

First prostate enucleation surgery

The surgery team at Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre has performed the first minimally invasive treatment for an enlarged prostate using a holmium laser. The technique, which can offer faster recovery of less than 24 hours instead of 7 days with traditional prostate surgery, reduces the risk of bleeding after the operation, especially for patients who use blood-thinning drugs. **SEE P2**



P10

NEYMAR SCORES BRACE, MBAPPE ON TARGET



P13

SAUDI ARAMCO PROFIT SOARS ON HIGHER PRICES



P20

IRAQ'S GARDEN OF EDEN NOW LOOKS 'LIKE A DESERT'



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO INDIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India, on her country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished President Murmu good health and happiness and the people of India further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO KOREAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Yoon Suk-yeol of the Republic of Korea, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Yoon Suk-yeol. His Majesty also wished the people of Korea further progress and prosperity. — ONA



INSIDE



RUTO PULLS AHEAD IN KENYA'S VOTE COUNT



LESSONS FROM GANDHI'S NON-VIOLENCE MOVE

US SPECIAL ENVOY HOLDS TALKS FOR LASTING PEACE IN WAR-HIT COUNTRY

Biden thanks HM for Yemeni truce extension

MUSCAT: Tim Lenderking, the United States Special Envoy for Yemen, conveyed US President Joe Biden's thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the success of Omani endeavours to get Yemeni truce extended, along with the President's appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman's support for efforts exerted by the United Nations and the United States to find a permanent and peaceful solution for the Yemeni crisis.

This was conveyed by the US envoy when Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Lenderking, at his office on Sunday. The meeting was attended by the US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, the US Ambassador to Yemen, and the delegation accompanying the



guest. The meeting also discussed UN proposals to expand and stabilise the provisions of the truce, as well as the efforts to tackle pressing humanitarian and economic issues in Yemen. It was agreed to continue joint action in this regard.

Gen Al Numani thanked the US Special Envoy for his efforts in this respect. He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman will keep up its stance, in partnership with all parties concerned, to reach a final and comprehensive settlement and to establish permanent peace and security.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, also received Lenderking. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

Arabian Sea tropical condition subsides as rains continue



The dust haze which began on Sunday over a number of governorates will continue till today. — ONA

MUSCAT: The latest satellite images and analyses of the National Multi Hazards Early Warning Centre indicate that the tropical condition in the Arabian Sea has weakened and its rating relegated from trough to low pressure.

Aisha bint Juma al Qasmiyah, Meteorology Specialist at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said, "We noticed a split in the tropical condition's axis of rotation, due to active seasonal winds which pushed the system towards the northeast close to the India-Pakistan coast. Other factors that helped in the decline of the trough include a high-pressure system prevailing in the region and the existing of unfavourable sea surface temperature and dry

We noticed a split in the tropical condition's axis of rotation, due to active seasonal winds which pushed the system towards the northeast close to the India-Pakistan coasts

AISHA AL QASMIYAH
Meteorology Specialist

air in the vicinity."

In the next few hours, the tropical condition will either dissipate or linger along the India-

Pakistan coast, with chances that it might weaken or strengthen again, she added.

Aisha said latest satellite images point to an influx of high and moderate level clouds, which may bring sporadic rains along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea. Currently, some wilayats in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah are experiencing scattered rains, which may persist over the next few hours, with chances that a thunderstorms close to Al Wusta Governorate, said Aisha.

Meanwhile, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) took precautions to tackle the impact of a dust haze prevailing in most of governorates due to active winds. — ONA

SEE ALSO P3

Egyptian church fire kills at least 41

CAIRO: An electrical fire swept through an Egyptian Coptic Christian church during Mass on Sunday, causing a stampede and killing at least 41 people, most of them children, security sources said.

The blaze started just before 9 am in the Abu Sifin church in the city of Giza where 5,000 people had gathered. The fire blocked an entrance to the church, causing the stampede, the two sources said, adding that most of those killed were children.

"People were gathering on the third and fourth floor, and we saw smoke coming from the second floor. People rushed to go down the stairs and started falling on top of each other," said worshipper Yasir Munir.

"Then we heard a bang and sparks and fire coming out of the

window," he said, saying he and his daughter were on the ground floor and able to escape.

In a statement, the Interior Ministry said a forensic examination showed that the fire began in the second floor air conditioning as a result of an electrical malfunction.

Smoke inhalation was the main cause of death, it said. Families of those who died will receive 100,000 Egyptian pounds (\$5,220), according to a cabinet statement. Giza, Egypt's second-largest city, lies just across the Nile from Cairo.

"Offer my sincere condolences to the families of the innocent victims that have passed on to be with their Lord in one of his houses of worship," said Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi in a tweet. **SEE ALSO P6**



AMER AL KHANJARI WINS SILVER IN WEIGHTLIFTING

Oman's Amer al Khanjari won a silver medal in the weightlifting 89-kg category competition in the ongoing Islamic Solidarity Games in Konya, Turkey, on Sunday. **DETAILS ON P12**



Royal Office Minister receives US envoy



Gen Sultan Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, with Tim Lenderking, the United States (US) Special Envoy for Yemen, in Muscat on Sunday. – ONA

Police aviation unit plays key role in search and evacuation

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With the Sultanate of Oman facing more unstable weather conditions every year, the role of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP), including its aviation department, are becoming equally more crucial.

It may be noted that in recent times, the police aviation unit has been playing a key role in the search operations of missing persons in the sea or wadis, evacuation of people from the flood-affected areas of South Al Batinah, including Al Rustaq.

The police aviation has been also helping transfer accident victims from the highly remote stretch of the Adam-Thamrait road to the nearest hospitals in Nizwa and Haima.

According to Major Harith bin Malik al Maamari of the Directorate General of Police Aviation, his department provides



Police copters airlift people stranded in remote and isolated areas, evacuate people during heavy rains and floods, and also do aerial surveys

major services, especially assisting the efforts of CDAA and ROP. He was speaking in a weekly discussion posted by the ROP in its twitter handle on role of the police in search and rescue during emergencies.

He said the role of the police

aviation department includes providing air ambulances to people stranded in remote and isolated areas, evacuation of people during heavy rains and floods, and also aerial surveys in case requested by the ministries.

Al Maamari said, “During

emergencies, the CDAA and the ROP are the first to respond and visit the affected site. Based on their evaluation of the situation and the area, they request our help and we make our plan to transfer the stranded people and accident victims, or emergency patients to the nearest hospital or ambulance.”

He added, “We also coordinate with the nearest hospital or clinic if the patients are critical, especially if there is head injury as they require special precautions from our side.”

He requested the trekkers to carry mobile phones adequately charged with them and follow the trekking trails laid out by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, which are easy to access. “They should also carry the first aid and have a proper and clear plan of their activities.”

Al Maamari said fishermen should carry satellite phones because it has a GPS facility, which can be used in case of an emergency.

SQCCCCRC performs minimally invasive prostate surgery

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 14

The surgery team at Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCCRC) has performed the first minimally invasive treatment for an enlarged prostate using holmium laser.

Dr Hilal al Rashdi, Consultant of Urology Oncology, said: “Holmium Laser Enucleation of the Prostate (HoLEP) treatment provides a lasting solution for an enlarged prostate, which is similar to open prostate surgery but requires no incisions. In the HoLEP procedure, we use a laser to remove tissue that is blocking urine flow through the prostate.”

HoLEP is an advanced technique, which can offer faster recovery to less than 24 hours instead of 7 days with traditional prostate surgery, reduces the risk of bleeding after the operation,



especially for patients who use blood-thinning drugs, and reduces the need for a catheter tube from 5 days to 24 hours.

Dr Al Rashdi said: “HoLEP also preserves the removed tissue so it can be examined in the laboratory for other conditions, including prostate cancer.”

He pointed out that the holmium laser is used to treat various conditions, including prostatectomy, lithotripsy in the bladder, ureter, and kidneys, treating ureteral strictures, in addition to the removal of tumours in the bladder and urinary tract.

RAO Commander receives India’s western fleet chief



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), received Rear Admiral Sameer Saxena, Commander of the Indian Navy’s Western Fleet, in Muscat on Sunday. They exchanged views and reviewed several military matters of common interest. Commodore Jasim bin Mohammed al Balushi, Director of Operations and Plans at the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Military Attaché

of the Indian Embassy at Muscat attended the meeting.

Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, Acting Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), also received Rear Admiral Saxena. They exchanged views on various matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Commodore Jasim bin Mohammed al Balushi, RNO Director of Operations and Plans and the Military Attaché of the Indian Embassy at Muscat.

Attempt to smuggle wild animals foiled in Dhofar

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 14

Authorities have foiled an attempt to smuggle wild animals through the Sultanate of Oman’s borders.

“The Directorate General of Environment in the Governorate of Dhofar, in coordination with the competent authorities and the Royal Oman Police, managed to thwart the smuggling of wild animals through the border crossings. The legal procedures are being completed against violators,” Environment Authority said in a statement.

The animals were transferred to the veterinary clinic of the Royal Court Affairs in Salalah to receive the necessary treatment and care.

Legal procedures have been initiated by the authorities against the violators. The authority called on everyone to preserve the environment and its natural features, and to

abide by environmental laws and legislations.

Oman’s Law on Nature Reserves And Wildlife Conservation bans the hunting of a number of indigenous animals and birds, many of which have become endangered ie the Arabian leopard and Arabian oryx.

Article 15 (b) says any one who intentionally kills, hunts or smuggles any animal or bird mentioned in the Appendix No.1 (Arabian oryx, Arabian leopard, Arabian tahr, Reem or Sand Gazelle, Nubian ibex, Striped hyena, Arabian gazella, Houbara bustard and Caracal) shall be subjected to imprisonment for a period not less then six months and not exceeding five years and a fine not less then RO1,000 and not exceeding RO5,000 or any of the two penalties.

Article 15 (c) says any one who intentionally kills, hunts or smuggles any animal or bird



Any one who intentionally kills, hunts or smuggles any wildlife shall be subjected to imprisonment and fines ranging from RO 10 to RO 5,000 depending on the animal or bird.

mentioned in the Appendix No.2 (Honey badger,Hare, Red fox, Green turtle, Loggerhead turtle, Olive ridley turtle,Hawksbill turtle, Wild cat, Sand cat, Arabian wolf, Rueppell’s sand fox and all falcon, owl, vulture, eagle, flamingo, pelican, gull and tern species) shall be subjected to imprisonment for a

period not exceeding three months and a fine not less than RO100 and not exceeding RO1,000 or one of the two penalties.

Article 15 (d) says any one who intentionally chop off or causes damage to any protected plant or kills, hunts or smuggles any of the protected animals or birds not mentioned in the above shall be subjected to a fine not less than RO10 and not exceeding RO500.

Nature reserves have been set up to protect the natural habitats of the animals that call Oman home. There are fifteen reserves in total and their main goals are to help conserve biodiversity and the natural heritage of Oman as well as to provide research opportunities, to help educate the population about conservation and to encourage ecotourism. Regulations are in place throughout Oman to ensure that environmental factors are considered before beginning new programmes.



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Low pressure impact may last for two days



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The tropical deep depression over the Arabian Sea currently aimed at coasts of Pakistan and India has been categorised as depression and even could be down scaled as a low pressure system.

The impact of the system is to last for the next two days with rains expected in the governorates of Al Wusta, South Al Sharqiyah and Dhofar.

“Maybe it will linger around the coasts of Pakistan and India for a while and vanish over the

“

The impact we will experience are medium and high clouds that could bring rain showers in South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar. We have been seeing clouds near the coastal areas of Al Wusta that has given moderate to heavy rains. The scenario is expected to last for two days

AHMED AL BALUSHI

Oman Met Office

sea or gain momentum due to the conditions prevailing there,” said Ahmed al Balushi, Weather Forecaster at Oman Met Office.

According to the weather expert, the system could go stronger because the area where it is located currently has some



conditions that could enhance it such as warm sea, low wind shear and good amount of water vapor. He said they would have to analyse the system in the next two days to know further.

“The impact we will experience are medium and high clouds that could bring rain showers in South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar. We have been seeing clouds near the coastal areas of Al Wusta that has given moderate to heavy rains. The scenario is expected to last for two days,” said Al Balushi.

The tropical systems are normal

but the year 2022 has seen higher frequency in the number of tropical systems that had been developing over the Arabian Sea.

“We have a thermal low pressure that is over the desert that causes high gradient pressure and high wind velocity in the area that is open and has sand,” he explained.

On Sunday the dust rising was at a lower level compared to what was experienced on Saturday.

“On Saturday the dust rising was such a level that it was almost in the grade of a sand storm with low visibility, which was less than 500m,” he added.

Ferry services resume in Masirah

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has announced the resumption of maritime traffic and ferry transportation service to and from Masirah after it was suspended due to weather conditions.

“The return of maritime traffic and the service of transporting passengers via ferries to and from Masirah, after it was stopped yesterday due to strong winds, high waves and weather fluctuations,” the ministry said in a statement.

Panel discusses tropical depression

MUSCAT: The Sub-Committee for Emergency Situations in Al Wusta Governorate held a meeting to discuss developments of the tropical depression in the Arabian Sea.

The discussion centred on the potential impact on the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, including the Al Wusta Governorate and the preparedness and readiness of various sectors.

Motorists urged to be careful about dust haze



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) took precautions to tackle the impacts of a dust haze that prevails in most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman due to winds.

Maj Ahmed bin Yahya al Ma'awali, Commandant of the ROP Operations Centre (ROC), said that ROC is deploying its security and traffic personnel along the route leading from northern governorates to the Governorate of Dhofar with two checkpoints set up, one at Raki Bridge (flyover) and the other at Qarat Al Milh in the Wilayat of Adam.

Maj Al Ma'awali advised road drivers to exercise caution, maintain a good distance from the vehicles travelling ahead of them and use front lights and headlights.

Awadh bin Salim al Sudairi, Director of the Road Maintenance Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and



Information Technology, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that a dust wave began on Saturday and extended over a number of governorates on Sunday.

Al Sudairi pointed out that the ministry, acting in cooperation with the ROP, distributed necessary equipment along the roads impacted by the dust storm,

including Nizwa-Thamrait Road, to help clear any sands that might pile up on the road and endanger road users.

The Ministry of Health also advised members of the public to stay at home as much as possible, to avoid any complications that might arise from inhaling the dust. — ONA



مملكة السلطنة
Oman Fisheries CO.SAOG

DIRECTORS REPORT For 2nd Quarter (Jan-Jun) Results – Year 2022

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Company's unaudited consolidated results for the six-month period ended on 30th Jun 2022.

Our key results are annexed below:

Key Results:

	GROUP			PARENT		
	2022	2021	Change	2022	2021	Change
	Jan - June	Jan - June	%	Jan - June	Jan - June	%
Total Revenue	7,695,352	5,825,545	32.10%	7,590,839	5,375,186	36.15%
Total Cost	(8,440,825)	(6,869,390)	22.88%	(8,345,527)	(6,661,758)	25.28%
Other income	2,895,001	194,672	1387.12%	2,894,988	257,375	1024.81%
Profit Before Tax	2,149,528	(849,173)	353.13%	2,148,300	(829,197)	358.12%
Income Tax	200,000	118,662	68.55%	200,000	118,662	68.55%
Net Profit / (loss) After Tax	2,349,528	(730,511)	821.63%	2,348,300	(710,535)	429.37%

Turnover and summary of results:

The unaudited results of the second quarter represent the consolidation of Oman Fisheries Co. SAOG(Parent), and Oman Fisheries Co. Sharjah (FZE).

