

HM MEETS SHURA MEMBERS



HM COMMENDS THE ROLE OF THE MAJLIS ASH'SHURA IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS

HM ASKS MEMBERS TO FOCUS ON THE POWERS GRANTED TO THEM

AVOID ANY DUPLICATION OR CLASH BETWEEN THE FUNCTIONS OF MAJLIS ASH'SHURA AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THE COUNCIL OF OMAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience to the Chairman and members of the Majlis Ash'shura Office at Al Barakah Palace today.

Upon the start of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the great blessings He bestowed on this dear country. He prayed to the Almighty to perpetuate the divine gifts on Oman and its people and guide the people to find the best way to fulfil their aspirations, asking Allah the Almighty to provide Omani people with abundant means of realising a brighter future.

His Majesty the Sultan spoke about a number of topics of relevance to realising the desired goals of the country and citizens, within the context of state's approaches and its future policies.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the role of the Majlis Ash'shura and its members in achieving the goals entrusted to them, notably by supporting the efforts made in implementing development plans and programmes and realising growth, in accordance with the priorities of each stage, as they act as partners in the comprehensive domestic development process.



MUSCAT

WINNERS OF SULTAN QABOOS AWARDS FETED

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, presided over the award ceremony of the 9th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature held at Al Wahat Club in Al Athaiba, on Wednesday. During the ceremony, Shaikh Abdulmalik announced the fields of the 10th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature 2023. **SEE P3**

NEW DELHI

INDIA BEGINS RANDOM COVID TESTS

India has asked states to keep a sharp lookout for any new variants of the coronavirus and urged people to wear masks in crowded areas, citing an increase in Covid-19 cases in other parts of the globe. Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya met officials to discuss the matter, with all those present wearing masks - a practice that has not been mandatory in most parts of the country for several months. **SEE P7**

92,000 visitors throng Football Fan Festival

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

Over 92,000 people thronged the Football Fan Festival, which was organised as part of the Qatar World Cup.

Of the 64 World Cup matches broadcast at the festival, the largest single match attendance was for the finals between France and Argentina on December 18, which saw over 5,800 fans cheering for their favourite teams. However, the largest number of visitors to the festival in a single day was the night of 6 December, with just under 7,100 fans attending the Round of 16 matches involving two popular rivals - Morocco vs Spain and Portugal vs Switzerland.

Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism and Head of the Steering Committee overseeing the Oman



World Cup Programme, said, "I congratulate Qatar for hosting such a successful tournament. It is a matter of great pride not only for the host nation but also for each and every one of us that a historical event of this magnitude was seamlessly hosted in our region with such care and professionalism."

He said, "On the other hand, the Football Fan Festival, which is one of the main pillars of the Oman World Cup Programme, was able to transfer the amazing atmosphere of the World Cup to the Sultanate of Oman, drawing thousands of visitors daily to watch

matches, participate in activities and enjoy accompanying events in a family-friendly atmosphere. A perfect blend of entertainment and sport-related activities proved to be the festival's greatest asset, and the reaction from the fans has been far greater than we expected."

Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO, Omran, said, "Sports has always been one of the main factors that contribute to enriching the tourism sector and maximising the benefit from the tourism potentials that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys. This historic hosting of the World Cup in the region, coupled with the popularity of football in Oman, drove us to organise this unique festival that brings together a family and sporting event in one. We are happy with the great turnout we got daily and the thoroughly enjoyable atmosphere it created."

Oman expresses condolences to Jordan

MUSCAT: Oman has voiced its deep sympathies and condolences to Jordan, its government and people and families of security men who fell martyr when performing their sacred duty in preserving the Kingdom's stability. It wished the injured quick recovery.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday affirmed Oman's full solidarity with Jordan in undertaking all measures to maintain its security and ensure its stability. Oman expresses its absolute rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism targeting countries' security or the gains or achievements of their peoples. — **ONA**



HM gives audience to Shura members



FROM PAGE 1
In view of ongoing preparations to hold municipal council elections on December 25, His Majesty the Sultan touched on the powers entrusted to the members of the municipal councils. His Majesty instructed members of the Majlis Ashshura to focus on the powers granted to them by virtue of Oman Council Law and observe the significance of integration between the roles of Majlis Ashshura and municipal councils, to avoid any duplication or clash between the functions of the two institutions.
At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan laid emphasis on the need to prioritise the interest of the nation above all other considerations, by strengthening partnership and integration between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman, to serve the public interest. — ONA

Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
8/2022/PEIE/HQ-8	Construction of Reverse Osmosis Plant at Mazyunah Free Zone	04-01-2023	30-01-2023	Construction and Electromechanical	First, Excellent	250

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200.

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening. Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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RAO celebrates graduation of officer cadets



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) today celebrated the passing out of officer cadets after a graduation course at Sultan Qaboos Military College (SQMC). The ceremony was presided over by His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

The protocols of celebration, held at the military parade grounds at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, began with the graduates' giving the military salute to the chief guest. The RAO band played the Royal Anthem, after which the commander of the column, asked HH Sayyid Shihab permission to inspect the front row of the parade. The graduates performed a military show in slow motion and normal march. They passed in front of the dais of the celebration square, led by the SQMC colours. Then, the column

advanced forward in parade form.

After that, HH Sayyid Shihab handed the Sword of Honour to RAO's cadet officer Mohammed bin Hamad al Shibli, who won first place at the level of the batch of cadet officers.

This was followed by the SQMC colours changing hands, with the graduating batch handing the flag over to the current batch undergoing training at the SQMC, who vowed to keep the flag fluttering high as ever. Then, the Flag Anthem was played, and the bearers of the flag roamed the rows of their batch.

The graduates chanted the RAO anthem. They performed the Oath of Loyalty, proclaiming allegiance and chanting thrice "Long Live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme commander".

The column of graduating officers performed the military



salute. Then, the band played the Royal Anthem and the commander of the column asked chief guest's permission to dismiss.

The column passed in front of the dais, giving the military salute to HH Sayyid Shihab.

Then, the RAO band presented

various musical pieces and a military musical show, with different detachments exhibiting their skills, which reflected high morale

and dexterity in using the latest equipment and musical instruments. The performance also reflects various aspects of modernisation and preparedness offered by the RAO to its personnel. Later, it shaped out the letters forming the name of "Sultanate of Oman" on the floor of the parade grounds.

The ceremony was attended by ministers, undersecretaries, Chairman of the State Council, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security units, commandants of military colleges in GCC states, retired commanders, senior SAF officers, retired senior officers from other military and security detachments, military attachés from embassies of Arab and friendly countries accredited to Oman, RAO personnel and parents of the officer cadets. — **ONA**

Winners of Sultan Qaboos Awards feted



MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, presided over the award ceremony of the 9th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature held at Al Wahat Club in Al Athaiba, on Wednesday.

During the ceremony, Shaikh Abdulmalik announced the fields of

the 10th edition of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature 2023 which will be as follows: Media and communications (culture), film directing (arts), novel (literature). Arabs will be contending for the next edition of the award alongside Omanis.

The broad categories for this year's award were — Culture (Omani Heritage), Arts (Theatrical Troupes), and Literature

(Articles).

The winners were announced in November by Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Secretary-General of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science.

In the field of investigating Omani heritage, the award was won by Harith bin Mohammed al Battashi for his analysis of a book titled "Introduction to Rules of Faith

and Restricting the Swings of Judgment and Religions", originally authored by Shaikh Said bin Khalfan al Khalili.

The troupe of "Al Dann" bagged the prize for theatrical performances — credit to its drama titled "Qarn Al Jarja", while Dr Mona al Sulaimi won the award for essay writing.

Al Riyami said that as many as 96 contestants met the conditions of

candidacy; 11 in the field of investigating Omani heritage, 12 in drama performances and 73 in the field of essay writing.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature is a biennial prize, contested by Omani candidates one year and by all Arabs the next edition.

The Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature was established in 2011 by the late Sultan Qaboos.



Knowledge Oman honours member with ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’



MUSCAT: As part of encouraging and motivating members to contribute to the society’s development, Knowledge Oman, the leading knowledge-sharing platform in the Sultanate of Oman, has awarded its long-time serving distinguished team member, Tomy Bosco, with the “Lifetime Achievement Award”, recognising his notable achievements over the past 14 consecutive years.

The award was presented by the President of Knowledge Oman, Balqees al Hassani, with the presence of the newly appointed chairwoman, Dr Yasmeen al Balushi, at a team gathering event.

