. The fact is the longer you take to chew the lesser the urge to have more food.

Most of the people who complain about the food or not being able to stick to the regime have the issue of not being mindful while having food", pointed out Dr Hamed.

Now is it important to enjoy the process?

Not necessarily, said the mind expert adding, "Remember we are not to judge the situation. We just have to be aware of it and we can do that by being aware of our breathing."

Breathing exercise is known to make one more relaxed instead of constantly thinking about the future so we need to bring our mind to this mind.

"As you are sitting here you can feel the softness of the sofa, be aware of the air being inhaled. It helps the brain to be in this very moment instead of floating. There is no need to resist the thoughts because it is difficult to go straight into deep mindfulness", he said.

It can be done slowly and gradually to let go of the thoughts. Some people prefer to follow an instructor going through step by step process as it helps to stay focused on what you hear.

"This is why some people experience peace in practising prayers and this is where spirituality comes in. But even there we should remember to be mindful and not rush through it", urged Dr Hamed.

For more tips to practice mindfulness join GreenMent on Oman Observer Podcast or visit www.omanobserver.om.



Catch them young

By Kaushalendra Singh



Autism is a disorder that comes as an unfortunate situation for parents and the individuals who suffer from it. It is debatable whether such births can be avoided, but the fact remains a fact for those who are born with autistic syndrome or develop it at a later stage. The responsibility of an inclusive society is to include children with autism into society's mainstream and "make them able to develop their skills and realise their full potential," as suggested by Unicef in one of its reports.

The Sultanate of Oman has been proactively taking up the cause of children with autism through government initiatives and private participation — current numbers and projections indicate some 27,300 cases between 2020 and 2030.

In line with the Oman Vision, 2040 wherein one of the major pillars of education is inclusion, a group of like-minded people have gotten together and started an inclusive school where children with autism and other difficulties are allowed to study alongside mainstream children, so they have better chances to acquire more skills than those who study in schools meant exclusively for special children.

"Inclusive education is the most effective way to give children with a broad range of learning difficulties a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to become a part of mainstream society. Inclusive education means all children are in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded. Inclusive systems value the unique contributions stu-

dents of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all," said Mahesh Verma, who has been in the Sultanate of Oman since 1985 and helped start Paradise Valley School.

Through this initiative, he wants to give back to the country that he now calls his home, something that was essentially required. He thus started the institution, an inclusive bi-lingual school with an international curriculum that is offering education to mainstream children and to those with learning difficulties, where all students are nurtured to achieve their best, regardless of their background or levels of ability.

"At Paradise Valley, we are proud that our vision of inclusiveness along with the concept of the Five areas of development — cerebral, physical, social, emotional and ethical — are fully aligned with the Sultanate of Oman's objectives," he said. The idea is to retain the children with special needs in the learning process as much, and as long as possible. "Due to certain constraints, children with disabilities are often overlooked in policymaking, limiting their access to education and their ability to participate in social, economic and political life. Worldwide, these children are among the most likely to be out of school. They face persistent barriers to education stemming from discrimination, stigma and the routine failure to incorporate disability in-school services," said Sayyid Mohammed bin Badar al Busaidy,

Chairman of the School Board and is known for his social commitment for the betterment of society. With Pallavan Learning Systems as their academic partner, Paradise Valley has the expertise and core competence to support other schools that impart education to Special Children and who may want to use the experience and knowledge of the team of Special Educators and therapists that Paradise Valley currently has. Commenting on the appeal the institution is having in the country, Verma said, "We are happy that corporates like Renaissance Services have supported the school and Esharaqa — the CSR arm of Khimji Ramdas — are sponsoring children with difficulties through the 'Association of Early Intervention for Children with Disability' and these children will start coming to Paradise Valley from early February."

Verma, however, appeals for greater participation from everyone to address one of the major issues that relate to a section of children and their parents. "Any delay in supporting these children with learning difficulties may have a serious impact on their emotional wellbeing and how with the right support and education, these children have the potential to thrive and build futures filled with opportunities. While we are doing our very best to raise awareness and provide the necessary support, we are requesting the community to join us to support inclusive education," said Verma in an impassioned appeal.