Your company has achieved the consolidated turnover of RO 7.695 million from operations and as at 30th June 2022 compared to the previous year turnover of RO 5.825 Million from operations for the same period last year. The group made a net Profit of RO 2,349,528/- compared to the net Loss of RO 730,511 for the same period of the previous year mainly driven by sales of Al-ameen.

Following are the key operational highlights for the second quarter:

- Oman Fisheries Company completed agreement with Atlantic Dawn to start commercial fishing operations in Oman which are anticipated to commence in Q3 2022.
- Oman Fisheries procured a total of 14,252 tons from artisanal fisherman and other sources as compared with 13,213 for the same period from last year.
- Export sales represented 85% of the total sales with local sales representing 15% of the total sales
- The company achieved a gross margin of 21% driven by the continuous efforts of the management to penetrate higher value markets, rigorous stock and inventory management and diligent revenue planning and management.

The selling and distribution expenses were driven higher principally due to container & freight charges associated with the global supply chain glut.

Debtors and cash collection cycle has been consistent in relation compared to the volume of sales both in the domestic and export market.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management of the Company, I wish to acknowledge and express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and his Government for the continuous efforts towards the development of the fisheries sector and food security.

Further, we are extending our thanks to, government bodies, suppliers, service providers, banks, customers, consultants, and employees of the Company for their continuous efforts and we are wishing them all the success for the remaining period of the year.

Chairman

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30 JUNE 2022

	Parent Company (Unaudited) 30 JUNE 2022 RO	Group Company (Unaudited) 30 JUNE 2022 RO	Parent Company (Audited) 31 December 2021 RO	Group Company (Audited) 31 December 2021 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Plant Property and equipment	2,874,504	2,874,504	3,079,095	3,079,095
Right-of-use assets	1,480,591	1,480,591	203,402	203,402
Finance lease receivables	-	-	297,958	-
Fixed deposit	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Investment in subsidiaries	15,750	-	515,750	-
Deferred tax asset	919,429	919,429	719,429	719,429
	6,390,274	6,374,524	5,915,634	5,101,926
Current assets				
Inventories	2,123,163	2,123,163	1,013,196	1,013,196
Lease receivables	-	-	18,149	-
Trade and other receivables	2,720,405	2,828,765	1,392,349	1,403,081
Amounts due from related parties	9,940	-	2,405	-
Financial assets at FVTPL	113,209	113,209	113,302	113,302
Other financial assets at amortized cost	-	-	-	-
Cash and bank balances	5,821,064	5,822,776	206,409	208,121
Assets included in disposal group classified as held-for-sale	-	-	-	2,533,004
	10,787,781	10,887,913	2,743,810	5,270,704
	17,178,055	17,262,437	8,659,444	10,372,630
Total assets				
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	16,307,700	16,307,700	12,500,000	12,500,000
Legal reserve	3,314,319	3,315,929	3,314,319	3,480,985
Capital reserve	29,269	29,269	29,269	29,269
Accumulated losses	(9,486,685)	(9,486,689)	(11,826,985)	(10,361,751)
Total equity	10,164,603	10,166,429	4,016,603	5,648,529
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loans	166,287	166,287	207,138	207,138
Lease liabilities	1,300,575	1,300,575	205,448	205,448
End of service benefits	59,244	59,244	69,149	69,149
	1,526,106	1,526,106	481,735	481,735
Current liabilities				
Term loans	77,759	77,759	77,759	77,759
Lease liabilities	229,912	229,912	46,270	46,270
Short term loans	2,173,484	2,173,484	2,600,000	2,600,000
Bank overdraft	400,000	400,000	-	-
Trade and other payables	2,606,191	2,688,747	1,115,814	1,117,135
Amounts due to related parties	-	-	321,263	1,092
Liability included in disposal group classified as held-for-sale	-	-	-	400,100
	5,487,346	5,569,902	4,161,106	4,242,356
	7,013,452	7,096,008	6,642,841	6,724,091
Total liabilities				
Total equity and liabilities	17,178,055	17,262,437	8,659,444	10,372,630
Net assets per share	0.056	0.056	0.032	0.045

INTERIM CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2022

	Parent Company (Unaudited) Period ended 30 JUNE 2022 RO	Group Company (Unaudited) Period ended 30 JUNE 2022 RO	Parent Company (Unaudited) Period ended 30 JUNE 2021 RO	Group Company (Unaudited) Period ended 30 JUNE 2021 RO
Revenue	7,590,839	7,695,352	5,375,186	5,825,545
Direct costs	(5,930,010)	(6,005,543)	(5,004,750)	(5,254,130)
Gross profit	1,660,829	1,689,807	570,436	571,415
Other income	294,988	295,001	257,375	194,672
Gain on disposal of subsidiary	2,600,000	2,600,000	-	-
General and administrative expenses	(1,048,018)	(1,056,915)	(827,089)	(982,987)
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,322,406)	(1,333,272)	(768,984)	(550,148)
Change in fair value of FVTPL investment	223	223	(21,702)	(21,702)
Operating profit	2,185,616	2,194,684	(789,946)	(788,750)
Finance income	40,872	40,872	26,507	18,479
Finance cost	(86,188)	(86,188)	(65,740)	(78,902)
Profit before taxation	2,140,300	2,149,528	(829,197)	(849,173)
Income tax	200,000	200,000	118,662	118,662
Total comprehensive income for the period	2,340,300	2,349,528	(710,535)	(730,511)
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0118	0.0118	0.0007	0.0006

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who request them, either in Arabic or English as requested within 7 days of receipt of the request.






OMAN FISHERIES



Make saving a priority

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

One of the most important factors of individual and family stability is having a savings culture that ensures financial stability, the ability to meet the necessary living needs, and provides a safety net for emergency financial requirements.

In light of the financial fluctuations that the world is going through, from stagnation at times and inflation at other times, everyone must reconsider their financial positions with regard to actual spending while raising awareness about rationalising spending, and moving towards alternative goods in line with their standard of living.

The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman rose, at the end of April of this year, to 2.7 per cent compared to April of last year, according to the data of the monthly survey of consumer prices issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information. Although the level of inflation is less, compared to other Gulf countries, it has had a noticeable impact on the level of the local market and on the purchasing power.

According to the recent World Bank report the spending on food accounts for 24 per cent of the household budget in the Sultanate of Oman, which is the highest percentage in the GCC countries.

Another report by Pricewaterhouse Consulting also found that housing, food and transportation account for 70 per cent of the total expenditure of individuals in Oman, compared to 57 per cent in the Gulf countries as a whole.

Hence, enhancing financial awareness among members of society, and developing a culture of savings is important. This is because most of the problems that afflict social and family stability often result from the financial crises of the individual or family, the inability to fulfil their responsibilities and the lack of proper financial planning when borrowing or accumulating consumer debts.

Therefore, experts and specialists in financial affairs urge individuals to save and develop tight financial plans to control consumption that facilitate the individual to reach their goals with greater comfort.

According to financial experts, before knowing how to save, you must determine the amount you want to collect and its purpose. This purpose may be emergencies, travel, or business. Knowing this purpose may be the best incentive for us to discipline and continue to save money.

For a start, divide your salary at the beginning of each month. Among the divisions, put aside an amount designated for saving, and do not use it during the days of the month. By

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PHONE, AND
OTHERS

preserving it, even if it is a small part, you will gradually be able to save a larger part of the money.

There are various rules for saving, but the most famous one is the rule of 50:30:20. It urges you to determine one third of your salary for financial obligations, one third for saving, and one third for emergencies. Although this rule may not be consistent with the nature of the current life, which consumes the salary immediately, and fills with irresistible temptations, you can add entertainment along with emergencies.

In order to achieve your savings goals, you need to get into the habit of comparing the prices of the goods and services you consume on a daily basis, such as food, fuel, clothes, phone, and others.

Experts believe that one should be introduced to the concept of smart shopping. It means knowing the ways that contribute to reducing the value of the shopping bill, such as preparing a list of purchases to avoid the rush to buy unwanted products, and using discount coupons to buy the necessary products or take advantage of good offers.

Also, beware of rushing to buy at times of sale, as this can be a trap. So even in these times, one should be satisfied with buying only the things he needs, and not paying attention to other goods, regardless of the size of the discounts.



Restaurants, eateries under lens

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Close on the heels of grading restaurants according to their hygiene levels, the Muscat Municipality has categorically told eateries and other joints to follow healthy standards or face the music.

“We, at Muscat Municipality, call on all owners, managers and in-charges of food establishments to comply with the health requirements,” an official from the civic authority said.

The reminder from the Municipality comes in the wake of the colossal violation of such norms in the food sector unearthed during random raids conducted by the Food Control division of Muscat Municipality in the Wilayat of Bausher.

As much as 133 kg of spoiled food which was unfit for human consumption was destroyed, and more than 2,000 cooking utensils of low quality were confiscated besides booking the perpetrators for violations in the 16 violations found in 34 restaurants and cafes of various grades.

“We are on an ongoing mission to ensure that healthy foods are being provided by the restaurants, cafes and other joints in various governorates and all are urged to adhere to the values



of good quality in foods, decor and service as hygiene measures would significantly promote the public health and contribute to strengthening and raising consumer confidence, he added.

The Muscat Municipality has earlier warned that eateries which pay less attention to hygiene standards would have to pay a doubled penalty as the authorities had launched an inspection drive to fix the gaps in maintaining healthy standards and in

promoting a hygiene environment in the premises.

Various teams of experts, who are part of the project named “Proactive Food Safety and Health Project” in accordance with the HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) standards, have been visiting eateries, restaurants, cafes and other joints to detect pesticides residues in vegetables, fruits and pickles used in serving the public.

The Civic Body had begun to

grade restaurants and cafes in the capital area in order to classify them according to a diverse set of yardsticks.

“We have been visiting the restaurants to make sure that they adhere to the standards and specifications that we have stipulated to them and to ensure they continue to offer the foods and services they were licenced to do business”, an official at the Restaurants Evaluation Department said.

RO 36m worth fish produced in Dhofar



SALALAH: The volume of fish production in the Governorate of Dhofar last year (2021) stood at 83,753 tonnes, valued at RO 36 million. Of this output, small pelagic fish comprised 52 per cent and bottom fish 26 per cent.

Eng Rashid bin Said al Ghafri, Director General of Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources encourages the ideal exploitation of marine resources in the governorate to ensure their sustainability within the context of Oman Vision 2040.

Al Ghafri affirmed on the importance of establishing

fisheries projects and industries that benefit the local society and enhance the national economy. He added that the Directorate General of Fisheries and Water Resources keeps a tap on the coast and lends support to fishermen and the workforce in the fisheries sector.

Dhofar had 11,632 fishermen in 2021, in addition to a large body of personnel engaged in fishing activities, including transport, marketing, specialised industry units, workshops and jetties, said Al Ghafri, adding that, by 2021, the number of fishing boats stood at 4,477 and the number of trawlers stood at 79. — ONA

■ SCOTT KELBY PHOTO WALK HELD



The annual Scott Kelby's Photo Walk was held in Muscat on Saturday. Each year photographers and enthusiasts around the world get out their cameras and meet up at a designated location in their town to walk around and take photographs, socialise, make new friends, win prizes, and be a part of a great cause during this walk. Muttrah seafont was the venue for the walk which saw about 20 photographers, both expatriates and citizens, taking part. The walk was held up until 2020 and was held after a gap of two years now due to the pandemic. Nature photographer Bavish Kizhakoodan Balan from Friday Shoot Out Muscat (FSO) who won the grand prize in 2019 and made it to the top 10 finalists in 2020, led the walk and guided the photographers.

Oman Air adds flights to Salalah to meet high khareef demand

MUSCAT: To meet the exceptional khareef season demand for Salalah, Oman Air has increased its daily flight frequencies on its Muscat-Salalah-Muscat sector to 30 flights a day.

The additional flights on the sector reflect Salalah's reputation as a top tourist destination during the khareef season.

There will be 20 flights on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, and 28 flights on Thursday and Saturday – effective August 14. Also, there will be 22 flights on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, and 30 flights on Thursday and Saturday – effective August 21.

Between Muscat and Salalah,



the airline offers wide-body service, including Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus A330 in addition to Boeing 737. Guests

should check omanair.com for the most up-to-date flight schedules and times, as they are subject to change.

Nizwa honours toppers in general education diploma

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, AUGUST 14

Nizwa held the annual ceremony to honour those who excelled in the general education diploma in the Creativity Centre for Culture and Innovation Hall in Nizwa on Saturday.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr. Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education. The ceremony was organised by the Cultural and Scientific Committee of Nizwa Club in association with the participation of the Nizwa Charitable Team and Shaikh Mansour al Farsi Award for Academic Achievement. The ceremony honoured 61 boys and girls who scored more than 97 per cent in the General Education Diploma exam.

Abdullah bin Mohammad al



Abri, Chairman of the Cultural and Scientific Committee at Nizwa Club, said: “The honouring of students of the General Education Diploma is an extension of recognising top performers. It was started by the Scientific Cultural

Committee at Nizwa Club in 2016. It will further motivate our bright children.” Taqwa bint Hamad bin Abdullah al Kindiyah, gave a speech on behalf of the feted students. She thanked the organisers and expressed pride in



the academic excellence.

The ceremony also included a discussion moderated by Dr Hafez bin Ahmed Ambusaidi, Vice-President of the Committee. The topics discussed the importance of achievement for the student's

family, the role of the family in motivating the student, and its role in guiding the student to choose a major. It also addressed the students' feelings of achievement and how to start planning, ambition, time management, and

prospects after the diploma.

A video of the committee's activities and events in the past years was presented. The seven schools which helped these outstanding students to achieve distinction were also honoured.

Electrical fire kills 41 in Cairo Coptic church

CAIRO: More than 40 people were killed when a fire ripped through a Coptic Christian church in a working-class district of greater Cairo during Sunday mass, church officials said.

The blaze, blamed on an electrical fault, hit the Abu Sifin church located in the densely populated Imbaba neighbourhood west of the Nile river, part of Giza governorate.

Witnesses described how people rushed into the burning house of worship to rescue those trapped but were soon overwhelmed by the heat and the deadly smoke.

“Everyone was carrying kids out of the building,” Ahmed Reda Baoumy, who lives next to the church, said.

“But the fire was getting bigger and you could only go in once or you would asphyxiate.”

The Egyptian Coptic Church and the health ministry reported 41 dead and 14 injured in the blaze before emergency services said they had brought the blaze under control.

Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah



Police officers stand near the scene where a deadly fire broke out at the Abu Sifin church in Giza. — Reuters



A lady reacts after a fire broke out at the Abu Sifin church in Giza. — Reuters

President Sisi ‘presented his condolences by phone’ to Coptic Pope Tawadros II. The interior ministry later said that ‘forensic evidence revealed that the blaze broke out in an air-conditioning unit on the second floor of the church building’

have been left out of key state positions and have deplored restrictive legislation for the construction of churches. Sisi, the first Egyptian president to attend the Coptic Christmas mass every year, recently appointed the first ever Coptic judge to head the Constitutional Court.