“Tomy Bosco has been part of Knowledge Oman since

its inception back in 2008. His quality contribution, professional collaboration with the multinational volunteer team, and constant support and leadership for the technical development of the platform is noteworthy. We are honoured to award Tomy with the lifetime achievement award, being the oldest and most longest quality serving member in Knowledge Oman” said Balqees

Tomy Bosco said upon receiving the award, “I am thrilled and honoured to be recognised for the community work I do, and for the country I hold close and dear to my heart. I will continue serving Knowledge Oman to my best ability and I thank all who put trust and belief in me.”

Muscat Nights from January 19

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The Muscat Nights 2023 activities will be held in the capital between January 19 and February 4. Muscat Municipality is yet to reveal the details of the

Muscat Nights, including new features. This event will be a successor to the Muscat Festival, which was held in the capital annually since its inception in 1998. The last edition of the Muscat Festival was held in 2019 as the mega

event was suspended following the Covid-19 related restrictions. The festival highlights the culture and heritage of the Sultanate of Oman, apart from entertainment and other activities. Muscat Municipality, which

recently announced the launch of a competition to design a logo for Muscat Nights, picked the design of Ali bin Said bin Sulaiman al Waeli. Muscat Municipality said 34 participants took part in the competition.

MoE organises ‘Mirrors and Windows’ workshop

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, organised a workshop titled “Mirrors and Windows” in cooperation with National Geographic. The workshop aims to identify new ways to read pictures and illustrations, the importance of reading pictures and drawings, their impact on students, linking the picture to reality, the feelings it carries, and how to ask questions about the picture, all in order for the participants to become acquainted with the National Geographic Learning approach to selecting high-impact images which inspire students and motivate teachers to develop future-ready students to lead choice-filled lives. The workshop began with an activity on thinking with pictures and the use of visual memory. It discussed the development of



educational content and visual literacy, and when the image is considered strong, influential, and celebrated. The characteristics of the image suitable for publication were also discussed which consisted of three elements: inspiration, connection, and reality. At the end of the workshop, a practical application was conducted on the characteristics of the appropriate image with the workshop participants. The application focused on

the importance of generating innovation in the image, deviating from the ordinary to create inspiration for the recipient. Jonathan Coxall, presenter of the workshop, said: “The aim of this workshop is to make sure that the people we work with understand the values, the importance we give to photography as well as the context, and the text of the book because we all know that stereotype images are very important nowadays especially

because of social media, and the importance that both students and adults attach to the image, so there are lots of principles that need to be followed when choosing the stereotype image in our books and sharing it with people, so that people get the right concept. It is also about visual literacy and making sure that we are all knowledgeable in visual literacy.” Erik Gundersen said: “The concept of this workshop is to present what we consider National Geographic as a special resource, which can bring the world into the classroom through National Geographic’s award-winning nature photography, which in turn, helps students and teachers to see the advantages of the usual and unusual photography methods in order to encourage critical thinking, effective class discussions and enrich the educational learning process.”



RECALL CAMPAIGN

FOR CHEVROLET SILVERADO, GMC SIERRA MODEL VEHICLES



Date of Recall: 22/12/2022

Campaign Type: Safety Recall

Recall Segment: Airbags

Product Description: Chevrolet Silverado 1500 2015-2016 / Chevrolet Silverado 2500/3500 2015-2016 / GMC Sierra 1500 2015-2016 / GMC Sierra 2500/3500 2015-2016

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2015-2016	Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	3GCUK9EC0FG413740 to 3GCUK9ECXFG339159 1GCNK9EC1FZ379151 to 1GCVK9EC0FZ301072	16
2015-2016	Chevrolet	Silverado 2500/3500		0
2015-2016	GMC	Sierra 1500	3GTU29EC0FG341986 to 3GTU29EJXFG464399 1GTN29EC0FZ322097 to 1GTN29ECXFZ423227	163
2015-2016	GMC	Sierra 2500/3500		0

DESCRIPTION:
In these vehicles, the roof-rail airbag (RRAB) inflators, which are located on the left- and right-side roof rails above the headliner, may contain a manufacturing defect that may result in inflator end cap separation or inflator sidewall split. If the end cap separates from the RRAB inflator or a sidewall rupture occurs, the compressed gas will escape from the inflator and the end cap or other components can be propelled into the vehicle, potentially causing an occupant injury if the vehicle is occupied.

PROCEDURE:
Dealers are to replace left and right front and rear row seat roof-rail airbag (RRAB) modules.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC for Chevrolet & Cadillac and Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for GMC.

CONTACT DETAILS:
For OTE, Call Toll free no. 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.30pm.
For MARH, Call Toll free no. 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am to 1.00pm and 4.00pm to 6.30pm.

Snow Oman to open for public on Dec 24



VINOD NAIR
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Snow Oman, an educational, entertainment, and adventure project will be open to the public on December 24 at the Mall of Oman in Bausher. The operators have stated that advance ticket booking will start soon with ticket rates from RO 12.5. Earlier Majid Al Futtaim in a statement said that the Snow Oman destination will cover an area of 14,830 square meters, complete with rides and attractions, a local colony of king and gentoo penguins, and real snow. Snow Oman is the third and newest brand to join Global Snow, the indoor snow and ski entertainment arm of Majid Al Futtaim. Husam al Mandhari, director at Majid Al Futtaim, in a statement, said, “Very excited to be one of the first to experience the biggest snow



park in the region before it opens to the public on December 24. Home to over 10 Desert Blizzard-themed rides and attractions, an ice rink, and a penguinarium with a resident colony of King and Gentoo Penguins, Snow Oman will be a must-visit entertainment

attraction in the Sultanate of Oman.” In 2005, Majid Al Futtaim pioneered the sub-zero leisure offering in its shopping mall the Mall of the Emirates: Ski Dubai, which was ranked among the “World’s Best Indoor Ski Resort”.



■ JORDANIAN MILITARY DELEGATION VISITS MTC



MUSCAT: Brigadier Kayid Jamal al Ja'arat, Head of Military Training at the Armed Forces of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and his accompanying delegation on Wednesday visited the Military Technological College (MTC). He was greeted upon his arrival by Air Commodore Mohammed bin Aziz al Siyabi, Commandant of the MTC. — ONA

GCC officials meet

MUSCAT: Sessions of the 24th annual meeting of technical officials tasked with preparing plans in GCC states kicked off at Grand Millennium Muscat on Wednesday.

The two-day meeting, organised by the Ministry of Economy, was attended by Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

Dr Nasser al Maawali hailed the efforts made in accomplishing transition in GCC economies. Since the 1960s, GCC countries incorporated developmental planning at the heart of their economic and social march, so that the member states could achieve unprecedented growth. — ONA

Pact signed to perform 1,000 eye surgeries

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday signed a cooperation and support programme to implement the social initiative “Ibsar”.

The initiative, which will help reduce waiting lists for eye surgeries, includes conducting 1,000 eye surgeries at private hospitals, starting from January 2023.

The programme was signed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and the sons and daughters of Shaikh Suhail Bahwan (Omar, Othman, Ali and their sisters).

The humanitarian initiative targets ophthalmic patients in the waiting lists according to the earliest appointment and urgent need for surgery. “Ibsar” covers expenses of surgery, medical care, and medication, in addition to post-surgery follow up



appointments.

The Ministry of Health launched an extensive campaign to shorten the accumulating appointments for a number of services, including radiology and outpatient clinics' appointments in the Ministry's health institutions.

Moreover, the ministry seeks to promote cooperation with the private health institutions and expand the role of community partnership in tackling challenges that face the health sector in a bid to provide optimal health services.

— ONA

Project to manage stray dogs in Muscat

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Muscat Municipality has launched a project to manage and control stray dogs in the city. With the number of stray dogs increasing across the capital, including in residential areas, the civic body has decided to start the project for their effective management by floating a tender

in October. Accordingly, the last date for submitting the tender was December 13, and as per the details available at the tender board, five companies have submitted their bids.

There has been a steady increase of stray dogs in several localities of the city over the past few years, and according to civic officials, “there was no particular policy for the management of

stray dogs.”

Speaking to the Observer, a resident of Seeb said, “We find big groups of stray dogs in our locality moving around unattended. We need a mechanism to take care of them as they are vulnerable to road accidents at night, especially in thinly lit areas. It is also seen that some pet owners dump them on the streets for their purposes.”