Accidental fires are not uncommon in the sprawling megalopolis of Cairo, where millions live in informal settlements. — AFP



A donkey sits in a pool of water following heavy rain in Khartoum. — AFP

Sudan floods kill 52 people

KHARTOUM: Flooding caused by torrential rains in Sudan have killed at least 52 people and damaged or destroyed thousands of homes, state media reported on Saturday.

Heavy rains usually fall in Sudan between May and October, and the country faces severe flooding every year, wrecking properties, infrastructure, and crops.

“A total of 52 people have been killed and 25 others wounded due to torrential rains and floods since the beginning of the fall season,” SUNA reported, quoting Abdel Jalil Abdelreheem, spokesman for Sudan’s National Council for Civil Defense. Abdelreheem

said 5,345 houses had been destroyed and 2,862 damaged across Sudan. Other public facilities, shops, and agricultural lands were also damaged.

North and South Kordofan states, River Nile state, and South Darfur were among the most affected across Sudan, he noted.

In a Monday report, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that around 38,000 people across Sudan had been affected by rains and floods since the start of the rainy season.

About 314,500 people were affected across Sudan during the rainy season of 2021, according to OCHA. — AFP

Gunman detained after firing shots inside Canberra’s main airport

SYDNEY: A gunman fired around five shots inside Canberra’s main airport on Sunday, sending passengers fleeing but injuring no one before he was detained by Australian police.

Images posted on social media showed a police officer restraining a man on the ground inside the terminal as the emergency alarm sounded in the capital’s main airport.

Police said the man was taken into custody and was being held at a station in the city. A firearm was recovered, they added.

The gunman entered the airport’s departures area in the early afternoon and sat close to the terminal’s large glass windows, detective acting superintendent Dave Craft told reporters outside the building.

He added that the gunman waited five minutes before pulling out his firearm and “let off approximately five rounds”

The airport was evacuated and locked down, leading to the suspension of flights

But normal operations resumed after the airport was re-opened later in the day, though some flights had been cancelled.



Police speak with witnesses after a gunman opened fire at the airport in Canberra. — AFP

Craft said the crime scene indicated that the man had fired shots at the glass windows in the terminal.

No shots were directed at passengers or staff, he said.

Several apparent bullet impacts were visible on the glass front on the second floor of the airport, television images showed.

A woman identified only as Helen was quoted as telling The Guardian newspaper that she saw a man “shooting into the air” not far from the check-in counter,

describing him as being middle-aged and “clean cut”.

After examining the airport’s closed-circuit television images, police said they believed the man had acted alone.

The situation was now “contained”, police said, describing the airport as an “active crime scene”.

The motive behind the shooting was not immediately clear, police said.

A journalist with Australian public broadcaster ABC, Lily

Thomson, reported that she heard the shots before people started to scream. She saw a fearful woman looking after a baby.

“So we all ran and I stayed with that grandma and her baby and hid behind an information desk,” Thomson reported on ABC.

“We stayed there for a couple of minutes until security told us to evacuate out to the car park,” she added.

“Everyone was hiding behind chairs and people were running.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES

DUBAI

Dust alerts as storms return to UAE

Large parts of the UAE were hit by dust and sandstorms as authorities urged caution on the roads and batted down for expected heavy rain. Homes and landmarks in major cities were caked in a fine layer of brown dirt and visibility plunged in the latest adverse weather following a series of choking dust storms around the Middle East.

On Saturday, Abu Dhabi’s official media office urged motorists to “avoid driving unless absolutely necessary”. Visibility



was below 1 kilometre in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Forecasts of rainstorms this week follow the deaths of seven Asian migrants in flash flooding last month. — AFP

MUMBAI

‘India’s Warren Buffet’ dies days after airline launch

Stock market billionaire Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, dubbed by local media India’s Warren Buffet, died a week after he launched the country’s newest airline.

Calling the 62-year-old “indomitable”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi echoed tributes from other senior officials, tweeting that the death of the tycoon was “saddening.”

The “Big Bull of Dalal Street” had a net worth of \$3.5 billion with significant holdings in more than 30 Indian blue chip stocks.



Jhunjhunwala had invested \$35 million for an estimated 40 per cent stake in Akasa Air which made its maiden flight in the Asian country’s crowded aviation market last Sunday. — AFP

BANGKOK

China and Thailand kick off joint air force drills

Thailand and China kicked off a joint air force exercise on Sunday, the kingdom’s military said, the first such drills in years following a pause forced by Covid-19. The “Falcon Strike” exercise comes after China’s biggest-ever military drills around Taiwan, which were conducted in retaliation to a visit by US House Speaker Pelosi.

Thai Air Chief Marshall Prapas Sornchaidee said “Falcon Strike”, running from August 14-25 in the northeast of the country, was meant to “strengthen relations



and understanding” with China. The visiting Chinese contingent will include fighter jets, bombers and airborne early-warning (AEW) planes, the defence ministry in Beijing said. — AFP



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In brief

■ KUWAIT



KUWAIT NAMES FIRST ENVOY TO IRAN IN OVER 6 YEARS

Kuwait has appointed an ambassador to Iran, both countries said, more than six years after recalling its top envoy to Tehran in solidarity with Saudi Arabia after it severed ties with the Islamic Republic in 2016. Ambassador Bader Abdullah Al Munaikh handed his credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in Tehran on Saturday, Iran's foreign ministry said on its website Kuwait's foreign ministry confirmed Munaikh was appointed envoy to Iran. Iran already has an ambassador in Kuwait. Kuwait recalled its envoy to Iran as other Gulf Arab states downgraded ties to rally behind Riyadh.

■ YEREVAN



FIREWORKS EXPLODE IN ARMENIAN MALL, KILLING ONE

Blasts ripped through a fireworks warehouse in a shopping mall in the Armenian capital of Yerevan on Sunday, killing one and injuring at least 45 people, Russian news agencies cited the Armenian emergencies ministry as saying. Video posted on social media showed thick grey smoke rising above a building, followed by an explosion that sent people running from the scene. Firefighters were struggling to contain the blaze as fireworks continued detonating, TASS cited the head of the ministry's rescue service as saying. The mall is located outside the city centre, a reporter at the scene said.

■ WASHINGTON



MAN DIES AFTER CRASHING CAR NEAR US CAPITOL

A man died in an apparent suicide early on Sunday after crashing his car into a barricade near the US Capitol and firing shots into the air, police said. While the man was getting out of the crashed car, it became engulfed in flames just after 4 am at East Capitol Street and Second Street, US Capitol Police said. "At this time, it does not appear the man was targeting any members of Congress, who are on recess, and it does not appear officers fired their weapons," Capitol Police said. Police said the man then fired several gunshots into the air along East Capitol Street.

Ruto pulls ahead in Kenya's presidential vote count



Riot police officers on horses patrol as they secure the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) National tallying centre at the Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi. — Reuters

NAIROBI: Kenya's Deputy President William Ruto has edged ahead in a tight presidential race, according to official results reported by Kenyan media on Sunday, as more riot police were deployed inside the national election tallying centre after scuffles and accusations by party agents.

The fracas underscored fraying tempers and high tensions within the national counting hall as the country waits for official results from last Tuesday's election. There were wry digs online over the melee from citizens pointing out that the rest of the nation is waiting patiently.

In the presidential race, official verified results reported by the Nation media group showed Ruto taking 51 per cent of the vote,

ahead of left-leaning opposition leader Raila Odinga who had 48 per cent.

Confusion over vote tallying in the media and the slow pace of progress by the electoral commission have fed anxiety in Kenya, which is East Africa's richest and most stable nation but which has a history of violence following disputed elections.

Reuters was unable to get access to the official running vote tally for the presidential race on Sunday. A live feed displaying the results at the national tallying centre had disappeared hours earlier.

When asked about the tally, a spokeswoman for the commission referred to the live feed. Other electoral officials said they were unable to provide the information.

The winner must get 50 per cent of votes plus one and the commission has seven days from the vote to declare the winners

Officially verified results on Saturday, with a little more than a quarter of votes counted, put Odinga in the lead with 54 per cent of the vote while Ruto had 45 per cent.

The winner must get 50 per cent of votes plus one. The commission has seven days from the vote to declare the winners. A Reuters tally of 255 out of 291 preliminary

constituency-level results at 12:00 GMT on Sunday showed Ruto in the lead with 52 per cent and Odinga at just over 47 per cent. Two minor candidates shared less than a per cent between them.

Reuters did not include 19 forms in the count because they lacked signatures, totals, were illegible or had other problems.

The preliminary tally is based on forms that are subject to revision if any discrepancies are discovered during the official verification process.

The many checks and balances are designed to try to prevent the kind of allegations of rigging that provoked violence in 2007, when more than 1,200 people were killed, and in 2017, when more than 100 people were killed.

— Reuters

Ship carrying first Ukraine grain cargo nears Syria

BEIRUT: The first ship to depart Ukraine under a deal to resume grain exports from the country two weeks ago was approaching the Syrian port of Tartous on Sunday, two shipping sources said, after the vessel had been sailing with its transponder off.

The Sierra Leone-flagged Razoni set sail from Ukraine's Odesa port on August 1 under the deal between Moscow and Kyiv, brokered by the UN and Turkey, but its location had not been clear in the past days without the transponder.

The cargo of 26,000 tonnes of corn had originally been destined for Lebanon, which has been suffering an economic crisis that has plunged its population into food insecurity.

However, the original buyer refused the delivery over quality concerns and the ship sailed to Turkey, docking in Mersin on August 11.

When it set sail again the following day, it did not keep its transponder on. Two shipping sources, one of them in Tartous, confirmed on Sunday that the ship was approaching the northwest Syrian port.

Ukraine previously accused Syria of importing at least 150,000 tonnes of grain it said was plundered from Ukrainian warehouses after Russia's attack in February. — Reuters

Rain brings relief to France fires, more evacuated

TOULOUSE: A forest fire that flared anew in southern France sent 1,000 more people fleeing while overnight rain brought blazes elsewhere in the country under control, officials said on Sunday.

France has been buffeted this summer by a historic drought as well as a series of heatwaves and several forest fires.

A fire that had been raging since Monday in the southern Aveyron region appeared to be under control and dying out on Saturday afternoon when it suddenly reignited in a "virulent" manner, gobbling up 500 more hectares, the prefecture said.

At least 1,000 people were evacuated from the village of Mostuejols near the city of Millau and six nearby hamlets, it said.

Some 3,000 people had already been evacuated because of the fire, but were allowed back when it appeared under control. No casualties have been reported so far from the blaze, which has consumed a total of 1,260 hectares so far.

A local man was under investigation for accidentally starting the fire when a metal part of his trailer touched the road, sending off sparks that ignited the dried vegetation.

To limit such risks in eastern France, police said on Saturday

they were banning entry to all but residents in most forests in the Bas-Rhin region near the German border.

Meanwhile in the southwestern Gironde region around Bordeaux, a huge fire that had flared on Tuesday was under control after rain fell overnight, a senior official said.

The situation "considerably improved during the night," Arnaud Mendousse, of Gironde fire and rescue, said.

He said there had been between 10 and 30 mm of rain in the region but on "terrain that is extremely dry".

"We know that this offers a respite but does not signify an end to the fight. We know that if it does not rain in the next 48 to 72 hours the risk will increase considerably."

Mendousse said the humidity level has gone up and the temperature was relatively low at around 25 degrees Celsius adding: "The fire is not completely out and the soil remains extremely hot".

In the northwest, in the legendary Broceliande forest in region of Brittany — where King Arthur roamed and where wildfires are normally rare — a fire was contained after rain fell overnight., but remained under watch after devastating 400 hectares, officials said. — AFP

Walrus that attracted crowds in Oslo fjord euthanised

OSLO: A walrus nicknamed Freya that attracted crowds while basking in the Oslo fjord was euthanised on Sunday, with Norway officials saying it was the only option but experts slamming an "infinitely sad" decision.

"The decision to euthanise was taken on the basis of a global evaluation of the persistent threat to human security," the head of Norway's Fisheries Directorate Frank Bakke-Jensen said in a statement.

"We carefully examined all the possible solutions. We concluded that we could not guarantee the well-being of the animal by any of the means available," he said.

Officials had previously said they were considering euthanasia because repeated appeals to the public to keep their distance from the young female weighing 600 kilograms had been in vain and that she was experiencing excessive stress.

Freya, whose name is a reference to the Norse goddess of beauty and love, had made headlines since July 17 when she was first spotted in the waters of the Norwegian capital.

Walrus normally live in the even more northerly latitudes of the Arctic. Between long naps in



A young female walrus nicknamed Freya climbing on a boat in Frognerkilen, Oslo Fjord, Norway. — AFP

the sun — a walrus can sleep up to 20 hours a day — Freya had been filmed chasing a duck, attacking a swan and, more often than not, dozing on boats struggling to support her bulk. Despite repeated appeals, curious onlookers continued to approach the mammal, sometimes with children in tow, to take photographs.

Experts said the decision to euthanise Freya did not taking into account the animal's well-being.

Siri Martinsen, a spokeswoman for animal rights group NOAH, told TV2 television that it was a rushed measure and that fines should have been issued to disperse the onlookers.

"It's very shocking," she added, saying it was an opportunity to show people how to respect wild animals.

"It's infinitely sad that they chose to euthanise such a beautiful animal simply because we did not behave well with it," biologist Rune Aae told the NTB news agency.

The Green Party earlier this week said experts recommended giving Freya sedatives and taking her away from populated areas, or taking her back to the remote Svalbard archipelago. But Bakke-Jensen said that "was not a viable option" because such an operation would be too complex.

— AFP

Flexibility of the mind and able to declutter it



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

The writer is a NLP practitioner, hypnotherapist and a life coach

We all know that being physically flexible is important to strengthen our body and keep us in supple shape. However, cognitive flexibility isn't really heard of, let alone practiced. With awareness and repetition, developing a flexible and agile mind will allow you to be malleable and bend towards living a more resilient, creative and fulfilled life. Fostering flexibility of the mind is extremely important for our mental well-being. It allows us to escape the vicious cycle of thoughts in order to enhance the betterment of our emotions, actions and motivations; in turn this adapts our thinking and boosts our inner resilience. Through stretching our

minds, we become open to the possibilities of change. Here are 10 methods to improve your mental flexibility: 1.Practise divergent thinking. Make an effort to think in unconventional and creative ways. 2.Seek out new experiences. Trying new things will boost your curiosity and enhance your knowledge. 3.Don't always take the easy route. Desirable difficulties can lead to deeper learning. This will keep your mind sharp, alert and ameliorate your mental clarity. 4.Spend time with people who think differently. Diverse perspectives and viewpoints will make you less rigid in your thinking and more open to change.

THE AIM IS TO REVERT TO BEING INQUISITIVE, TO NOT BE SO STUBBORN IN YOUR WAYS AND ALWAYS BE IN A STATE OF LEARNING AND GROWTH 5.Routine alteration: Brush your teeth with your left hand, take a different route home. Doing this regularly will aid to switch the neural pathways. 6.Meditation: Regulating your mind. When we change the thought, we change the feeling. Meditation allows us to go deeper into the realm of un-becoming. 7.Unwind. Work hard, play harder. The mind needs to be

cleaned and refreshed like the body. 8.Connect to your source: God, light, universe. Through removing self-importance, having humility and focusing on a higher purpose will bring a lightness of being. 9.Let go and live now. We can get easily caught up in the past or the future. Being present, right here, right now reaps amazing benefits and rewards. 10.Gratitude. When we vibrate on a higher level of consciousness, we improve our flexibility muscle. Flexibility of the mind is being able to declutter it like you would your living environment. The aim is to revert to being inquisitive, to not be so stubborn in your ways and always be in a state of learning and growth. Cognitive flexibility

allows you to see your failures and mistakes as part of the process of life, so you are able to bounce back from adversity quicker. Being more adaptable and resilient better equips you to go with the flow armed with a strengthened ability to solve complex problems. A flexible thinker will see roadblocks as growth opportunities not defeat. A supple mindset moves us away from limiting thought patterns to a place of openness and endless possibilities. Through these eyes, we are guaranteed to see atypical perspectives and most importantly to not be so inflexible in our patterns of belief. Maintaining a flexible mind is effectively powerful and powerfully effective.

Ukraine nuclear plant standoff stirs Chernobyl memories

JOE STENSON

Anastasiya Rudenko clutches the gleaming gold medal her late husband Viktor was awarded for working in the Chernobyl nuclear disaster zone. He died in 2014 from bladder cancer — perhaps a result of radiation, she thinks. Now she mourns his loss in the Ukrainian village of Vyschetarasivka, across the river from the Zaporizhzhia atomic power plant. Kiev and Moscow accuse each other of shelling near the facility. Rockets have struck a radioactive waste storage area and monitors warn of a “grave” crisis with potential for catastrophic fallout. Across a 14-kilometre stretch of the Dnipro River, the station’s hulking silhouette is clearly visible from the village where Rudenko handles paperwork proving her partner’s fateful role in history’s greatest nuclear calamity. “We could have the same fate as the people of Chernobyl,” the 63-year-old said. “There’s nothing good in what’s going on, and we don’t know how it will end.” Ukraine remains deeply scarred by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe, when a Soviet-era reactor exploded and streamed radiation into the atmosphere in the country’s north. Russia captured the site when it began its large-scale war of Ukraine in late February, stirring safety fears, but it was abandoned within weeks when Moscow failed to take Kyiv. The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine was also occupied in the early days of the war but it has remained in Russian hands ever since. Ukraine says enemy troops are launching attacks from the facility — Europe’s largest — and its own military cannot return fire. The escalating situation brings dark echoes from the past for those with close links to Chernobyl. Anastasiya’s husband Viktor worked as one of the 600,000 “liquidators”, tasked with painstakingly decontaminating the “Chernobyl exclusion zone,” where high radiation levels forced civilian evacuations. The official death toll of Chernobyl remains just 31, however that figure is hotly contested with some estimating that thousands of liquidators may have suffered fatal doses of the invisible rays. Viktor drove a truck in “the zone” for a total of 18 days. A gold service ribbon awarded by the Ukraine Chernobyl Union shows atoms swirling around the “bell of Chernobyl”, a symbol which has become a ringing reminder of the event. A brittle document from Ukraine’s defence ministry archives certifies Viktor’s work and the dose of radiation he absorbed — 24.80 roentgen.— AFP

Reuniting separated people through an unlikely source: YouTube

SALMAN MASOOD AND MIKE IVES

DHILLON IS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND PUNJABI LEHAR, A 6-YEAR-OLD YOUTUBE CHANNEL THAT POSTS REGULAR INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS OF THAT EPISODE

Nasir Dhillon, a former police officer, sells houses in a Pakistani city about 100 miles from the Indian border. His real estate company has four locations and he drives a Toyota SUV, a local marker of affluence. But Dhillon, 38, is better known for his sideline: reuniting people separated from their relatives during Partition, when Britain split its large South Asian colony in August 1947. Dhillon is the driving force behind Punjabi Lehar, a 6-year-old YouTube channel that posts regular interviews with survivors of that episode. He says it has enabled a number of Muslims and Sikhs — including some who live in North America — to visit their ancestral villages, and has led to about 100 in-person reunions. “What have they done wrong? They were children,” Dhillon said recently at his office in the northeastern city of Faisalabad. “Why can’t they visit their families now?” In a typical case, Dhillon or his business partner, Bhupinder Singh Lovely, interview a person who wants to meet a long-lost friend or visit an ancestral house or village. The video ricochets around social media and sometimes prompts tips from the public that lead to a reunion or a journey to the countryside. Many Partition survivors on both sides of the border have expressed a dying wish to cross it and reconnect with lives and people left behind, said Anam Zakaria, author of “Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians.” “Too many people have already passed away with this desire unfulfilled,” she said. “Against this context, the way in which Punjabi Lehar is fostering connections and reunions provides a window of hope and closure, at a time when we are at the brink of losing the Partition generation.” Dhillon, said that his interest in Partition’s legacy comes from his grandfather, who would tell the family stories about their ancestral village in Indian Punjab, and the Sikh friends and neighbours he used to know. “In the media and elsewhere, we

were told a different story about differences and enmity between the people,” Dhillon said, speaking in thickly accented Punjabi, a provincial tongue. “But our elders told of a time when Muslims and Sikhs lived peacefully together.” In his mid-20s, he began making friends with Facebook users in Indian Punjab, and later created a Facebook page about Punjabi language and culture. He struck up a friendship with Lovely, a Sikh who lives nearby. They co-founded Punjabi Lehar in 2016, after Dhillon left the local police force. Dhillon said they chose the name, which translates to “Punjabi Wave,” because an ocean wave is hard to stop. Early responses to the channel’s videos came mainly from Sikhs in Canada and the United States; some later travelled to their ancestral villages after receiving new information about their families, Dhillon said. As word spread, he and Lovely also heard from people in Pakistan and India seeking to connect in person with long-lost friends and relatives. It is hard to get tourist visas for travelling between India and Pakistan, and official channels that have occasionally allowed people to meet are now “pretty much frozen,” said Ilhan Niaz, a historian at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. “There is no government support for this sort of stuff,” he said. There is one loophole: People from the two states can meet in person at a

handful of Sikh holy sites in Pakistan that Indians are permitted to visit, mostly on religious pilgrimage visas. Dhillon said about 80 of the 100 or so in-person reunions that Punjabi Lehar has enabled so far have taken place at Kartarpur, a visa-free pilgrimage site that opened along the border in 2019. He said the channel’s work has also led to virtual family reunions and about 800 in-person trips to ancestral villages. Dhillon’s estimates could not be independently verified, but the channel has uploaded reams of videos that document emotional journeys and reunions in the Indo-Pakistani borderlands. A recent one featured Mumtaz Bibi, 75, born in Indian Punjab and raised in Pakistan by a Muslim family that had adopted her as a baby after her mother was killed in riots. This year, Bibi’s son contacted Punjabi Lehar to see if its administrators could help find her Sikh relatives in India. “The thing is, it’s a blood relation,” she said in a video that Dhillon uploaded in May. “Now, a fire is burning in my heart to meet my family.” She learned that her biological father had died but that her three brothers still lived in the Indian city of Patiala. A video later posted to the Punjabi Lehar site showed her hugging them for the first time at Kartarpur, as they cry with happiness. — New York Times



Nasir Dhillon, right, at the studio for his YouTube channel in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Are you a bookworm?!



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

It is attributed that the biggest pleasure of reading comes from what we read, not from on what we read.

There is a great difference between an eager man who wants to read a book and the tired man who wants a book to read.

There are people who regard reading the only thing that makes their day; those are book lovers or in other words, called bookworms.

This kind of people always never go to bed alone; rather with a

book in hand to read. Perhaps, they keep reading until they fall asleep with the book falling on their chest!

Though life is getting busier more and more every single day, book lovers never give up the habit of reading. It is becoming an essential part of their day-to-day activities; reading marks another life for them! In fact, books are regarded the best friend ever over years, so one has to ask himself whether he is a friend of books or not? Probably this question provokes one to ask how much he/she reads in a day, a week, a month, a year or even a decade! Is he/she reading enough as one grows up?

Reading is a good habit which many people are unfortunately not used to, especially nowadays while everyone is busy with the social media and technology.

READING IS A GOOD HABIT WHICH MANY PEOPLE ARE UNFORTUNATELY NOT USED TO, ESPECIALLY NOWADAYS WHILE EVERYONE IS BUSY WITH THE SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

I am afraid that reading might be ignored and excluded from one's list of daily, weekly or monthly things-to-do.

If it really happens, then reading, as a habit or a culture, could be given a cold shoulder if not totally forgotten.

This might be the case with probably those who are not fans of reading. However,

the case is of course different for book lovers.

However, it all works with the interest and passion, if we have it then one will always have the time to read.

Having the interest to read should not be linked to how much one has to read. It has nothing to do with the amount of reading one does everyday, but to keep the habit going on.

Though life always keeps us busy, one must have reading on the list of responsibilities and accord it a priority.

As food is important for the body, so is reading for the mind and soul. Reading feeds our minds and souls with knowledge, inspiration and good spirit. All you need to do is simply to put away your smartphones, pull out a good book and start reading.

Have some time everyday and have this practice as a daily action and eventually it becomes a habit. Instead make it a culture at home where you urge your family and kids to do the same.

Let each one of them discover how passionate he/she is about reading.

Let reading be unconsciously a habit that they like and enjoy with no pressure put on them. Consequently, reading will become a culture at home, which everybody has adopted.

As bookworms worldwide observed the National Book Lovers Day on August 9, it is a commendable call to everyone to adapt reading as a habit in life.

It is a day to encourage the joy and fun of reading with family, friends, colleagues and other book lovers. Besides, it is a perfect time to give a book as a well-chosen gift to friends and family. You could also commemorate the day with a group of friends or reading enthusiasts by reading a book, discussing a novel, sharing an experience or exchanging books.

On the other hand, if it wasn't for the authors, there would actually be no books! Hence, on the occasion of National Book Lovers Day, one can take a little time to show some tribute and appreciation for a favourite author.

If he/she is a living author, then give them applause and send them a thank you note, else pray for the dead authors. Hats on for all authors in the universe.



A RESTING SPIDER!

A spider rests under a hydrangea petal in a garden outside Moscow, Russia, on Sunday. – AFP

Lessons from Gandhi’s non-violence move



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a journalist, author and columnist

India is all set to celebrate its 75th Independence Day. The importance of the day increases when one thinks of all the years of pain and strain, and deprivation that the leaders and revolutionaries of the struggle-filled history endured for their beloved nation.

Coinciding with the commemoration of the day is the 100 years of what has gone down in history as ‘The Great Trial’ of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Mahatma of India, for sedition in 1922. The trial led to a six-year jail sentence, although the Father of the Nation served only two years of it thanks to his good behaviour and ill health.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he was already a well-known activist for the Indian community’s cause in South Africa and the principle of non-violent struggle that he had honed against British rule. A lawyer by profession, he used truth and non-violence in the struggle to achieve freedom for his people and country.

During the initial years back home, Gandhi travelled extensively in India to understand the social, economic, and political landscape of the country. He was loved and respected as the Mahatma, the great soul with voluntary poverty, simplicity, humility, and saintliness.

Gandhi was swept to the top of the freedom struggle in 1919-20 because he had caught the imagination of the people. But by this period, the discontent among Indians against the British rule reached its peak ignited by the Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh killings, and the imposition of martial law in Punjab.

The non-cooperation movement was launched by Gandhi on August 1, 1920, after the failure of the British to respond to a letter by him to the Viceroy in June that spoke about the right recognised “from time immemorial of the subject to refuse to assist a ruler who misrules.”

The movement called for boycotting

COINCIDING WITH THE COMMEMORATION OF 75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY IS THE 100 YEARS OF WHAT HAS GONE DOWN IN HISTORY AS ‘THE GREAT TRIAL’ OF MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, THE MAHATMA OF INDIA, FOR SEDITION IN 1922. THE TRIAL LED TO A SIX-YEAR JAIL SENTENCE, ALTHOUGH THE FATHER OF THE NATION SERVED ONLY TWO YEARS OF IT THANKS TO HIS GOOD BEHAVIOUR AND ILL HEALTH

government-run schools and colleges, courts, and foreign-made cloth and surrendering all government honours. This finally led to mass civil obedience and non-payment of taxes. However, Gandhiji had to withdraw from the ‘Non-Cooperation Movement’ in February 1922 because at a dusty market town known as Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur in the present north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a peaceful mob turned violent and clashed with the police resulting in the deaths of several policemen.

Gandhi realised that the movement was turning violent and agitations needed proper understanding. He construed this mob violence as unimpeachable evidence of the fact that the country was not yet ready for swaraj (self-rule) and unilaterally decided to call off the non-cooperation movement. In response, Gandhi called off the movement, which was gaining lot of momentum, and vociferously condemned the violence in Chauri Chaura to reinforce the principle of non-violence. Gandhi was convinced about his decision and that was very much reflected in the writings on this issue when he wrote, “I know that

the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound. The country will have gained by my humiliation and confession of error. The only virtue I want to claim is truth and non-violence. I lay no claim to superhuman powers”.

However, on March 10, 1922, Gandhi was arrested on charges of sedition. Gandhi held himself accountable, fasted in penance, and asked for the highest penalty at his trial. For him, no future goal justified violence in the present; it could not be the means to any political end. Self-discipline was crucial to self-sovereignty, swaraj.

In his remarkable statement to the judge during the trial, Gandhi said: “I have concluded that I can’t dissociate myself from the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura... Non-violence is the first article of my faith...”

Non-violence was a lifelong commitment for Mahatma Gandhi in his personal and public life. As it is the centenary year of Chauri Chaura, every Indian must understand its significance in the country’s freedom struggle and the tireless efforts taken by Gandhi to keep the struggle largely non-violent.

The idea of non-violence was central to Mahatma Gandhi’s beliefs. From the railway platform in Pietermaritzburg to the indigo plantations of Champaran, the response to Chauri Chaura, and the salt march at Dandi, underpinned his steadfast resistance to injustice and guided him on every step of his leadership of the freedom struggle. While sentencing Gandhi to six years imprisonment, the judge observed, “you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely ever to try... in the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and a great leader; even all those who differ from you in politics look up to you as a man of high ideals and noble and even saintly life.”

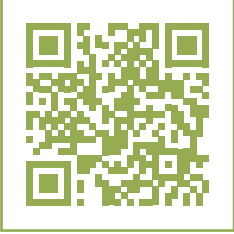
No doubt, non-violence has great appeal in the current scenario where nations are involved in a war with each other and the non-violence movement removes the illogicality of trying to make the world a less violent and more just place by using violence as a tool.

In post-independent India, there have been leaders and workers from all political parties actively committing and encouraging violence towards India’s citizens. Many leaders, while paying profuse lip service to Gandhi, never have shown the moral will or courage to unambiguously discourage violent followers and violent acts as the Father of the Nation consistently did.

Violence, while never being a solution to any problem, also gives birth to further perpetuating disasters!



A motorist drives past a light installation showing an image of Mahatma Gandhi in a map of India ahead of the country’s 75th Independence Day celebrations in Chennai on Sunday. – AFP



NEYMAR

SCORES BRACE, MBAPPE ON TARGET

PARIS: Neymar continued his outstanding start to the season with a brace while Kylian Mbappe marked his return to the team with a goal but also had a penalty saved as Paris Saint-Germain trounced Montpellier 5-2 in Ligue 1 on Saturday.

Neymar rolled in a spot-kick to put PSG 2-0 up at the break on a hot night at the Parc des Princes after Falaye Sacko's own goal had put them ahead.