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (50/2022)

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

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/130	2022/MM/QS-74 Re-Call	Design & Construction of Car Parking at Bousher HTS, Lump Sum Contract (Re-Tender)	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	First
PRE/22/140	2022/MM/QS-75 Re-Call	Design & Construction of Internal Roads at Ghala (Re-Tender)	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	First
PRE/22/152	2022/MM/QS-81 Re-Call	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve Storm Water Problems in Hail North Wilayat AL Seeb (Re-Tender)	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	First
PRE/22/162	2022/MM/QS-86	Supply of Bollards for Road Maintenance Department - 2023	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	Specialist
PRE/22/163	2022/MM/QS-87	Design & Construction of Roads Improvements & Parkings at Al Khaua Phase 7	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	First
PRE/22/165	2022/MM/QS-88	Rehabilitation Works at Mutairah Roundabout in Muttrah	25	10/01/2023	30/01/2023	First
PRE/22/170	2022/MM/QS-89	Hire of Machinery for Road Construction in Al Seeb	25	31/12/2022	10/01/2023	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-

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



سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

Bidding Announcement

Investment Announcement No. 3/2022

Bidding for development, management and operation of In-Vehicle Monitoring Systems (IVMS)

The internal investment committee at The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology announces the following request for investment proposals for local companies specialized in the field of technology and artificial intelligence to submit investment offers for development , management and operation of In-vehicle monitoring system (IVMS) in the Sultanate of Oman by the conditions outlined in this announcement and according to the details and attachments mentioned in the bidding document.

NUMBER	DOCUMENT PURCHASING DATE	CLARIFICATION PERIODS	CLOSING DATE	DOCUMENT FEES
3/2022	22/12/2022 to 22/01/2023	22/01/2023 to 12/02/2023	12/03/2023 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)

- Document fee should be paid by bank transfer only to the Ministry's account number **0325001361300017** Bank Muscat
- The payment receipt must be sent to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- The bidding document will be shared via email
- The Investment proposals must include all the requirements mentioned in the Bidding document
- The Investment proposal must be valid for at least 12 months and should be signed and stamped
- All investment proposals should be sent as PDF to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- For any other inquiries, you can reach us via the following contact details:

PHONE NUMBER	E-mail
24685341 24685094 24685340	investment@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE


المملكة العربية المتحدة
Muscat Arab Digital Capital
2022

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سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

Bidding Announcement

Investment Announcement

Bidding for the operation, management and development of commercial activities at Sultan Qaboos Port

The internal investment committee at The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology announces the following request for investment proposals for local and global companies specialized in operating, managing and developing commercial activities in Ports to submit investment offers by the conditions outlined in this announcement and according to the details and attachments mentioned in the bidding document.

NUMBER	NAME OF BIDDING DOCUMENT	DOCUMENT PURCHASING DATE	CLARIFICATION PERIODS	CLOSING DATE	DOCUMENT FEES
4/2022	Operation, management and development of Ship Services Activity at Sultan Qaboos Port (Providing ships with foodstuffs, water and cleaning operations)	22/12/2022 to 19/02/2023	19/02/2023 to 12/03/2023	09/04/2023 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)
5/2022	Operation, management and development of Crews Change Activity at Sultan Qaboos Port	22/12/2022 to 19/02/2023	19/02/2023 to 12/03/2023	09/04/2023 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)
6/2022	Operation, management and development of Ships Repairmen Activity in Mooring Areas in Sultan Qaboos Port	22/12/2022 to 19/02/2023	19/02/2023 to 12/03/2023	09/04/2023 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)
7/2022	Operation, management and development of Luxury Yacht Mooring Activity at Sultan Qaboos Port	22/12/2022 to 19/02/2023	19/02/2023 to 12/03/2023	09/04/2023 12:00 PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)

- Document fee should be paid by bank transfer only to the Ministry's account number **0325001361300017** Bank Muscat
- The payment receipt must be sent to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- The bidding document will be shared via email
- The Investment proposals must include all the requirements mentioned in the Bidding document
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INTERNAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE


المملكة العربية المتحدة
Muscat Arab Digital Capital
2022

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■ MESSI BUMP IN BISHT SALES



Tailors work on a traditional black and gold Arab cloak (bisht) at the Al Salim store in Doha's Souq Waqif market, on Tuesday. Normally, the Al Salim store, a longstanding bisht supplier to Qatari royalty, sells eight to 10 garments a day. On Monday, sales shot up to 150, including three copies of the top-of-the-range bisht made famous by Messi. — AFP

Five people dead in Malaysia floods

KUALA KRAI: At least five people were killed and more than 70,000 rushed to evacuation centres in Malaysia after monsoon-triggered floods inundated the country's north, authorities said on Wednesday.

More than 31,000 people have fled their homes in Kelantan state while more than 39,000 residents have been evacuated to temporary shelters in neighbouring Terengganu after flooding began over the weekend, the official Bernama news agency said.

Emergency services officials said a total of five people had been killed.

"The water levels reached almost three metres (10 feet)," Muhammad Ameenudin Badrul Hisyam from Kuala Krai district



A family sits in a pergola surrounded by floodwaters in Pasir Mas in Kelantan state on Wednesday. — AFP

in Kelantan said, as he cleared debris from his home after a nearby river overflowed and forced his family to flee.

Local media reported that four people died in Kelantan on Monday when three sisters were electrocuted while wading in the floodwaters and a 15-month-old boy drowned. — AFP

WORLD, UN CONDEMN AFGHAN GOVT'S MOVE

Taliban ban women students in universities

KABUL: Girl students in Afghanistan were turned away from campuses on Wednesday after the Taliban-run administration said women would be suspended from tertiary education.

The decision to bar women was announced on Tuesday evening in a letter to universities from the higher education ministry, drawing condemnation from foreign governments and the UN.

"We went to university, the Taliban were at the gate and told us 'you are not allowed to enter the university until further notice' ... everyone was crying," said Shaista, a business studies student at a private university in Kabul.

A professor at another university in Kabul who declined to be identified said staff turned female students away at the gate as they had no choice but to implement the instruction.

The bar on women students is likely to complicate the Taliban administration's efforts to gain international recognition and to get rid of sanctions that are severely hampering the economy.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan asked the Taliban-run administration to "immediately" revoke the decision. It also urged the authorities to reopen girls' schools beyond the sixth grade and "end all measures preventing women and girls from participating fully in daily public life". Third-year political science student Hassiba,



Students stopped by Taliban security personnel stand next to a university in Kabul on Wednesday. — AFP

based in Kabul, said she was studying for her exams when she heard about the announcement.

"It's too hard to accept, it's unbelievable, I can't believe it's happening," she said. "When there is no education for women in a society, how can we be hopeful for a bright future?" According to the late on Tuesday announcement, the decision was made by the Taliban administration's cabinet.

Several Taliban officials, including the deputy foreign minister and administration spokesperson, have spoken out in favour of female education in recent months.

The supreme Taliban spiritual leader, based in the southern city of Kandahar, has the final say on major decisions. Diplomatic and Taliban official sources have told Reuters the issue had been under

discussion by the leadership.

"This decision had been anticipated for weeks, prompting some Western officials to start talking about additional sanctions and further economic restrictions," said Graeme Smith, senior consultant at International Crisis Group. "But the flood of outrage from the West will strengthen the resolve of the Taliban leadership, which defines itself as a bulwark against the outside world."

Most girls are unable to go to school beyond primary classes. The Taliban administration has said it is working on a plan for girls' secondary education but has not given a time frame.

The administration made a surprise U-Turn on signals it would open all high-schools for girls in March. — Reuters

Nepal orders release of serial killer Charles Sobhraj

KATHMANDU: Nepal's top court ordered on Wednesday the release and deportation of Charles Sobhraj, the French serial killer portrayed in the Netflix series "The Serpent" who was responsible for a string of murders across Asia in the 1970s.

The Supreme Court ruled Sobhraj, 78, who has been in prison in the Himalayan republic since 2003 for murdering two North American tourists, should be freed on health grounds.

"Keeping him in the prison continuously is not in line with the prisoner's human rights," read a copy of the verdict seen by AFP.

"If there is not any other pending cases against him to keep him in the prison, this court orders his release by today and... the return to his country within 15 days."

Sobhraj needed open heart surgery and his release was in keeping with the law allowing the compassionate discharge



Charles Sobhraj

of bedridden prisoners who had already served three-quarters of their sentence, the verdict added. The notorious murderer underwent a five-hour cardiac operation

in 2017 and the verdict said he remained in regular treatment for heart disease.

After a troubled childhood and several prison terms in France for petty crimes, Sobhraj began travelling the world in the early 1970s and wound up in the Thai capital Bangkok.

His modus operandi was to charm and befriend his victims — many of them starry-eyed Western backpackers on a quest for spirituality — before drugging, robbing and murdering them.