The Brazilian then headed in his second and PSG's third shortly after the interval, taking his tally for the season to five goals already after just three games.

Wahbi Khazri pulled one back for Montpellier before Mbappe made it 4-1 and new signing Renato Sanches came off the bench to get the fifth late on.

Enzo Tchato notched another consolation for the visitors at the death but PSG have now recorded three wins out of three this season under new coach Christophe Galtier, scoring 14 goals in the process. Neymar has picked up where he left off last season, when he scored nine in PSG's final nine

Ligue 1 matches.

So often plagued by fitness issues since arriving in Paris in 2017, he finally looks in rude health.

In contrast, Mbappe was playing his first competitive game since announcing on the final night of last season that he had agreed a new three-year deal to stay at PSG, turning down a move to Real Madrid in the process.

MBAPPE 'NEEDS TIME'

The France superstar missed his club's first two games of the new campaign — a 4-0 defeat of Nantes in the season-opening Champions Trophy, and then the 5-0 win at Clermont — due first to suspension and then injury.

"Physically, we knew his lack of game time in pre-season would cost him," Galtier told broadcaster Canal Plus when asked about Mbappe's performance and attitude, with the 23-year-old appearing frustrated at times on the night.

"He is a competitor, he wants to be good, and he wants to be good quickly."

Mbappe, whose last match was



against Gamba Osaka in Japan almost three weeks ago, had a penalty saved midway through the first half by Montpellier goalkeeper Jonas Omlin after the VAR spotted a handball in the area.

However, it was his shot that was diverted in by Sacko for an own goal to break the deadlock, and Mbappe later got his goal following a Neymar corner in the

normal that he should be, not disappointed, but a bit short of full fitness compared to his teammates."

Meanwhile Neymar thought he had a hat-trick late on when he finished from a Lionel Messi pass, only for the celebrations to be cut short when the VAR spotted an offside in the build-up.

Soon after that Sanches scored moments after coming on for his debut following a move from Lille for a reported 15 million euros (\$15.4m).

PSG are expected to make more signings before the transfer window closes and have been strongly linked with Napoli's Spanish international midfielder Fabian Ruiz.

Earlier in Ligue 1, Monaco bounced back from their midweek Champions League elimination to draw 1-1 with Rennes.

Knocked out in the third qualifying round of Europe's elite club competition by PSV Eindhoven, Monaco had Youssef Fofana sent off inside 15 minutes at the Stade Louis II.

Axel Disasi then had a penalty

FRENCH LIGUE 1 RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Monaco 1 (Embolo 73)
Rennes 1 (Laborde 59)
Paris Saint-Germain 5 (Sacko 39-og, Neymar 43-pen, 51, Mbappe 69, Sanches 87)
Montpellier 2 (Khazri 58, Tchato 90+2)

On Friday
Nantes 1 (Simon 27) Lille 1 (Ismaily 75)

saved for the hosts, and Gaetan Laborde put Rennes ahead before the hour mark.

However, Swiss forward Breel Embolo pounced on an error by Rennes substitute goalkeeper Dogan Alemdar to ensure a share of the spoils.

Sunday's scheduled match between Lorient and Lyon was called off because of damage caused to the Brittany side's pitch by the scorching, dry summer weather in France combined with a festival held on the surface last week. — AFP



Duplantis

DUPLANTIS, WARHOLM HEAD STELLAR CAST

MUNICH HOSTS EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

MUNICH, Germany: World and Olympic pole vault champion Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis will headline the European Athletics Championships that also features the top Norwegian duo of Karsten Warholm and Jakob Ingebrigtsen, and Italy's Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs.

Track and field will headline the European Championships in Munich, the biggest sports event in Germany since the 1972 Summer Olympics in the same Bavarian city.

The athletics has drawn a record 1,540 participants from 47 nations in 50 medal events, rubbing shoulders at the second edition of the European Championships with eight other Olympic sports: beach volleyball, canoe sprint, cycling, gymnastics, rowing, sport climbing, table tennis and triathlon.

In total, 31 reigning individual champions from Berlin 2018 are competing in the 25th edition of the Euro athletics champs, including Croatia's Sandra Perkovic, who is targeting a record-breaking sixth successive title in the discus.

All 10 European gold medallists from the World Athletics Championships in Oregon are due to compete once again on the continental stage after the 2020 edition in Paris was cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

All eyes, however, will be on Duplantis, fresh from breaking his own world record in Eugene as he clinched world gold with 6.21 metres.

The championship record of 6.05m — set by the Soviet and Ukrainian great Sergey Bubka — looks in danger if the US-born Swede puts his mind to it.

Norway's Ingebrigtsen was one of the stars of Berlin 2018, winning double gold in a memorable 1500-5,000m double.

A world silver medallist behind Jake Wightman in the 1500m in Eugene, Ingebrigtsen will attempt the same double in Munich, with the Briton handily stepping down



Karsten Warholm

to the 800m.

CALM PREPARATIONS

Ingebrigtsen's teammate Warholm ran one of the greatest Olympic track performances of all time when he smashed the 29-year-old world record to win the 400m hurdles at last year's Tokyo Games in a time of 45.94sec. But the 26-year-old suffered a hamstring injury in June and although he made the world final in Oregon, he could only finish seventh. If fully fit, Warholm will be the one to beat at the Olympic Stadium.

"I'm going to run everything I've got in a European Championship final and take the best time I can," Warholm told Norwegian tabloid VG.

"I have been able to train without worry since the worlds," he added. "Whereas, before the worlds it was a race against time to be ready — very stressful — now I was able to prepare myself more

calmly and it's a very good feeling."

Italy's Jacobs was another one to disappoint in the United States, withdrawing before the semifinals of the men's 100m with a thigh injury.

His coach Paolo Camossi was confident Jacobs would be able to compete in both the 100 and 4x100m relay in Munich.

"He's running free. He's having fun. The workouts are promising," he said. "If we are here in Munich, it is because he is fine and can compete."

"Marcell is the Olympic gold medallist and he is here to win, but it is not a race to be taken lightly." There are also injury concerns over Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, the reigning double European sprint champion who skipped the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Defending her world title, she had to be happy with a 200m bronze in Eugene and can

expect strong competition from Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji and fellow Briton Daryll Neita.

British hopes look more secure in the women's middle-distance events, as Keely Hodgkinson and Laura Muir are favourites, and in form, in the 800 and 1500m respectively.

Eilish McColgan is also doubling up in the 5,000-10,000m after having won silver and gold in Birmingham.

In the multi-discipline events both world champions are in action: Belgium's Nafi Thiam goes in the heptathlon and France's Kevin Mayer in the decathlon.

Mayer has warned that his body had not fully recuperated from Eugene.

"If there's the slightest pain and a risk that could cost me in the future, it won't be worth it," Mayer said with a nod to the 2024 Summer Olympics to be held in Paris. — AFP

Shakib returns as Bangladesh T20 captain

DHAKA: Shakib Al Hasan on Saturday was named to return as Bangladesh's Twenty20 international captain after he bowed to a Bangladesh Cricket Board ultimatum to scrap a deal with a betting site.

The all-rounder was given the nod to lead the side for the upcoming Asia Cup in the United Arab Emirates and the World Cup in Australia.

"Shakib realised his mistake," BCB cricket operations chief Jalal Yunus told reporters as he announced the decision.

"He is a very important player for us."

Earlier this month Shakib announced a partnership with Betwinner News, a portal operated by a gambling firm based in the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao.

He wrote on his social media pages that it was the "one and only source of sports news!"

Gambling is illegal in Bangladesh and he was forced to cancel the deal after the BCB president, Nazmul Hassan, issued an ultimatum ordering him to choose between the national team and Betwinner.

Shakib captained Bangladesh to seven wins and 14 defeats in 21 T20Is until he was banned for two years — one of them suspended — in 2019 after he failed to record corrupt approaches.

Shakib, who also returned as Test captain in July, replaces wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan as Bangladesh's T20



Shakib Al Hasan

skipper.

Nurul was retained in the Asia Cup squad despite undergoing surgery on a finger in Singapore last week in the hope that he would regain his fitness by the time the tournament starts on August 27 in Dubai.

"His stitches will be removed on August 21. Hopefully, the result will be positive," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin.

Three-time Asia Cup finalists Bangladesh will face Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in Group B of the competition, with two teams progressing to the next round.

Former captain Mushfiquur Rahim also returned to the side after being rested for the T20 series in Zimbabwe, where Bangladesh lost a series against the hosts for the first time.

— AFP

Oman Cricket launches Women's Indoor Bash



MUSCAT: Oman Cricket will launch the Women's Indoor Bash 2022 on September 16 and 17 at the Indoor Academy facility at the Oman Cricket headquarters in Al Amerat.

The T10 format tournament provides all girls and women from beginners to experienced an opportunity to come and play fun and competitive cricket over the weekend. The Women's Indoor Bash is being played with the Wind Ball (Softball), the first of its kind to be played a tournament within Oman. Each team will consist of 11 players (9 playing) with a maximum of three national women team players in the playing IX of each side.

Vaishali Jesrani, Oman's women national team captain on the announcement of the tournament said, "We are indeed pleased by this initiative taken by Oman Cricket to grow women's participation in cricket in Oman. This tournament certainly serves as a starter to our season 2022-23

and also help us spot talent for the OC League. We are looking forward to play this fun, fast, competitive and compelling format."

Oman Cricket Academy's state-of-the-art 7-lane Indoor facility gives an opportunity to everyone interested to play cricket from beginners to experienced with a different level of game competitiveness. It explores all aspects of the game and provide the opportunity for cricket enthusiast females to enjoy the game of indoor cricket.

Oman Cricket visionises the growth of women's participation in cricket and provides more game time as well as exposure by playing competitive cricket across various formats to engage them to play the game.

Registrations are on for the Women's Indoor Bash. For enquiries and registration, contact Vaishali Jesrani: +968 99463323 and Lakshitha D: +968 93260881

Amer al Khanjari snatches silver as Oman bag fourth medal

WALEED AL JAHWARI
KONYA, AUGUST 14

Olympian Amer al Khanjari bagged a silver medal for Oman in the weightlifting 89 kg category in the fifth edition of Islamic Solidarity Games in Konya, Turkey, on Sunday. With the silver, Oman claimed their fourth medal in the Games.

Amer lifted 193 kg in the clean and Jerk competition. The Omani lifter also achieved a record of 156 kg in snatch competition among 12 competitors at Tuyap hall in Konya.

The Islamic Solidarity Games is being held from August 5 to 19 in Konya with participation of 5,000 athletes from 55 countries.

Earlier, Oman national shooting team opened the preliminary qualification for (shozen skeet) shooting at Konya



shooting field. On the first day, the qualifying consisted of three rounds. Each round has 25 points, with total of 75 points.

In men's competition, shooter Nagmash al Hatali achieved 74 points among 35 shooters. Yasir al Nasri finished with 71 points and Mohamed al Gharbi earned 68 points. In women's shooting, Oman's Fatima al Sulaimi finished with 59 points.

On Monday, the shooting competition continues with another two rounds out of 50 points. On same day, the top eight shooters in two qualification rounds will compete in the final round.

Oman national swimming team concluded their participation in the Games. Issa al Adawi achieved a time of 2:00.07 minutes among 19 competitors in 200m freestyle competition.



Oman futsal team shift gears as AFC Asian showdown nears

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 14

Oman futsal team is picking up the pace ahead of its debut at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in September in Kuwait. After an absence of two months from last presence at the West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) men's futsal championship, the national futsal team players reported for training and completed their first part of the domestic preparatory camp on successful note recently. The short warm-up gathering was part of team's preparations for the upcoming Asian finals in Kuwait from September 27 to October 8, 2022.

It is expected that the preparatory programme will feature series of internal and external camps which will be announced soon by the team management. The team will play some friendlies which will act as a good chance to assess all aspects of the team's readiness for the forthcoming Asian assignment.

The Sultanate of Oman team will face a tough challenge with the hosts Kuwait, 16-time Asian

champions Thailand and Iraq in Group A. The topper and runner-up from all the four groups will advance to the quarterfinals.

Younis al Fahdi, head of coaching staff, led the team to the semifinals in the latest presence of team at West Asian Football Federation (WAFF) men's futsal championship which was held in Kuwait in June. Oman team suffered a 4-3 loss against Saudi Arabia in the semifinal.

In the group stage, the Sultanate of Oman team managed to top Group B by five points with a 4-2 win over the UAE in the opener.

Then, the Oman futsal team had registered two draws as they were held to a 2-2 draw against Bahrain before they split points with a 3-3 draw against Lebanon in the concluding group match. Lebanon ended their campaign as runners-up with the same points but with goal difference than Bahrain who finished in third place. The UAE team was positioned in the fourth place with no points. Ahead of WAFF event, the national team took part in the GCC Games in Kuwait.



Brentford battering leaves Man Utd bottom

LONDON: Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag said he had the "main responsibility" for a humiliating 4-0 loss away to Brentford on Saturday left the one time kings of English football bottom of the Premier League.

Brentford, who only ended a 74-year absence from English football's top flight with promotion to the Premier League in August 2021, scored four goals inside the opening 35 minutes to spark joyous scenes at their west London ground.

United fell behind in woeful fashion when goalkeeper David de Gea somehow let a Josh Dasilva shot slip through his grasp before Mathias Jensen struck as the visitors failed to play out from the back.

Ben Mee then exposed United's frailty from set-pieces for his first Brentford goal and Bryan Mbeumo rounded off a stunning counter-attack 10 minutes before half-time.

Former Ajax manager Ten Hag had seen his United reign begin with Brighton recording their maiden win at Old Trafford last week, but this defeat plunged the



Brentford's Ben Mee and team-mates celebrate after the match. – Reuters

Red Devils to the bottom of the table for the first time in 30 years.

'OPEN-HEART SURGERY'

"You have to take responsibility

on the pitch as a team and as individuals, that's what we didn't do," Ten Hag told Sky Sports.

"What I asked them to do is play with belief and

take responsibility for the performance. We have to work on that."

He added: "The manager is responsible as well. He has the

main responsibility and I'll take that and work on that."

In a separate interview with the BBC, the United manager said his team had to be "ready for the battle".

United were last crowned champions of England in the 2012/13 season in manager Alex Ferguson's final campaign before retirement.

But while Ten Hag was keen to bolster his squad, he was adamant the team he sent out at Brentford were far better than this result indicated.

"It is clear we need players but I don't want to think about that in this moment," he said.

"The good players we had should have been better. I hoped for a better start, but still I have to believe because I have seen good things but the two games from now are disappointing."

Former Manchester United and England full-back Gary Neville, a longstanding critic of the Glazer family, the club's US-based owners, slammed the hierarchy at Old Trafford for failing to give Ten Hag adequate support.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Arsenal 4 (Jesus 23, 35, Xhaka 55, Martinelli 75) Leicester 2 (Saliba 53-og, Maddison 74)
Aston Villa 2 (Ings 31, Buendia 85) Everton 1 (Digne 87-og)
Brentford 4 (Dasilva 10, Jensen 18, Mee 30, Mbeumo 35) Manchester United 0
Brighton 0 Newcastle 0
Manchester City 4 (Gundogan 19, De Bruyne 31, Foden 37, Lerma 79-og) Bournemouth 0
Southampton 2 (Aribo 72, Walker-Peters 81) Leeds 2 (Rodrigo 46, 60)
Wolves 0 Fulham 0

"Manchester United have known for eight to 10 months they needed to rebuild the squad for the summer," said Neville, now a Sky pundit.

"(Former manager) Ralf Rangnick said it was open-heart surgery.

"To not get the players in early, the quality of the players, the number of players that Erik ten Hag needed to be able to start the season, is baffling and difficult to forgive." — AFP

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Qais: Encouraging international response to Oman’s fiscal reforms

INCENTIVES: Economic Stimulus Plan, Social Protection Plan and Medium Term Fiscal Plan unlock a “wealth of benefits” for Oman’s business landscape”: Minister

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 14

A raft of fiscal programmes rolled out by the Omani government in response to the recent global economic slowdown, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, has been positively received by the international investment community, according to Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef (pictured), Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

His observation came during a keynote address at the Annual Omani British Business Council conference held in London recently. Around 250 distinguished guests from the Sultanate of Oman, as well as UK institutions, were in attendance.

Notable among these fiscal initiatives is the Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP), which is designed to support the Omani economy “by offering tax incentives, fee reductions and waivers”, said the Minister.

Launched just over a year ago, the ESP scheme comes with



Launched just over a year ago, the ESP scheme comes with “various reductions in land rents and the opportunity for foreign companies to own land over 5,000m2 for commercial and commercial-residential purposes.

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

“various reductions in land rents and the opportunity for foreign companies to own land over 5,000m2 for commercial and commercial-residential purposes”, Al Yousef pointed out.

Furthermore, in an effort to ease entry into the private sector, the Ministry of Commerce,

Industry and Investment Promotion reduced fees for 30 business services, some by as much as 95 per cent – a move that was initiated earlier this year.

“To give an example of what this means in real terms - the fee to obtain an industrial license was slashed from £2,172 (RO 1,000

approx) to £108 (RO 50 approx).

Moreover, it is possible to rent land on one of our fully developed industrial estates at around £2 pounds 20 (RO 1 approx) per square metre per year,” explained Al Yousef, adding that new businesses setting up operations before the end of 2022 will enjoy corporate tax at zero per cent for the next five years.

These incentives, coupled with the many advantages offered under the Social Protection Plan and the Medium Term Fiscal Plan, unlock a “wealth of benefits to Oman’s business landscape”, the Minister noted.

Significantly, the response from the international community to the introduction of these three fiscal programmes, alongside other reform packages, has been “encouraging”, said Al Yousef.

“From positive reports by the IMF to the upgrading in April by S&P Global of our credit rating to BB- with a stable outlook - the first upgrade since 2015. And in November last year, as Oman participated in its third World Trade Organization trade policy review in Geneva, members complimented our low tariffs and minimal non-tariff barriers to trade. Also praised was our new legislation covering foreign capital investment, privatisation, public-private partnerships and bankruptcy laws,” he further stated.

Sohar Islamic named Mandated Lead Arranger for Oman Cement expansion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 14

Publicly listed Oman Cement has announced that it has appointed Sohar Islamic Bank as its Mandated Lead Arranger (MLA) to secure the funding necessary to finance the capacity expansion of its Misfah plant.

Salim bin Abdullah al Hajry, CEO – Oman Cement, said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Sunday that it has “executed an Expression of Interest document for arranging funds for the (expansion) project with Sohar Islamic Bank”.

Late last year, Oman Cement, the country’s first cement producer, announced that the expansion would consist of the construction of a new production line (Line 4) with a capacity of 10,000 tonnes per day (TPD) of cement. Additionally, the existing Line 3 production facility is proposed to be upgraded to a capacity of 5,000 TPD of cement, up from the present 4,000 TPD capacity.

The capacity increase is designed to meet domestic cement demand growth, reduce import dependence, and also add value to local resources. This increase will be achieved



via the construction of a new production line, the company stated. A number of engineering firms are bidding for its contract to expand the capacity of plant.

Separately, Oman Cement is investing around RO 10 million to enhance environmental safeguards at the Misfah plant. In addition to improvements to Productions Lines 1 and 2, the company plans to install solar panels to generate green electricity for the main building, as well as upgrade the air quality control system.

The government’s 51 per cent stake in Oman Cement, the country’s first cement manufacturer, is held by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

Saudi Aramco profit soars on higher prices, refining margins

RIYADH: State oil giant Saudi Aramco on Sunday reported its highest quarterly profit since the company went public in 2019, boosted by higher oil prices and refining margins.

Aramco joins oil majors such as Exxon Mobil Corp and BP that have reported strong or record breaking results in recent weeks after Western sanctions against major exporter Russia squeezed an already under-supplied global market causing a surge in crude and natural gas prices.

The company expects “oil demand to continue to grow for the rest of the decade despite downward economic pressures on short-term global forecasts,” CEO Amin Nasser said in Aramco’s earnings report.

Net profit increased 90 per cent to 181.64 billion riyals (\$48.39 billion) for the quarter to June 30 from 95.47 billion riyals a year earlier and compared with a mean estimate from 15 analysts of \$46.2 billion.

It declared a second-quarter



Engineers work at Yanbu refinery of Saudi Arabian state-owned oil and gas company Aramco. – AFP

dividend of \$18.8 billion, in line with its own target, to be paid in the third quarter. Aramco shares, which were little changed on Sunday, have risen more than 25 per cent this year.

Nasser, speaking to reporters on an earnings call, voiced concern over a lack of global investment in hydrocarbons that has led to “very limited” spare capacity. He said Aramco stands

ready to raise oil output to its maximum sustained capacity of 12 million barrels per day should the Saudi government ask. Aramco said its average total hydrocarbon production was 13.6

NET PROFIT INCREASED 90 PER CENT TO 181.64 BILLION RIYALS (\$48.39 BILLION) FOR THE QUARTER TO JUNE 30 FROM 95.47 BILLION RIYALS A YEAR EARLIER AND COMPARED WITH A MEAN ESTIMATE FROM 15 ANALYSTS OF \$46.2 BILLION.

million barrels of oil equivalent per day in the second quarter. The company is working to increase production from multiple energy sources, including renewables and blue hydrogen as well as oil and gas, as it works on both energy security and climate goals, Nasser said.

Capital expenditure increased by 25 per cent to \$9.4 billion in the quarter compared to the same period in 2021. Aramco said it

continued to invest in growth, expanding its chemicals business and developing prospects in low-carbon businesses.

It is also currently studying opportunities in the liquid-to-chemicals sector with a focus on the Asian market. In July, Exxon posted its biggest quarterly profit ever, a net income of \$17.9 billion, an almost four-fold increase from a year earlier, while European majors Shell and TotalEnergies also benefited from surging margins for making fuels like gasoline and diesel.

The Saudi stock market, up 11 per cent this year, is very promising for company listings in the near future, Nasser said, adding that there is “some expectation” that Aramco might list some entities within the firm.

Aramco is working to merge two energy trading units, with Aramco Trading Co to absorb Motiva Trading, ahead of a potential initial public offering of the business, sources have said.

— Reuters

Bank Nizwa gives aid to flood-affected areas in Al Rustaq and Al Awabi

MUSCAT: In keeping with its commitment to social responsibility, Bank Nizwa, the leading and the most trusted Islamic bank in Oman, has provided aid to flood-stricken communities in Al Rustaq and Al Awabi in response to the severe flooding that struck the area.

The bank pledged RO 40,000 to support impacted people and companies in the two wilayats. Bank Nizwa has always been at the forefront of humanitarian and disaster relief efforts, providing aid to those directly affected.

“Our commitment to giving back to our community is a core pillar of Bank Nizwa’s operations. Since CSR is an integral part of the way we do business, we strive to help those in need. In light of the floods in Al Rustaq and Al Awabi, the Board of Directors decided to contribute and support the communities affected,” said Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalili (**pictured**), Chairman of Bank Nizwa.

“In our organisation, being compassionate and offering assistance to those affected by calamities is deeply ingrained as an Islamic bank that adheres to Sharia law. When it comes to proactive preparations, the bank consistently surpasses



expectations. The goal is to ensure adequate resources are available to affected families and recovery activities can be carried out in the aftermath of a crisis. As a result, we are pleased to offer this assistance and hope it will alleviate some of their burdens,” he said.

Bank Nizwa focuses on assisting the communities affected by the floods and safeguarding their well-being. The Flood Relief Assistance is designed to support those in need of protecting the safety of their families and focuses on rebuilding lives following the floods.

In strong alignment with the Sharia principles of giving back to the local community, Bank Nizwa has always been hands-on in assisting individuals and has contributed significantly to philanthropic and humanitarian causes.

Bank Muscat continues to develop Omani human resources

MUSCAT: In line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources and the recognition that bank’s achievements are powered by its competent employees, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman continues to provide comprehensive multilevel Management Development programmes that are governed by a robust framework.

These programmes aim at transitioning the bank’s top talent to assume progressively higher roles and responsibilities and are closely linked with strategic plans, succession planning and the ability to fill critical roles from within.

Speaking on the occasion, Said bin Salim al Aufi (**pictured**), General Manager - Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, explained: “Bank Muscat’s Executive Management firmly believes that our employees are the very source of the bank’s leading position and sustained growth.

We ensure that we provide vast development opportunities and the finest working environment which makes us one of the top employers of choice and a magnet for top graduates in the country. Our Omanisation achievements



of over 83 per cent for top management, over 93 for middle managers, 100 per cent for clerical and about 94 per cent overall as of June 30, 2022 is a testimonial regarding the development of our employees.”

The bank has launched its flagship graduate development programme, which has evolved into the premier High Potential Graduate Development programme in the banking sector, with a focus on creating a foundation in banking, self-management and building the potential leadership pipeline at the bank by growing and nurturing talent internally to take up additional responsibilities in preparation for managerial roles.

Specific modules throughout the programme emphasise on gaining critical knowledge and skills such as credit, investment banking, corporate finance, treasury and capital markets, retail banking, finance, assurance

functions, etc.

A total of 60 graduates have successfully completed the programme and 56 are currently enrolled in it. The two-year journey comprises 10 workshops and blended online modules with case studies, simulations and technical and leadership assessments.

Participants who demonstrate the highest levels of both on-the-job performance and potential, proceed in due course to the First Time Line Managers programme.

Here the objective is to develop First Time Managers by equipping them with skills required to transition from job roles as individual contributors to assume managerial roles. This is achieved through the use of customised technology in learning along with tools, templates and case study simulators. The programme comprises 6 modules and 35 online modules delivered over a period of one year.

A total of 49 participants are currently enrolled in this programme from across the bank. Bank Muscat’s Middle Management Development Programme has helped the bank to ensure a steady flow of talented, well-developed managers to senior and middle-management roles in the banking sector.

The main objective is to develop the bank’s leadership bench at the middle management level in order to support succession planning at the top and middle management levels.

This also includes comprehensive assessments to assess readiness and potential. In 2022, the bank has launched its third Management Development Programme with a total of 25 participants.

The main capabilities being developed through these development programmes are: financial acumen, decision making, strategic thinking, building and leading high performing teams and people management capabilities. These programmes are facilitated by top ranked business schools with world-class executive education practices.

The bank also assigns resources to provide continuous development opportunities to its Top Management team through regular speeches on current trends and leadership by top leadership thinkers globally, executive coaching opportunities, participation in self-learning programmes and nominations to general and advanced management programmes at leading business schools.

Alizz Islamic Bank, Mastercard launch AlizzRemit

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has partnered with Mastercard to launch AlizzRemit, a fast and secure Cross Border Remittance Service. AlizzRemit is integrated with Mastercard Send, a global money transfer platform that allows participating banks to use Mastercard’s network to send money swiftly and easily to beneficiary bank accounts, mobile wallets or cash-out points across the world.

AlizzRemit is now available on Alizz Islamic Bank’s mobile banking application and offers an unmatched user experience, enabling both retail and corporate banking customers to conduct seamless transactions from the comfort of their homes.

Speaking on the launch, Mohammed al Ghasani, Chief Consumer Banking Officer, Alizz Islamic Bank, said: “Alizz Islamic Bank is proud to be at the forefront of adopting new digital tools that enhance the customer experience and AlizzRemit is another cutting-edge service launched in this direction.

AlizzRemit offers competitive rates across corridors, as well as near real-time settlements



round the clock to multiple destinations, including the UK, India, Nepal Sri Lanka and more during the working hours of the bank.”

Al Ghasani added: “Our continued partnership with Mastercard is a commitment from the bank to bring additional value to our customers’ lives and AlizzRemit is one of countless new services we are rolling out. Through the AlizzRemit remittance solution, customers will be able to send money directly and securely to the beneficiary’s bank account,

mobile wallet or to a cash out point, which will save them the hassle of standing in long queues.”

J K Khalil, Cluster General Manager, MENA East, Mastercard, said: “Consumers are demanding increasingly diverse and bespoke solutions within the Islamic financial landscape. Through our partnership with Alizz Islamic Bank, we are pleased to deliver on these expectations and reimagine the way people send and receive funds. We are proud to support Oman’s 2040 vision by delivering innovative products and solutions that boost the economy and empower the communities we serve.”

Since its inception in 2013, Alizz Islamic Bank has bridged the gap between customers and the bank using the latest technology solutions. The bank’s infrastructure has been developed to provide customers with innovative financial solutions and responsive customer service via its corporate website, online banking, mobile banking, short message service, call centre, ATM, ITM, and branch banking.

Muzn holds Sharia Board meeting to discuss plans

MUSCAT: Continuing to provide its customers with the latest Sharia compliant solutions, Muzn, National Bank of Oman’s Islamic banking window, recently held its Sharia Board Meeting.

Shaikh Dr Muhammad bin Zubair Usmani, Chairman – Sharia Board, was joined by board members, HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Shaikh Dr Abdul Rahman bin Abdullah al Saadi, and Shaikh Saleh al Kharusi, to discuss the bank’s products, which include the approval of term based Wakala Bil Istithmar mode, reserves creation in the Wakala product, and the approval of the Internal Sharia Audit Plan.



Salima al Marzouqi (**pictured**), Chief Islamic Banking Officer, said, “We are committed to fostering the development of the country’s growing Islamic finance sector.

Sharia compliance is at the heart of what we do and through ongoing collaborations with our learned Sharia board members, we are creating new possibilities for our customers while ensuring their banking experience is not only seamless but is in keeping with their values.

We have a lot planned in the upcoming months as we continue to adapt to new technologies and meet the evolving needs of our customers.”

Toyota Corolla now with exclusive summer thrills campaign

MUSCAT: Toyota customers looking forward to owning the popular Corolla can now enjoy exclusive benefits. 3 years / 30,000 kms service (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance (or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 175). The campaign is valid until September 15, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

Corolla offers amazing driving experiences with a 2.0-litre four-cylinder dynamic force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque. This is paired to a direct shift CVT transmission.

Customers looking for a more fuel-efficient option can choose



the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine Corolla that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque. This is paired with a CVT transmission.

Contributing to comfortable journeys is the spacious cabin

planned with good quality finish. The interior design adopts a simple yet appealing style, with comfortable spaciousness and integrated functional parts combining to create a refined

elegance. The ergonomically designed seats feature new cushion material, while the armrest and ample legroom offer superior comfort for the rear-seat passengers.