Suave and sophisticated, he was implicated in his first murder, that of a young American woman whose body was found on a beach in Pattaya wearing a bikini, in 1975. He was eventually linked to more than 20 killings.

His victims were strangled, beaten or burned, and he often used the passports of his male victims to travel to his next destination. Sobhraj's sobriquet, "The

Serpent", came from his ability to assume other identities in order to evade justice. It became the title of a hit series made by the BBC and Netflix that was based on his life.

He was arrested in India in 1976 and ultimately spent 21 years in jail there, with a brief break in 1986 when he escaped and was caught again in the Indian coastal state of Goa.

Released in 1997, Sobhraj retired to Paris but resurfaced in 2003 in Nepal, where he was spotted in Kathmandu's tourist district and arrested.

A court there handed him a life sentence the following year for killing US tourist Connie Jo Bronzich in 1975. A decade later he was also found guilty of killing Bronzich's Canadian companion.

In prison in 2008, Sobhraj married Nihita Biswas, who is 44 years his junior and the daughter of his Nepalese lawyer. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BANJUL

Gambian govt says has foiled coup attempt

The Gambia's government on Wednesday said it had thwarted a coup attempt the previous day and arrested four soldiers.

Scattered witness accounts reported soldier movements around the presidential headquarters in the centre of the capital Banjul on Tuesday evening, and rumours circulated during the night of a possible coup. "Based on intelligence reports that some soldiers of the Gambian army were plotting to overthrow the democratically



elected government of President Adama Barrow, the (armed forces) in a swift military operation conducted yesterday arrested four soldiers linked to this alleged coup plot."

SAN FRANCISCO

Musk to step down as Twitter CEO

Elon musk said on Tuesday he would resign as chief executive of Twitter once he finds a replacement, in apparent response to a poll he launched that suggested users wanted him to step down. musk has fully owned Twitter since October 27 and has repeatedly courted controversy as CEO, sacking half of its staff, re-admitting far-right figures to the platform, suspending journalists and trying to charge for previously free services.



"I will resign as CEO as soon as I find someone foolish enough to take the job!" musk tweeted, saying he will then only run software and server teams at Twitter.

KOUROU

Vega-C rocket lost after lift-off

Europe's new Vega-C rocket was lost shortly after lift-off from French Guiana with two satellites on board, in the latest blow to European space efforts.

The launch failure on Tuesday night threatens to ground the Vega-C, which would leave Europe without a short-term way to send satellites into orbit after delays to the Ariane 6 rocket and cancelled Russian cooperation over the Ukraine war. If it had been successful, it would have been the first commercial



launch of the Vega-C since its inaugural flight on July 13. But just minutes after lift-off, the launcher's trajectory deviated from its programmed route and communications were lost.



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In brief

■ VATICAN CITY



REMEMBER UKRAINE'S SMILELESS KIDS THIS CHRISTMAS: POPE

Pope Francis on Wednesday called on people to remember Ukrainian children suffering in the cold this Christmas. "Let us think of the many children in Ukraine who suffer, suffer so much, because of this war," he said in the Vatican.

The Pope has been making appeals for Ukraine at nearly every public appearance since Russia invaded its neighbour in February.

"The majority of those that I have seen here can't manage to smile," he said, referring to Ukrainian children who have found shelter in Rome with Italian families and charities. "It is grave when a child loses the capacity to smile."

■ LONDON



'FLASH GORDON' DIRECTOR DIES AGED 90

Mike Hodges, the British director of gritty 1970s crime drama "Get Carter" and 1980 film "Flash Gordon", has died at the age of 90, media reported on Wednesday.

He passed away last Saturday at home in Dorset, southwest England, his long-time friend and producer Mike Kaplan told The Guardian and US trade publication Variety.

Hodges first shot to recognition writing and directing 1971 British gangster film "Get Carter", which also helped establish Michael Caine as an emerging acting star. Both men immediately collaborated again in the 1972 comedy thriller "Pulp".

■ PRAGUE



CZECHS TO BUY 210 CV90 COMBAT VEHICLES

The Czech Republic has signed a memorandum with Sweden and Britain's BAE Systems to buy 210 CV90 tracked combat vehicles, the defence minister said on Wednesday. The memorandum signed on Minister Jana Cernochova said the deal would be worth up to \$2.3 billion, without disclosing further details. BAE Systems Hagglunds' CV90 is a tracked combat vehicle with a turret-mounted cannon that can be considered a light tank or armoured personnel carrier. Cernochova was speaking at a ceremony at which the Czech Army received the first of 14 Leopard tanks from Germany.

CITES AN INCREASE IN CASES IN CHINA AND OTHER PARTS OF THE GLOBE

India begins random Covid tests

NEW DELHI: India's federal government has asked the country's states to keep a sharp lookout for any new variants of the coronavirus and urged people to wear masks in crowded areas, citing an increase in Covid-19 cases in China and other parts of the globe.

Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya met senior government officials on Wednesday to discuss the matter, with all those present wearing masks - a practice that has not been mandatory in most parts of the country for several months.

"Covid is not over yet. I have directed all concerned to be alert and strengthen surveillance," he said on Twitter. "We are prepared to manage any situation."

China has seen a surge in infections after ending strict restrictions, while data from the World Health Organization shows infections have risen in countries like Japan, South Korea and the United States in recent days.

The Indian government has asked all states to ensure that samples of positive cases are sent to the country's 54 designated genome sequencing laboratories.

"Such an exercise will enable timely detection of newer



Travellers at the departure area of Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. — Reuters

variants, if any," Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan wrote in a letter to the states on Tuesday.

Some opposition leaders and Twitter users in India have called for a suspension of flights to and from China. A government source, who was not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified, said there was no

such plan.

Broadcaster India Today said, citing sources, that authorities will randomly test international arrivals at airports. A spokesperson for the health ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mandaviya also asked

participants in a cross-country march organised by the opposition Congress party to ensure they are vaccinated and follow safety measures like wearing masks.

With more 44 million Covid cases to date, India has reported the most in the world after the United States. — Reuters

Zelensky to meet Biden, address Congress

WASHINGTON: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky will meet US leader Joe Biden and address Congress in Washington on Wednesday, a visit the White House said will send Russia a strong message of Western unity.

The secretly arranged trip comes on the same day Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to meet his top military officials to assess the conflict in Ukraine and set goals for next year in what the Kremlin described as an "important, voluminous speech".

The visit will "underscore the United States' steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

It will be Zelensky's first trip outside Ukraine since Russian forces invaded in February, when they planned for a rapid takeover



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

of Kyiv and much of the country.

Instead, the visit to Washington comes on the 300th day of a war that has seen Russian forces halted by a stubborn Ukrainian army backed by Western arms, forced to retreat from captured territory and struggling to avoid further setbacks.

"On my way to the US to strengthen resilience and defence capabilities of (Ukraine)," Zelensky tweeted, also confirming that he

will make a speech to Congress.

Zelensky will visit the White House where Biden is to announce a new arms package worth almost \$2 billion that a senior administration official said includes Patriot air defence missiles.

Patriot missiles are seen as crucial to help Kyiv fend off Russia's punishing missile and drone attacks on its infrastructure.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday that new weapons deliveries would lead to an "aggravation of the conflict" and do not "bode well for Ukraine".

He added that Moscow does not expect Ukraine to change its stance on peace talks — including refusing to negotiate while Putin is in power — during the visit.

Zelensky is also expected to address a joint session of Congress, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said would be "a very special

focus on democracy." The visit was quietly planned, beginning with a phone call between Biden and Zelensky on December 11, followed by a formal invitation one week ago and confirmation of the visit on Sunday.

Details of the visit leaked on Tuesday afternoon, with officials stressing to US media that there were still security concerns over Zelensky's travel.

In White House talks, Biden and Zelensky will discuss the arms and training provided by the United States and allies, sanctions and other pressure on Russia, and economic and humanitarian aid that Ukraine needs, the senior White House official said.

"They will discuss every element of this conflict, including the situation on the battlefield and including the question of where the war goes from here," the official said. — AFP

First foreign Covid vaccines head to China from Germany

BERLIN: Germany has sent its first batch of BioNTech Covid-19 vaccines to China, a German government spokesperson said on Wednesday, the first foreign coronavirus vaccine to be delivered to the country.

No other details were available on the timing and size of the delivery.

The shipment comes after China agreed to allow German nationals in China to get the shot following a deal during Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit in Beijing last month, with the German leader pressing for Beijing to allow the shot to be made freely available to Chinese citizens as well.