Offering enhanced experiences on every drive are a range of features, which vary based on the trim level. Occupants also benefit from AC vents for the rear seat, a moonroof, 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), 8-inch display audio, cruise control, six-speaker sound system, and 60:40 split-folding rear seats. As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

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Venezuela's PDVSA pauses oil-for-debt shipments to Europe, wants product swaps

HOUSTON: Venezuela has suspended new crude shipments to Europe under an oil-for-debt deal and has asked Italy's Eni and Spain's Repsol to provide it with fuel in exchange for future cargoes, three people familiar with the matter said.

Venezuela's oil company PDVSA no longer is interested in the oil-for-debt deals that the US State Department authorised in May, the sources said, which allowed the state company to resume shipments to Europe after a two-year suspension caused by US sanctions.

Washington authorised the shipments as long as cargo proceeds were used to pay off accumulated debt PDVSA owed to joint ventures with Eni and Repsol.

"PDVSA wants to go back to oil swaps, and that is not possible yet," said a person involved in cargoes previously delivered to Europe.

"There's zero interest in the oil-for-debt deals. Venezuelan oil shipments, particularly those sent to refineries in Spain, have helped Europe reduce purchases of Russian oil since the invasion of Ukraine. But the deal's terms have not provided needed cash or fuel to PDVSA, whose own refineries are struggling to produce gasoline and diesel



An oilfield worker walks next to drilling rigs at an oil well operated by Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA. — Reuters

after years of underinvestment and lack of repairs.

According to PDVSA's shipping schedules, there are no loading windows assigned to Eni or Repsol for Europe-bound cargoes in August, even though stocks of diluted crude oil (DCO) at the Jose port rose to almost 5 million barrels as of August 8.

PDVSA wants to get fuel in exchange for its crude, while using a portion of the cargoes' value to

offset billions of dollars in debts to joint venture partners including Chevron, Eni and Repsol, according to the sources.

The deal reshuffle could help the Venezuelan company reanimate its Orinoco Belt extra heavy oil operations, which need imported diluents such as heavy naphtha, and ease the country's motor fuel deficit.

Since last year, PDVSA has relied mostly on Iranian

diluents to turn its extra heavy crude into exportable grades. Since June, Eni received a total of 3.6 million barrels of Venezuelan diluted crude oil (DCO), according to the PDVSA's documents and tanker tracking data. Most of that volume was later delivered by Eni to Repsol, which has a larger capacity for refining the South American country's heavy sour crude grades.

Repsol's CEO Josu Jon Imaz in

PDVSA WANTS TO GET FUEL IN EXCHANGE FOR ITS CRUDE, WHILE USING A PORTION OF THE CARGOES' VALUE TO OFFSET BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN DEBTS TO JOINT VENTURE PARTNERS INCLUDING CHEVRON, ENI AND REPSOL.

late July said the return of cargoes from Venezuela was "good news" for its refineries, as the quality of those crudes matches perfectly with its refining system.

Resumption of oil shipments to Europe helped PDVSA boost sales in June and July, with overall exports reaching 545,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the 60-day period, according to the documents and vessel monitoring.

Operational issues later offset the export increase. But PDVSA plans to restart a third heavy crude upgrader, at the Petromonagas joint venture, which would boost crude production and export capacity. Last month, it resumed operations at an oil-blending station and two upgraders that had been hit by power and gas outages.

— Reuters

SAS secures \$700 million financing to aid restructuring



STOCKHOLM: Scandinavian airline SAS said on Saturday it entered into an agreement with Apollo Global Management to raise \$700 million of fresh financing it needs to see it through bankruptcy.

The airline filed for bankruptcy protection in the United States in early July to help cut debt after the collapse of wage talks between the airline and its pilots, triggering a 15-day strike that added to travel chaos across Europe.

SAS said in a statement it expects to complete the Chapter 11 restructuring process in nine to 12 months. The airline anticipates receiving court approval for its \$700 million financing by the end of September.

SAS chief executive Anko van der Werff (pictured) has said the strike accelerated its decision to file for Chapter 11 status. The airline has said the industrial action had cost it more than \$145 million, affecting 380,000 passengers in the peak summer travel season, and might jeopardise the firm's ability to secure additional financing.

SAS grounded some 3,700 flights during the strike, saying last week its number of passengers fell 32 per cent in July from June and capacity by 23 per cent.

Pilot union members, who voted to adopt a collective bargaining agreement reached with SAS last month, say they will not resume their strike.

— Reuters

Germany reaches 75% gas stocks target ahead of schedule

FRANKFURT: German gas storage facilities were slightly more than 75 per cent full last Friday, a couple of weeks ahead of target, data from European operators group GIE showed on Sunday.

Germany has 23.3 billion cubic metres (bcm) of underground gas storage, a little more than a fifth of the 100 bcm of gas used in 2021.

The Rehden storage unit, which holds 4 bcm, was 54 per cent full, the GIE data showed. Germany is at phase two of a three-stage emergency plan formulated after a reduction in gas flows from



Pipes at the landfall facilities of the 'Nord Stream 1' gas pipeline are pictured in Lubmin, Germany. — Reuters

Russia, its main supplier.

That causes serious headaches for German industry, which accounts for a quarter of the country's gas demand.

Russia has drastically cut flows to Europe via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline since mid-June and currently supplies only 20 per cent of agreed volumes, blaming faulty and delayed equipment, while Europe says the move has been politically motivated.

The government had targeted gas storage levels to reach 75 per cent by September 1.

The next targets are 85 per cent by October 1 and 95 per cent by November 1, which are embedded in a number of provisions aimed at helping Germany to avoid a gas crisis in the 2022/23 winter.

The provisions include higher imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and incentives to reduce energy usage. Separately, Germany's gas market operator THE is set to announce on August 15 the size of a gas price levy on consumers, to help Uniper and other importers cope with soaring prices. — Reuters

'Now Hiring': US employers struggle to find enough workers

WASHINGTON: Salespeople, food servers, postal workers — "Help Wanted" ads are proliferating across the United States, as companies struggle to deal with a worker shortage caused by the pandemic, a rash of early retirements and restrictive immigration laws.

More than 10 million openings went unfilled in June, according to government data, while fewer than six million people were seeking work, even as employers desperately try to boost hiring amid a frenzy of consumer spending.

"We have a lot of jobs, but not enough workers to fill them," the US Chamber of Commerce, which represents American companies, said in a statement.

Many of those who stopped working as Covid-19 first ravaged the US economy in early 2020 have never returned.

"There would be 3.4 million more workers today if labour force participation" — the percentage of the working-age population

currently employed or actively seeking work — was at the pre-pandemic rate, the Chamber calculated. It has slipped from 63.4 per cent to 62.1 per cent. And where have all these people gone? Many simply took early retirement. "Part of that is just the US population continues to age," Nick Bunker, a labour-market specialist with jobs website Indeed, said.

The huge cohort of "baby boomers" had already begun leaving the labour market, but there has been an "acceleration in retirements" since the pandemic struck, Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG, said.

Millions of people opted for early retirement, concerned for their health and with sufficient assets — thanks to a then-buoyant stock market and high real-estate prices — to leave the workplace.

In the short term, Bunker said, "We're unlikely to get back to exactly the pre-pandemic level of labour-force participation because of the aging of the population."



A woman walks past a "Now Hiring" sign as she leaves the Urban Outfitters store at Quincy Market in Boston, Massachusetts. — Reuters

Adding to this, said Swonk, "We haven't had immigration at the pace to replace the baby boomers."

Restrictions imposed under president Donald Trump, plus the impact of Covid, steeply reduced the number of

foreigners entering the country. "It has rebounded a little bit, but still not at the levels we were seeing several years ago," Bunker said.

The Chamber of Commerce also underscored the impact of generous government assistance

MORE THAN 10 MILLION OPENINGS WENT UNFILLED IN JUNE, ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT DATA, WHILE FEWER THAN SIX MILLION PEOPLE WERE SEEKING WORK, EVEN AS EMPLOYERS DESPERATELY TRY TO BOOST HIRING AMID A FRENZY OF CONSUMER SPENDING.

during the pandemic, which "bolstered people's economic stability — allowing them to continue sitting out of the labour force." Large numbers of women quit their jobs in 2020, in part because extended school closings required many to stay home to care for children.

Those who wanted to place children in day care were often frustrated, as labour shortages hit the day care sector as well. Swonk noted that not only Covid infections but also the debilitating effects of long Covid have had a serious impact. It's "really one of the

most underestimated and misunderstood issues" keeping workers sidelined, she said.

To lure workers back, many employers have boosted pay and benefits. And if Americans' buying frenzy slows, analysts say, companies will need fewer workers.

The labour shortage is expected to ease a bit as the Federal Reserve continues aggressively raising interest rates in its effort to combat inflation.

In the meantime, wage earners have profited. Over the past year, millions have changed jobs, often lured elsewhere by higher wages and better working conditions. This "Great Resignation" has resulted in higher hourly wages.

The private sector average is now \$32.27, up 5.2 per cent in a year, adding to inflationary pressures. The US labour market showed new signs of vitality in July. The 22 million jobs lost due to Covid-19 have returned, and the unemployment rate is a historically low 3.5 per cent. — AFP

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An ode to a great man, a mentor of great calibre



By Rawan al Nadabi

"IN THE END, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years" said Abraham Lincoln, 16th president of the United States.

This is what I believe when I remember Dr Hussain bin Said al Harthy who lost his life after a courageous battle with Covid this year. Al Harthy was born in Bahla, Al Aqr, in 1962.

The oldest-born child was curious about the world, which made him fond of knowledge and finding answers to his questions at an early age. He was an outstanding student in school. He was rosed twice to a higher grade than students his age due to his excellent and intelligent performance.

In his childhood, he lost one of his eyes when he was playing with other children from his village, but

that never stopped him from pursuing the knowledge he seeks. Before graduating from high school, he received his first job as an accountant in the Ministry of Municipalities and Water Resources, Bahla. He obtained a full scholarship to Cairo from the Ministry of Higher Education due to his outstanding marks.

In 1986, he graduated from Alexandria University with a bachelor's degree. His academic achievement rolled over his life as he received his Master's Degree in sociology from Jordan in 1992 in the studies of Omani Culture, and obtained his PhD from the University of Kent at Canterbury in philosophy and psychology in 2001. He published three books, one of which is Introduction to Social Work in Islam.

His career achievements were as spectacular as his educational journey. He held several positions,

he was director of investment and events at the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources and the general director for administrative and financial affairs and training expert at Public Authority for Craft Industries. He was known for his leadership skills. Even though of his higher position, he was a team player, reachable, and down to earth.

In 2006, he joined the academic field as an assistant professor at Dhofar University. In 2008, he joined the University of Nizwa and held the position of Assistant Dean for Student Development Programs. Dr Hussain al Harthy was an essence of knowledge spreading, a unique mindset, and charity work.

Being an assistant professor, he spared no effort to help his students. And for many of his students, he was a sanctuary they go

to in critical situations. Sheikha Al Mahrezi, a student he taught, memorialising him said "Dr Hussain was an ideal instructor. He was a remarkable educator, he used to advise us, provide us with the knowledge we aspired to, and he had been very understanding" Rayan al Mandhari, a student he taught, said, "Dr Hussain was a role model for many of us in progress. He had always urged us to research for knowledge rather than waiting for it to reach us".

All around his community he was a symbol of selfless humanity, as he was the founder of Bahla Charity Association, he founded the association with money and thoughts. He was a standard bearer for community service and helping the poor and people in need as he had a special endowment for community services. He also provided free family and educational consultations

for the public.

He was active on Twitter shared his thoughts and communicated his ideas to his student, loved ones, and the public. One of his tweets was "The person who deserves to be called a "giver" is the one who gives without waiting for a return or thanks"

After a long fight with Covid, he died on Tuesday, March 3, 2022. Even after his death his charity work never stopped, he bequeathed his home library with very valuable books to Bahla Public Library. He left this earth with a legacy of hard work and determination. And to those of us who loved him, and ache with his passing, know Dr Hussain al Harthy by other titles he held: caring brother and a loving husband. I, like others at the university of Nizwa where he worked until he passed, knew him as an assistant dean, a colleague, and above all, a mentor.

READ

LONG LIVE THE PUMPKIN QUEEN

BY SHEA ERNSHAW

Sally, the new Queen of Halloween Town, must save her town from a sleeping curse.



THE ACTION FIGURE

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who has been fighting a Russian invasion since February, is being made into an action figure by a product design company in Brooklyn, New York. — Reuters



THE IRON THRONE

A replica of the Iron Throne from upcoming "Game Of Thrones" prequel series, "House Of The Dragon," has been erected outside the Tower of London ahead of the show's launch. The seat of the Lord of the Seven Kingdoms will be displayed at the landmark on Monday and Tuesday before the premiere next week in Leicester Square. — dpa





Brazil farmers bet on environmentally friendly cotton

THE ROAD THROUGH Cristalina, Brazil is in the middle of the tropics, but the fields on either side look like they are covered in snow – little white puffs of cotton stretching to the horizon.

The alabaster plants interspersed with the corn and soy-bean fields outside the central-western town are part of a silent revolution in Brazil: facing negative attention over the agribusiness industry's environmental impact, farmers are increasingly turning to cotton and adopting sustainable techniques to produce it.

After increasing exports 15-fold in the past two decades, Brazil is now the world's second-biggest cotton supplier, after the United States – and the biggest producer of sustainable cotton.

No less than 84 per cent of the cotton grown in the South American agricultural giant is certified by the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), an international non-profit group to promote sustainable cotton farming.

"Consumers have changed. People don't want to buy products any more that don't respect nature and its cycles," says entomologist Cristina Schetino of the University of Brasilia, who specialises in cotton farming.

The industry is trying to improve the international image of Brazilian farming, tarnished by a history of slave labour, heavy pesticide use and the destruction of the Amazon rainforest for agriculture, a trend that has accelerated under far-right President Jair Bolsonaro – an agribusiness ally.

In 2005, the Brazilian Cotton Producers' Association (Abrapa) launched a sustainability training programme for farmers and introduced protocols on efficiently using water and pesticides and phasing out toxic products in favour of biological fertilisers.

A new tracing programme launched with Brazilian clothing brands, meanwhile, lets consumers check how cotton goods were produced.

Last season, cotton farmers in Brazil replaced 34 per cent of chemical pesticides with biological ones, Abrapa says.

They have also started using drones to apply pesticides more efficiently.

Switching to sustainable techniques is "a re-education process," says Abrapa's executive director, Marcio Portocarreiro.

"At first, farmers tend to think mainly about the impact on their bottom line. But when they get past that phase... they realise that farming sustainably gives them a guaranteed market," he said.

and housing for employees. The farm aims to retain workers by creating a home where they will want to stay, says production coordinator Diego Goldschmidt. He stands in front of two enormous



ADDED VALUE Located outside Cristalina, around 130 kilometres (80 miles) south of Brasilia, the capital, Fazenda Pamplona is one of Brazil's biggest proponents of sustainable cotton.

The 27,000-hectare (67,000-acre) operation, run by agribusiness giant SLC Agricola, is like a small city in the middle of the countryside, with a banquet hall, a children's park, sports fields

mous bales of cotton, labelled with QR codes that detail their harvest.

"These are already sold," he beams.

The farm produced more than 600,000 tonnes last year, 99 per cent of it for export. Sustainable cotton sells for prices up to 10 per cent higher than conventional cotton.

"Besides being the right thing to do for society and the environment, it provides added value," says Goldschmidt.



AIMING HIGH

But cotton remains one of the most pesticide-intensive crops, using more than double that of soy per hectare.

The problem is the prevalence of pests such as boll weevils and the absence of organic products to stop them, says Schetino.

"There's still a lot of dependence on chemical products, which have a negative environmental impact," says the entomologist, who is researching alternatives.

Brazil cultivates around 1.6 million hectares of cotton a year. It is a key supplier for the global garment industry, exporting to the likes of China, Vietnam, Pakistan and Turkey.

Abrapa has set itself the ambitious goal of surpassing the US to become the world's biggest cotton supplier in 2030.

"Brazil may not have a good image on sustainable farming yet," says Goldschmidt.

"But we will soon. There's a lot of potential." — AFP

A LOOK INTO THE ACADEME



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Developing Students' Creative Thinking

IT'S RATIONAL TO presume that people are creative, but people's creativity levels aren't similar. Basically, the degree of student creativity has been expressed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. Bloom's Taxonomy for cognitive learning objectives ranked "create" as the highest order of thinking. That is, it should be at the forefront of all learning activities and an end goal. It should be noted that creative thinking skills begin with student imagination, where creative thinking as a concept refers to using abilities and skills to come up with creative solutions to problems and set a plan.

According to (Rock Content writer's Blog, 2020) developing creative thinking is highly beneficial for any field of work. After all, every occupation needs people that can come up with innovative solutions to problems that arise. Skills such as the ability to create the best solution to each issue; improving on problem-solving, and a better understanding of data; all represent the advantages of creative thinking.

On the other hand, for educators, creative thinking is the most valuable skill that enriches an understanding and makes the learning process easier.

Simultaneously, Creative thinking is the one of hardest thinking skills to acquire for students. However, creative thinking is a skill that could be strengthened like any other. Johanson (2019) stated that there are four things that teachers do to develop creativity in their students, including: "I set up learning activities that allow students to explore their creativity in relevant and worthwhile ways.

Classroom example: Fourth-grade students are presented with a sample of rock. They are to devise tests to determine what kind of rocks they should base on the definitions they've studied. Students find their own ways to determine differences in hardness, colour, and shapes.

2. Value creativity. Classroom example: Third-grade students are learning about polygons and to see if they know the concept, the teacher takes them outside and gives each student sidewalk chalk. Each student is given the task of drawing several examples of polygons on the driveway.

Once students an accomplished this, the teacher tells the students to transform those steps into something they love, and then they must explain to the whole class why they liked them.

3. Teach students the other skills they need to be creative. Classroom example: A second- grade class is learning about the concept of freezing. The teacher asks one question to get them started, "Does only water freeze?" The students then design an experiment to determine what other things freeze.

Students come up with a list of things they will leave outside to see if they freeze: water, juice, glue, toothpaste, and paper. The next day, they discuss their finding and be directed to conversations about why the paper is stiff and the vinegar has not frozen.

4. Eventually, remove constraints for creativity and give the students space and a framework in which they can be creative. Classroom example: A sixth-grade class produces school play; the students going to write a play that incorporates each of their characters into a plot and then present the play".

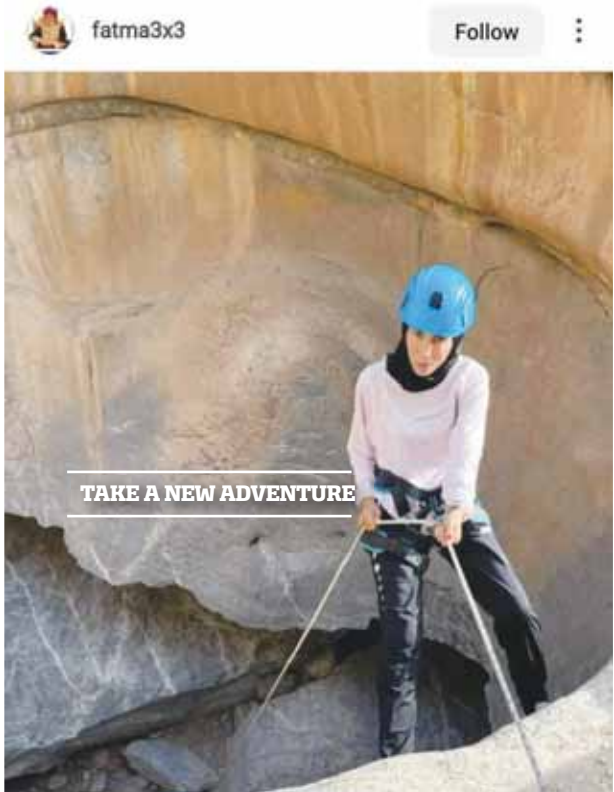
To summaries, creativity today is one of the most intelligent skills taken into high consideration due to the possibilities of invention and knowledge creation that are most sought after in the future. Creative individuals can recognise a problem, analyse it, and provide extraordinary solutions.

Consequently, "In planning and designing learning for students, teaching students how to think is more important than teaching students what to think" (Johanson, 2019).



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENVIRONMENT

Swiss artist sculpts sprawling model castle on dried river bank



SWISS ARTIST Francois Monthoux's annual project to build clay sculptures on the banks of Switzerland's Toleure river has sprawled into a captivating castle complex this year as the drought afflicting Europe allows him to extend his dream world.

Monthoux began this year's project with modest ambitions six weeks ago but the drought allowed him to build an entire city of spires.



Now he has mixed feelings: he wants it to rain, but is sad at the thought of his dream world disappearing when it does.

"I imagine the life of the people walking under the arches, under the bridge, looking at the monuments, looking at the city," said Monthoux, who works with clay from the dried bed of the Toleure river in the Vaud canton in western Switzerland.

"So, I enter a bubble, and I become a dreamer ... I see their world being created under my fingers," he added.

Monthoux, a nature lover, says he is sad to see plants dying all around him and "it would be a catastrophe" if an enduring drought meant he could keep going with the project for years. At the same time, he knew from the outset it was temporary.

"Of course, I'm a little bit sad, because I'm sad that the form I gave to the matter will disappear," he said.

Visitors to the sculpture are enjoying it while it lasts.

"I don't have words to say what I feel, because it's ... it's just sublime," said Heidi Butty, a Vaud resident. — **Reuters**

TRADITIONS

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



FOR BOSNIAKS in the Kosovan village of Donje Ljabinje, a wedding ceremony is an art form.

Maintaining a centuries-old tradition, the two-day event is a festival of music and dance to showcase a bride resplendent in traditional Bosniak costume.

American Melissa Guerrero was dazzled when she attended a traditional wedding on her first visit to Donje Ljabinje, near the city of Prizren, in 2013 to meet the family of her high school sweetheart. So much so she dreamt of having a similar wedding herself.

Last week Melissa, 30, realised that dream. Dressed head to toe in traditional costume, her face painted white with elaborate sprays and dots of red, blue, gold and silver, she married Melsid Redzeqi, who is from a Bosnian family in Kosovo. He was seven when the war began in Kosovo and his family moved to the United States.

Melissa Guerrero, a US citizen of Mexican origin, wearing traditional wedding make-up and a traditional costume, is prepared for her wedding ceremony in the village

Donje Ljabinje, near Prizren, Kosovo on August 5, 2022.

As Melissa prepared for the wedding ceremony, loud drum music played while an elderly woman painted her face, a process that takes about two hours during which time the bride cannot open her eyes, talk to anyone or eat or drink. Cooks who had butchered a huge bull prepared food for a feast for hundreds of people.

"When I came for the first time in 2013, I witnessed a wedding here and I just thought it was so rich and so special and it is something that I had never seen anywhere else in the world," said Melissa, a graphics designer who was born in Mexico before her family emigrated to the United States when she was 11. She met Melsid in elementary school in Chicago. "All those lines and those colours on the face of the bride symbolise an experience be that happiness, love, respect, harmony and so on," said Khavit Rexhepi, a former biology professor who has written a book on local traditions in the area. Although similar face paintings and costumes,

which are pagan in origin, can be found in other communities in countries such as Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey, Rexhepi said the designs on wedding dresses in his village are **u n i q u e**.

DYING ART? Donje Ljabinje's population has halved from about 3,000 inhabitants 20 years ago as many emigrated abroad. July and August are the busiest months for weddings as many people with links to the village return to visit then and there is a wedding every day, sometimes twice a day. "Once you are born here you cannot get out of it," said Melsid, the groom.

However, there are fewer and fewer people every year who want this kind of traditional wedding and there is only one woman left who does the make-up.

Aziza Sefitagic, who is in her late 60s, has tried to teach her art to other women in the village but most of them have since emigrated to Western countries. "I just hope this tradition will not die with me," Sefitagic said while painting Melissa's face. — **Reuters**

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Stories from the Book of Misers (3)

12) Stories of Mohammed ibn Abi Al-Mu'mal:

Was a miser who had interesting theories regarding food and water. He said that the worst enemies of bread were condiments as it made people eat more. He believed that if people drank more water while eating, it would be better for their health as it meant less food entering their stomachs, hence less chance of being stuffed.

Water is also a good indicator of how full the person is. However, doctors won't give such an advice as it would put them out of business! He was quote saying: "If food was as cheap as water, people would've eaten less."

When he had guests in his house, he'd notice the most gluttonous or the timidiest and ask them about a matter that would take long to explain — preferably a subject that needs head and hand gestures to keep him busy from eating. Also, when sharing a common plate, he'd pretend to be eating with the rest, while in reality he'd only be tearing food into small pieces so to put people off eating.

Once they stop, he'd devour the rest of the food saying: "Eating and drinking should be done at intervals!" If his friends passed by early during the day, he'd invite them for a cup of wine on empty stomachs, numbering it's many benefits: "it kill worms, relaxes, increases appetite, detoxes the body and prevent fullness". As expected, many would be full after that, which makes him the happiest; he'd enjoyed the company without wasting a meal.

To avoid feeding his noon visitors, he'd ask them what they'd had for lunch. Most of them would feel shy and obliged to lie about having just ate before visiting him. He'd then insist on them having something extra and when they refuse, he'd call his servant to bring them something to snack on.

13) Story of Abu Yaqoob Al-Daqqan:

He used to boast that his family never missed eating meat since he owned money. Every Friday, he'd buy beef for a Dirham and for a sixth of that he'd get: onions, aubergine, squash, and carrots (when in season). He'd then cook everything as a stew and divide the pot as follows: on Saturday they'd eat the sauce with bread. On Sunday the onions. On Monday the carrots. On Tuesday the squash. On Wednesday the aubergine and finally the meat on Thursday.

14) A miser called Sulieman Al-Kathry — he was called Kathry for the abundance of money he owned but never spent — was blamed for being a grump who rarely laughed. He answered: "When a man laughs then he'd be in a good mood which means spending senselessly."

15) There was a man who was so stingy that people appointed him the Imam of all misers. When a Dirham reached his hand, he'd say to it: "How many lands you'd travelled and pouches you'd left! How many idles you'd raised and nobles you'd tired! I promise that you'd never get stripped or exposed to light!" and he'd throw it in his pouch and adds: "Stay in a place where you never get belittled, harassed or humiliated!". And the coin would never leave his pouch. When he died, his son came and took over his house and possessions. He demanded to see his father's food — where corruption always starts. They pointed to a piece of cheese that had deep lines from being wiped down with bread instead of being out. The son was horrified by his father's indulgence and declared that he should've wiped the cheese from a greater distance.

(To be continued....)

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



Iraq's Garden of Eden now 'like a desert'

TO FEED AND COOL his buffaloes, Hashem Gassed must cross 10 kilometres (six miles) of sunburnt land in southern Iraq, where drought is devastating swathes of the mythical Mesopotamian Marshes.

The reputed home of the biblical Garden of Eden, Iraq's swamplands have been battered by three years of drought and low rainfall, as well as reduced water flows along rivers and tributaries originating in neighbouring Turkey and Iran.

Vast expanses of the once lush Huwaizah Marshes, straddling the border with Iran, have been baked dry, their vegetation yellowing. Stretches of the Chibayish Marshes, which are popular with tourists, are suffering the same fate.

"The marshes are our livelihood — we used to fish here and our livestock could graze and drink," said Gassed, 35, from a hamlet near Huwaizah.

Southern Iraq's marshlands were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2016, both for their biodiversity and their ancient history.

But now, beds of dry streams snake around the once verdant wetlands, and the area's Um al Naaj lake has been reduced to puddles of muddy water among largely dry ground.

Like his father before him, Gassed raises buffaloes, but only five of the family's around 30 animals are left.

The others died or were sold as the family struggles to make ends meet.

Family members watch carefully over those that remain, fearful that the weak, underfed beasts might fall in the mud and die.

"We have been protesting for more than two years and no one is listening," Gassed said.

"We are at a loss where to go. Our lives are over."

NO MORE FISH

Nestled between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Mesopotamian Marshes suf-

fered under the former dictator Saddam Hussein, who ordered that they be drained in 1991 as punishment for communities protecting insurgents, and to hunt them down.

The wetlands have sporadically gone through years of harsh drought in the past, before being revived by good rainy seasons.

But between August 2020 and this month, 46 per cent of the swamplands of southern Iraq, including Huwaizah and Chibayish, suffered total surface water loss, according to Dutch peace-building organisation PAX.

Another 41 per cent of marsh areas suffered from reduced water levels and wetness, according to the organisation, which used satellite data to make the assessment.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization in Iraq said the marshes were "one of the poorest regions in Iraq and one of the most affected by the climate change", warning of "unprecedented low water levels".

It noted the "disastrous impact" on more than 6,000 families who "are losing their buffaloes, their unique living asset".

Biodiversity is also at risk. The swamplands provide a home for "numerous populations of threatened species", and are an important stopping point for around 200 species of migratory water birds, according to UNESCO.

Environmental activist Ahmed Saleh Neema said there were "no more fish", wild boar or even a subspecies of smooth-coated otter in the marshes.

'LIKE A DESERT'

He said the Huwaizah swamplands were irrigated by two tributaries of the Tigris River, which originates in Turkey, but that their flows had dropped.

Iraqi authorities are rationing supplies to cover different needs, he said.

"The government wants to

preserve the largest quantity of water possible," he added, lamenting "unfair water sharing" and "poor (resource) management".

After pressure from protesters, authorities partially opened the valves, he said, but had closed them again.

On the Iranian side, the Huwaizah Marshes, called Hoor al Azim, are also suffering.

"The wetland is facing water stress and currently about half of its Iranian part has dried up," Iran's state news agency IRNA reported recently.

Hatem Hamid, who heads the Iraqi government's water management centre, said that "on the Iranian side, the main river that feeds the Huwaizah marsh has been totally cut for more than a year".

The water needs of Iraqi farms and marshlands are only half met, he acknowledged, as authorities are closely monitoring reserves and trying to cover a range of uses, with drinking water one of the "priorities".

Iraqi officials point to canals and small streams that have been rehabilitated to feed into the marshes — and to where some families have relocated from dried-out areas.

But it is "impossible to compensate for the very high evaporation in the marshes" in temperatures that pass 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit), he added.

In Chibayish, the effects of the drought are all too clear to Ali Jawad, who said dozens of families had left his hamlet.

"They migrated towards other regions, looking for areas where there is water," the 20-year-old said.

"Before, when we used to come to the marshes, there was greenery, water, inner peace," he added.

"Now it's like a desert." — AFP