"I can confirm a shipment of the BioNTech vaccine is on its way to China," the person told journalists in Berlin.

Beijing has so far insisted on using only domestically produced vaccines, which are not based on the Western mRNA technology but on more traditional technologies.

The shipment comes amid Beijing dismantling its strict "zero-Covid" regime of lockdowns, which has led to a surge of cases that caught a fragile health system unprepared.

Experts predict that the country of 1.4 billion people could face more than a million Covid deaths next year.

Allowing German expats access to a Western shot is a big gesture to Berlin, reflecting Beijing's effort to strengthen ties with EU's biggest economy after years of tensions over trade and climate between the two countries. — Reuters

Ambulance workers join widening UK strikes

LONDON: UK ambulance workers went on strike on Wednesday, widening a dispute with the government over its refusal to increase pay above inflation after recent walkouts by nurses.

A series of stoppages are causing misery Britain in the run-up to Christmas, with railway workers and passport control officers also threatening to ruin festive holiday getaways as the government refuses to cede on pay demands.

On Wednesday, ambulance staff at the state-run National Health Service (NHS), including paramedics and call handlers, walked out, prompting warnings from healthcare leaders about straining a health system already in crisis. Thousands of members



Striking ambulance workers in London on Wednesday. — Reuters

of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland took to picket lines on Tuesday, just five days after their first strike in its 106-

year history.

Unions representing both NHS nurses and ambulance workers have threatened further stoppages in the new year if the

Ministers have drafted in 750 military personnel to drive ambulances and perform logistics roles to mitigate the impact of Wednesday's ambulance strike

government keeps refusing to discuss pay. Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, urged the public not to panic during strikes on Wednesday.

"It's important to say that if you have a life-threatening emergency, you must call 999 and the trade unions have made

absolutely clear they'll respond to those," he said. "The best way to help them and help everyone else in the country is for us to get a grip and reduce inflation as quickly as possible," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said.

Ministers have drafted in 750 military personnel to drive ambulances and perform logistics roles to mitigate the impact of Wednesday's ambulance strike.

Despite the government's insistence that it will not negotiate, polls indicate most people support nurses, and to a lesser extent other workers walking out.

YouGov polling published on Tuesday showed two-thirds of Britons support striking nurses, with 63 per cent support for ambulance staff. — AFP

Who’s ready to fight plastic pollution?

OLGA SPERANSKAYA & ALEXANDRA CATERBOW

In late November, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution met for the first time. The INC was established by the United Nations Environment Assembly with a well-defined mission: to create the first-ever legally binding global agreement on plastic pollution.

The fact that delegates and observers finally met to have this discussion is welcome.

But the meeting results are just the beginning of addressing the scale or scope of the problem.

Plastic pollution threatens people’s health and endangers

the environment. And plastic causes harm throughout its entire lifecycle, beginning with resource extraction and continuing after disposal.

But the problem is not just plastic itself. Plastic contains over 10,000 chemicals, more than a quarter of which are toxic to humans and wildlife. In the absence of a global requirement that companies make known exactly which chemicals are in which plastic materials and goods, what we know about plastic in our lives is dictated by the whims of individual manufacturers and national legislatures.

As a result, we are ignorant of the full extent of the problem. No one – from workers facing

PLASTIC DOES NOT AFFECT EVERYONE EQUALLY. VULNERABLE GROUPS LIKE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES, INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE ESPECIALLY AT RISK

occupational hazards to parents trying to make healthy choices for their children – has all the information they could and should have.

Plastic does not affect everyone equally. Vulnerable groups like low-income families, indigenous communities, and people of colour are especially at

risk. For example, the vulnerable and disadvantaged are more likely to live or work near petrochemical manufacturing facilities and refineries, exposing them to air, water, and soil pollution from the toxic chemicals used to manufacture plastic products.

This inequality exists within and between countries. Plastic products are often made in developing countries, transported to developed countries, and then returned to developing countries as waste. It is not only the last stage of plastics’ lifecycle that creates pollution and endangers communities. Plastic production itself is hazardous.

Consider the textile sector, where workers create clothes from

synthetic fibres made of plastics.

The workers are largely unaware of the toxicity of the chemicals they are using while they assemble skirts and shirts for people an ocean away.

They do not have all the information they need to understand the risks they are facing from doing their jobs. There is an obvious gendered component to this, too, given that the textile sector in developing countries is dominated by women.

But while people are unfairly and unevenly affected by plastic pollution, the reality is that no one is spared. Plastic pollution does not respect borders. Women everywhere use menstrual products containing plastics with

chemicals that pose a direct risk to their health.

Children all over the world, including in wealthy countries, play with cheap plastic toys containing unknown chemicals.

Given the high-stakes challenges facing the first INC, it is disappointing that delegates did not even manage to adopt procedural rules. More substantive negotiations will be delayed until they do.

There were some small successes. The presence of observers permitted corridor conversations in which they could help delegates better understand the link between plastic, chemicals, and health.

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Becker says he ‘rediscovered’ himself in prison

Tennis star Boris Becker says his time in prison has changed him. “I think I have rediscovered the person in me that I once was,” the 55-year-old said in an interview with the German TV channel.

“I have learned a hard lesson. A very expensive one. A very painful one,” the three-time Wimbledon champion said in his first interview since leaving jail.

“But the whole thing has taught me something important and good. And some things happen for a reason.”

Becker was sentenced to two and a half years behind bars at the end of April in London for concealing assets worth millions from his insolvency administrators.

He was released last week and deported to his native Germany after serving eight months of the sentence.

Speaking about his time in jail the former sportsman said “in prison, you are nobody. You are just a number. Mine was A2923EV. I wasn’t called Boris. I was a number. And they don’t give a shit who you are.”

He had been declared bankrupt in June 2017, owing creditors £50 million over an unpaid loan of more than £3 million on his estate on the Spanish island of Majorca.

The former tennis world number one said the nights in Wandsworth Prison -- not far from where he won the Wimbledon title three times -- were “atrocious.”

He said he was fortunate to have forged close ties with a group of inmates he termed “blood brothers” as two prisoners he called ‘John’ and ‘Ike’ on separate occasions had threatened him.

‘John’, serving 25 years for multiple murders, threatened to harm him if he did not give him money. ‘Ike’ got him on his own and Becker says 10 prisoners “saved my life” rescuing him when he yelled out.

“And then the next day Ike asked if I would accept his apology,” said Becker.

“I could have rejected it. I encountered him in the laundry. He threw himself down to the ground and begged me for forgiveness.

“I raised him to his feet and hugged him. “And I told him that I had great respect for him,” added a tearful Becker. Becker says he would remain in contact with those who protected him.

“When you have fought for survival together, that brings you together,” he said. “We needed each other.”

Becker says the sound of the cell door closing will stay for him for the rest of his life.

“When the cell door closes, then there is nothing left. The loneliest moment I’ve had in my life.” He described the prison as “extremely dirty and extremely dangerous . . . there were murderers, child abusers, drug dealers, every kind of criminal you can imagine”. — **Agencies**

What 1942 can teach us about 2022



Bret Stephens

On June 18, 1940, Churchill delivered his celebrated “Finest Hour” speech. The British army had been evacuated from Dunkirk. France, under Pétain, had decided to surrender. “Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war,” Churchill told the House of Commons.

“If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.

But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.”

Two of those phrases — “broad, sunlit uplands” and “the abyss of a new Dark Age” — should ring in our ears as we approach the end of this hinge year in history.

Broad, sunlit uplands are the women of Iran tearing off their hijabs the way the people of Berlin once tore down their wall.

And Ukrainian soldiers raising their flag over Irpin, Lyman, Kherson and other cities liberated from Russian barbarism.

And Chinese protesters demanding — and gaining — an end to their regime’s cruel and crazy Covid lockdowns by holding up blank sheets of paper, where nothing needed to be written because everyone already knew what they meant.

Broad, sunlit uplands were Emmanuel Macron’s victories over the fascist Marine Le Pen in France. They were the defeat of nearly every election denier in the United States who ran to oversee voting at the state level.

They were the drubbing of most of Donald Trump’s hand-picked candidates in battleground midterm elections, including in states such as Georgia where non-QAnon Republicans won handily.

Broad, sunlit uplands are a COVID fatality rate that, in America, no longer spikes a few weeks after case counts do. They are the demonstration that a lab-made fusion reaction can create more energy than it consumes.

They are the lofting of a telescope that lets us peer far into the reaches of space and back to the beginning of time.

This isn’t just a laundry list of the year’s good news.

IT IS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE CAPACITY OF PEOPLE ACROSS CULTURES AND CIRCUMSTANCES TO DEMAND, DEFEND AND DEFINE FREEDOM; TO DEFY THOSE WHO WOULD DENY IT; AND TO USE FREEDOM TO BROADEN THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT WE CAN KNOW AND DO AND IMAGINE

It is a demonstration of the capacity of people across cultures and circumstances to demand, defend and define freedom; to defy those who would deny it; and to use freedom to broaden the boundaries of what we can know and do and imagine.

But it isn’t the only thing 2022 demonstrated.

We continue to stare into the abyss of a new Dark Age, brought about not just by the malice of the enemies of freedom but also by the complacency and wishful thinking of its advocates.

The complacent include those who imagined we could leave Afghanistan to the Taliban and suffer no wider consequences. But the perception of

American weakness travels fast and far. Vladimir Putin’s second invasion of Ukraine, on Feb. 24, happened about six months after that American fiasco.

Recall that his first invasion of Ukraine, in February 2014, happened a few months after Barack Obama’s Syria debacle over his chemical weapons “red line.”

The complacent include those who thought that we could trade our way to a form of perpetual peace — whether by bringing China into the World Trade Organization or outsourcing Europe’s energy needs to Putin or imagining we could strengthen Iranian “moderates” with sanctions relief.

Dictatorships are rarely weakened by being enriched.

Lenin may not have said that “capitalists will sell us the rope with which to hang them,” but it’s remarkable how the point never seems to be learned by successive generations of capitalists.

The complacent include those supposedly sophisticated Republicans who never took a real stand against Trump — first on the grounds that he couldn’t win; then on the view that he could be a vehicle for conservative policy victories; then in the conviction that he would concede gracefully; then in the belief that impeachment after Jan. 6, 2021, was too extreme a remedy — only to see him infect the party with conspiracy theorists and lead it to its well-earned defeat.

The complacent are those who think that no vital American interest is at stake in a Ukrainian victory or in the outcome of the Iranian demonstrations.

— *The New York Times*



Retrospective, the way I see it

The year 2022 has been a passionate and tumultuous one, like a cat toying with a mouse. Emotions are high, and people are expressing themselves more vigorously. The year seems to have been permanently in crisis with instability, insecurity, violence, and climate change.

Volatile! Perhaps, as a result of the after-effects of the global pandemic, everybody shows signs that they want to catch up with everything: wealth, success, material fulfilment, power, you name it.

In February, Russia launched its so-called ‘military operation’ in Ukraine, displacing millions of people and destroying infrastructure. World leaders seem paralysed in the face of what looks like a chess game.

When Queen Elizabeth died, the world was able to see a royal burial in real time. The magnificent ceremonies were captured for the first time when cameras were permitted to record inside a British monarch’s cenotaph.

In Iran, the women’s movement demanding justice, reform, and rights saw blood spilled across the country. This is a reminder of their enduring struggle for freedom and achievements in 1979 – with a difference: the internet has now provided a platform for virtual communities within and outside the country.

Mass protests in China, the largest the country has seen since 1989: a challenge to the government’s zero-Covid policy. It is not surprising that a crackdown on VPNs and social media platforms occurred.

Afghanistan’s women’s status has faded into the dust of the sand. The brave, educated girls and women who helped the country to improve living standards receive little attention. Shame on those who set the country’s population back into the darkness. Misogyny is spreading like fire across the globe.

The Palestinian case is very much alive on the internet. The casualties of the Syrian war have faded from public view, while Sri Lanka made headlines with its worst economic and political crisis in decades.

Violence, discrimination, and



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THE YEAR SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PERMANENTLY IN CRISIS WITH INSTABILITY, INSECURITY, VIOLENCE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

racism have become commonplace in many parts of the world. Environmental disasters and natural hazards have battered Australia, South Sudan, Venezuela, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Oman, Pakistan, Guatemala, the USA, and Indonesia, to name a few.

The world population topped 8 billion in November posing challenges to feeding, health, and education care, particularly in poorer countries.

The cost of living is also part of this tumultuous year. Over half of the world’s population, according to the UN Food and Agriculture (FAO), can’t afford a decent diet.

The Food Foundation noted that people are eating less or skipping meals entirely. Humanitarian crises indicate that 95 million people are living in extreme poverty.

While all is going on, the market for military equipment, explosives, weapons, and tear gas is booming. These are lucrative industries.

A football stampede in Indonesia that killed more than 170 people was caused by tear gas, the country’s security minister has acknowledged.

The highs and lows of 2022 have been the worst in recent times. Democratic influence is gradually eroding.

Institutional mistrust is on the rise, as is a war on the free press and the elimination of tools for holding authorities accountable. We see deception, control, manipulation, and outright lying. It is such a relief that no ‘modern or populist’ leader decided to create a new calendar.

This one, the Gregorian, which was introduced in 1582, is just perfectly synced with the solar system. So, my hopes for 2023 remain strong, though there are predictions that we will be facing a global recession.

A few countries that had not adopted the Gregorian had started using the Catholic church calendar to save money on civil servant financial arrangements but kept the lunar cycle for cultural celebrations - which fits best. Like everything else, the 2022 World Cup had its surprises!

A new chapter in the storytelling process starts in 2023. My best wishes to all.

RUN FOR A CAUSE



Belgium’s Crown Princess Elisabeth and Prince Emmanuel take part in the Warmathon, as part of the “Warmste Week” in Brussels, Belgium, on Wednesday. – Reuters

Kishida is confronting a different battle

Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan, when compared with some of very aggressive predecessors, is generally considered to have a relatively passive approach in handling domestic political matters as well as external policies.

Particularly, in the wake of his depleting approval ratings after the “forced” resignations of key members of his cabinet due to their alleged links with the Unification Church, his detractors were expecting him to further crumble down in the face of his rather ill-planned expansion in the defence budget.

In this month, in addition to getting the cabinet approval of the much-touted new National Security Strategy (NSS), which has comprehensively defined all major threats to Japan’s security and devised an elaborated action plan to tackle them, Kishida also announced an unprecedented increase in defence budget, which generated a lot of debate within the ruling Liberal Democratic party (LDP) over the question of how to generate funds for such a massive increase in the defence budget.

China’s growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, North Korea’s sabre rattling and Russia’s attack



Dr Imran Khalid
The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE AFTER THREE YEARS, BUT KISHIDA IS FACING A TOUGH CHALLENGE FROM WITHIN HIS CABINET AND PARTY LEADERSHIP

on Ukraine are some of the major factors that have been compelling the Japanese leadership for quite some time to give a new transform former Premier Shinzo Abe’s “pacifist activism” into aggressive activism. Increment is the defence budget is very much part of the emerging aggressive thinking in Japan to respond to the existential threats to the country’s security.

In order to divert the attention of the simmering public resentment against the links between the Unification Church and some top tier members of the LDP, Kishida announced a game plan for increased defence spending that included additional taxes, But soon he was forced to punt in the face of a stronger than expected opposition blitz from within his own party on the methodology how to funnel the additional money for such ambitious expansion in the defence budget. Interestingly, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s tax panel gave its affirmative nod to raise taxes in order to generate money to meet Kishida’s goal of jacking up defence spending from existing 1 per cent to 2 per



cent of gross domestic product by 2027. However, the tax panel also did not elaborate specific timelines for these new taxes, leaving questions about when, or even if, new taxes might be introduced. Kishida, who had been advocating for a step-wise and phase-wise increase, was compelled to back off from a specific timetable for tax hikes to pay for defence spending of ¥43 trillion over the next five years, starting in the 2023 fiscal year.

Kishida was subjected to severe criticism by the backbenchers of his own party, who were demanding him to consider issuing government bonds to pay for at least some

of the increase instead of introducing new taxes. Kishida, a former banker, and his supporters within the Finance Ministry, were resisting the idea of issuing new bonds because of the country’s record debts. Not surprisingly, the pro-Abe faction within the LDP has been leading this revolt against Kishida’s tax increase plan despite agreeing to defence budget increment. Although, for the time being, Kishida has “managed” this crisis over the tax plan by accepting his opponents’ demand, but the situation for him is growing tense. There is no imminent threat to his seat from the opposition

because the next general elections will take place after three years, but Kishida is facing a tough challenge from within his cabinet and party leadership. There are many aspirants within the LDP – in fact, inside Kishida’s cabinet – who are vying for the top slot. Digital Minister Kono Taro and Minister of Economic Security Takaichi Sanae, both contested against Kishida in the 2021 LDP presidential race and have never kept their desire secret that they would want to succeed Kishida someday. Similarly, LDP Party Secretary General Motegi Toshimitsu has also divulged his intentions that he would run for LDP president in the near future, too. Some of Kishida’s detractors are even pinning their hopes on former Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide, who has improved his stature within the party after his quitting as party leader, that he stands a good chance to be reinstated as prime minister - although Suga has declined to re-enter in the race to replace Kishida. So, Kishida is going to have a tough time in the coming days. Things will be quite thorny for him.

sport

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ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The Oman national football team delegation arrived on Tuesday evening in Dubai to have an aboard camp. The external camp in UAE will feature two friendly matches against Syria team.

The first match is scheduled to take place on Friday at Shabab Al Ahli Stadium in Dubai. The match will kick off 20:30 (Oman Time).

The following warm-up game will be played on December 30.

Dubai camp is part of the team's preparation for the forthcoming assignments which includes Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra, Iraq and AFC Asia Cup in 2023. Ahead of travelling to Dubai, Red Warriors completed their first internal part of the gathering in Muscat which lasted for five days.

The coaching staff will focus in the forthcoming preparatory



match against Syria on the line-up who will represent the team in the Arabian Gulf Cup. The players of

Seeb joined the camp after their completion of Omantel League match against Suhar which Seen won 2-1.

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic will look for a better show of Oman team in the Arabian Gulf Cup in Al Basra after the team had quit from the group stage in the previous edition in Doha in 2019.

The team was positioned in the third place with four points.

Oman were held to a goalless draw against Bahrain and they had registered a 2-1 win over Kuwait. In the third match, Oman suffered a 3-1 loss against Saudi Arabia.

In the upcoming edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup, Oman will compete Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in Group A while defending champions Bahrain will defend their title in Group B which comprised Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE.

The Red Warriors will commence their campaign in the tournament with a tough match against Iraq in the opening match on January 6. Oman will then face Yemen on January 9 and they will conclude group matches with a final match against Saudi Arabia on January 12.

The topper from each group will advance to the semifinals and the winners will vie for the title in the final match.

Fan gloom as Argentina victory parade ends abruptly

BUENOS AIRES: Millions of jubilant fans turned out on Tuesday to welcome home Argentina's World Cup winners led by Lionel Messi, but most were left disappointed when an open-top bus parade had to be abandoned due to the massive crowds, in favour of a hastily organised helicopter tour.

Vast crowds of ecstatic fans cheered on their heroes along every meter of the planned 30-kilometer parade route from a Buenos Aires suburb to the centre of the capital -- but that made for interminably slow progress.

The bus had crawled along for almost five hours as the throng celebrated the team's thrilling penalty shoot-out victory over France in the World Cup final, before the decision was made to trade the bus for a chopper.

"It was impossible to continue on the ground due to the explosion of popular joy," presidential spokeswoman Gabriela Cerruti said on Twitter.

It meant that many fans, including the largest congregation at the iconic Obelisk monument

in central Buenos Aires that has for decades been the epicentre of sporting celebrations, did not get to see their idols in the flesh. "I'm a little bit sad that we weren't able to see them," said Marta Acosta, 35, who travelled into town from a southern suburb at 5:00 am.

Claudio Tapia, president of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), blamed police for the decision to abandon the victory parade. "They are not allowing us to go and greet all the people at the Obelisk," said Tapia on Twitter.

"The same security agencies that escorted us are not allowing us to continue. Thousands of apologies in the name of all the champion players. It's a shame."

ANTI-CLIMAX

Hordes of revellers wearing the national team's blue and white replica shirts and draped in flags sang, danced and set off fireworks throughout the day, with many camping out all night to secure spots along the parade route. But three hours into the procession, the bus had barely covered a third of the planned path. Eventually, the vehicle was ditched.



Instead, Messi, coach Lionel Scaloni and midfielder Rodrigo De Paul took the World Cup

trophy with them for a helicopter ride over the main parade sites, including the Obelisk, police said.

Messi and winger Angel Di Maria then took a private plane to their hometown of Rosario,

alongside forward Paulo Dybala.

As Messi and Di Maria boarded another helicopter to take them to the private neighbourhood where they own homes, Dybala continued on to his hometown of Cordoba, a photographer said.

Back in Buenos Aires, many continued to celebrate but for some fans, the short-circuiting of the party was inevitable. "Only someone who does not know what football means to the Argentine people could think this was not a possibility," Roman Garcia, 38, said.

An estimated five to six million people had lined the parade route, a government source said.

Television images showed two men trying to jump from a bridge onto the players' bus. One succeeded but the other missed and fell into a crowd of people.

As the evening wore on, minor clashes broke out between fans — some clearly inebriated — and police who moved to evict a small group that had forced its way into the area around the Obelisk. City officials earlier said 16 people had been hospitalised. — **AFP**

JOKIC INSPIRES NUGGETS TO TAKE TOP SPOT IN WEST

MIAMI: Inspired by their in-form centre Nikola Jokic, the Denver Nuggets took over at the top of the Western Conference, after knocking the Memphis Grizzlies off their perch with a convincing 105-91 win on Tuesday.

Jokic produced his sixth triple double of the season with 13 points, 13 rebounds and 13 assists, as Denver handed Memphis their second straight defeat after a seven-game winning run.

Ja Morant starred for Memphis with 35 points and 10 assists but Denver's scoring was spread throughout the team — Aaron Gordon top-scored with 24 points but all the starters reached double figures.

The Nuggets led 55-40 at half-time with their defence not allowing the Grizzlies any time or space.

Jokic's passing was superb at times but the Serb was pleased with the way they limited the Grizzlies offence.

"Our defence was amazing, we were aggressive from the start, we had a bit of luck in the third quarter but generally the whole game we had a really good defensive night," said Jokic.

"I think that is the key for us to go deep in the playoffs," he added. The two teams are tied at the top of the West with 19-11 records.

KNICKS EXTEND WINNING RUN

The New York Knicks extended their winning streak to eight games as they continued their push towards a play-off spot with an emphatic 132-94 win over the defending NBA champions, the Golden State Warriors. The Knicks were never behind in the game after opening up an 8-0 lead and ran away with



Phoenix Suns center Bismack Biyombo (right) slam dunks the ball against Washington Wizards centre Daniel Gafford in the first half at Footprint Center. — USA Today Sports

the game in the second half.

Immanuel Quickley scored 22 points and Jalen Brunson 21, with Quentin Grimes (19) and RJ Barrett (18) also making big contributions.

Golden State have won just three games on the road this season and coach Steve Kerr said they have yet to find their edge.

"You win the championship and there's just a natural human nature drop-off," Kerr said. "You're just not on edge. Combine that with other factors — injuries and stuff — it's just we haven't gotten there yet."

Nikola Vucevic put up 29 points and DeMar DeRozan 24 points as the Chicago Bulls beat an under-strength Miami Heat 113-103 to end a four-game losing run.

The Heat, who had won their previous four outings, were without Jimmy Butler, Kyle Lowry and Caleb Martin and, although Bam Adebayo stepped up scoring 27 points and grabbing 12 rebounds, they were blown away in the third quarter.

The Bulls (12-18) went on a 30-7 run in the third and were never in danger of losing from then on as the Heat slipped to a 16-16 record.

The Utah Jazz beat the struggling Detroit Pistons 126-111, with Lauri Markkanen scoring 38 points and a career-high nine 3-pointers.

With Jarred Vanderbilt adding 18 points and 13 rebounds, the Jazz improve to 18-16 in the West while the Pistons remain rooted to the bottom of the Eastern Conference with just eight wins from 33 games.

The Washington Wizards beat the Phoenix Suns 113-110, with Kyle Kuzma's 29 points helping end their 10-game losing run.

— AFP

Shoulder injury return timeline to be set in new year: Curry



NEW YORK: Reigning NBA Finals MVP Stephen Curry will plot out a timeline for his return from a left shoulder injury in the new year. Curry suffered a shoulder subluxation in last Wednesday's 125-119 loss to the Indiana Pacers, with initial reports stating he would miss a "few weeks."

The 34-year-old point guard has avoided surgery and is hopeful of plotting out his return soon.

"This is an interesting one just because I haven't had an injury like this on the shoulder, so it's a wait and see approach," Curry said on the Warriors' bench during NBA on TNT's coverage of the game with the New York Knicks on Tuesday.

"I'm still in the early healing process, so I'm nowhere near picking up a basketball yet. It'll be a few weeks. Maybe we'll get to the new year and I'll start to key in on a timeline from there."

The Warriors are 15-16 overall, sitting 11th in the Western Conference, coming into Tuesday's road game. Golden State have a 3-14 road record this season.

Curry is leading the NBA this season in three-pointers made, with 5.0 per game. The four-time NBA champion is averaging 30 points shooting at 50% with 6.6 rebounds and 6.8 assists this season. — dpa

Venus accepts wildcards for Australian Open, Auckland tournaments



WELLINGTON: Venus Williams will roll back the years next month, with the 42-year-old accepting wildcards to play in the main draws of both the Australian Open and the Auckland WTA tournaments, it was announced on Wednesday.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion, who last took the court at September's US Open playing doubles with her sister Serena, will be in the singles field in Auckland ahead of the Australian Open, which starts January 16.

It will mark Venus Williams's 22nd appearance at Melbourne Park, where she made her Australian Open debut 25 years ago and reached the finals in 2003 and 2017.

Her most recent appearance was a second-round exit in 2021.

"I am very excited to be returning to Melbourne to compete at the Australian Open," Williams said in a statement. "I've been competing in

(Australia) for over 20 years now and I'm looking forward to making more memories at the tournament this year."

Williams, a former world number one, has played rarely in the past few years, her singles world ranking dropping to 1007th.

She will warm up for Melbourne in Auckland, where she will be one of four Grand Slam winners in the field alongside former US Open champions Emma Raducanu and Sloane Stephens, and 2020 Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin. "I'm looking forward to playing my first tournament of the season in Auckland," said Williams, who won the tournament in 2015.

"The tournament and fans always make me feel welcome, and I'm excited to compete there in January."

The elder Williams sister has won 49 titles in her career, including Wimbledon five times and the US Open twice. — AFP

Fifa 'pondering' World Cup every three years

BERLIN: Football's ruling body is pondering holding the World Cup every three years instead, after plans for a biennial staging were shelved, according to British news reports on Wednesday.

The Guardian and the Daily Mail said that such a triennial tournament could be backed the African and Asian confederations and would be part of a radical change of the annual match calendar after 2030.

It would be a further expansion of Fifa's showcase event which in 2026 will see an increase of teams from 32 to 48.

That tournament in the United States, Mexico and Canada is planned with three teams in a group but there are now ideas to have groups of four teams. If that is the case the number of matches would rise from a current 64 to 104.

All ideas are expected to further drive up the income of Fifa which is said to have generated record revenue of some \$7.5 billion from the tournament in Qatar which ended on Sunday. Fifa distributes the vast majority of its earnings to its 211 members.

Fifa president Gianni Infantino,



who could be in office until 2031, has also announced a 32-team Club World Cup from 2025 onwards.

The World Cup has been held every four years since its inauguration in 1930. Fifa floated the idea of a switch to a biennial

event but that ended over stiff resistance mainly from Europe and South America who may also oppose a triennial version. — dpa

STOKES, GREEN, POORAN UP FOR GRABS AT IPL AUCTION



NEW DELHI: Some of the world's top cricketers will be among 405 players to go under the hammer at an auction on Friday for next year's money-spinning Indian Premier League.

A look at five stars who could get a fat pay cheque when the 10 franchises bid in Kochi ahead of the Twenty20 tournament due to start in late March.

BEN STOKES

The big-hitting left-hand batsman and dangerous right-arm seam bowler last played the IPL in 2021, when he left midway due to injury, and opted out of this year's edition.

Stokes, 31, played a key part in England's T20 World Cup triumph in November and this month led the Test side to a famous series victory in Pakistan.

He set an IPL record in 2018 when Rajasthan Royals bought him for \$1.96 million in the auction and is currently listed in the highest base-price bracket at \$246,000.

SAM CURRAN

The all-rounder was Player of the Tournament in the T20 World Cup after his skills as a "death bowler" closing down opposition batsmen in the final overs turned

him into a potent weapon for England.

The left-arm quick and attacking middle-order batsman had a successful stint with Chennai Super Kings but parted ways after a back injury and missed the 2022 edition.

Curran has a strike rate of nearly 150 and is placed, like Stokes, in the top band of the auction list, so Chennai and their warhorse captain MS Dhoni may want him back as they hunt for a fifth title.

CAMERON GREEN

Six-foot-six (1.98 metres) tall with a demon outswing, Green was

initially picked as a fast bowler for Western Australia but has emerged as a fearsome batsman too.

The Perth Scorchers star, 23, made a big impression in India with his attacking batting on tour in September, when he struck 118 runs at a strike rate of 214.54 as an opener.

Compatriot David Warner warned Green that playing his maiden IPL on top of a busy 2023 that will include a tour of India, an Ashes and a World Cup, could be too much.

"It's going to be a really tough year. I don't think anyone is disagreeing with that. But it's a

really good opportunity, I think," Green said.

NICHOLAS POORAN

West Indies stars have long thrived at the IPL and left-handed batsman Pooran has played in leagues around the world, from Australia's Big Bash to the Abu Dhabi T10.

The wicketkeeper-batsman stepped down as West Indies' white-ball skipper after the team's T20 World Cup debacle and was also released by IPL side Sunrisers Hyderabad last month.

But with a T20 strike rate of over 141, Pooran is listed in the top bracket of players, including

fellow West Indian Jason Holder, in the auction.

RILEE ROSSOUW

The left-hand batsman has been an impact player for South Africa, with his blazing T20 form including two centuries in October.

The 33-year-old demolished the Indian attack to give the Proteas a consolation win in Indore and blasted 109 to crush Bangladesh in a T20 World Cup group match.

He has been in demand in the T20 franchise circuit, but could never get going in the IPL in 2014 and 2015 before returning unsold ahead of this year's season. — AFP

FACTS BOX

The Tata IPL 2023 Player Auction list is out with a total of 405 cricketers set to go under the hammer in Kochi on December 23.

Initially, a total of 369 players were shortlisted by 10 teams from the initial list of 991 players. Thirty Six additional players were requested by teams, which are added into the final list which makes a total of 405 players which will be presented at the IPL 2023 Auction.

Out of 405 players, 273 are Indians and 132 are overseas players of which 4 players are from associate nations. The total capped players are 119, uncapped players are 282 and 4 from associate nations. A maximum of 87 slots are now available with up to 30 being slotted for overseas players.

INR 2 crore is the highest reserve price with 19 overseas players choosing to be slotted in the highest bracket. 11 players are in the auction list with a base price of INR 1.5 crore.

Manish Pandey and Mayank Agarwal are the two Indian players in the list of 20 cricketers with a base price of INR 1 crore. The Auction will start at 14:30 IST.



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Manufacturing sector’s contribution to GDP climbs 9.1% in 2021



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion announced the upcoming manufacturing and future industries laboratory in January of 2023. The laboratory, organised in collaboration between The Ministry, the Industrial Innovation Academy and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit will focus on solutions facing the manufacturing sector in the country.

Under-Secretary for Commerce & Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan said in a press conference, “The laboratory aims to address the challenges facing projects and investment opportunities in the industrial sector and finding practical solutions to implement them. In addition to developing solutions to general challenges facing the investment in manufacturing projects.”

“Over the past decades, the sector has seen steady growth since the 1970s and a rise in its contribution to GDP, achieving around 9.1 per cent of 2021,” he added. According to recent data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the value of

manufacturing industries grew by 67.4 per cent by the end of June 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

The upcoming laboratory will focus on four main axes: industries of the future, project and investment opportunities, Oman Vision 2040 industrial strategy, and governance. In addition, the event will also focus on the outcomes of the previously held solution clinics last month.

Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Industrial Innovation Academy, Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, further elaborated, “The suggested solutions will be discussed in detail, and execution plans of the suggested initiatives will be put forth in coordination and collaboration with relevant authorities.”

At the beginning of the month, the organising authorities held a series of solution clinics with an emphasis on infrastructure and public services, funding and investments, and laws and legislation in regards to the manufacturing sector in the country.

The Academy said 15 enabling initiatives were put forward as a result. The laboratory is expected to take place in January over a period of 4 weeks.

OIA outlines major strategy to spur Omani economy in 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, plans to ramp up investments across its sizable portfolio in 2023, as well as exit certain other investments as part of a strategy to align its growth objections with the nation’s broader economic development.

OIA Chairman Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi (pictured) said a total of 65 new investments and expansions are planned in 2023. These are distributed across diverse sectors: Logistics 19, Energy – 5, Communications and Information Technology - 12, Mining – 5, Services – 12, and Food Security / Fisheries – 12. Speaking at a media briefing on the preliminary estimates of the 2023 Oman Budget, Al Murshidi, said the Authority intends to spend RO 1.9 billion on investment projects during 2023.

These include the expansion and consolidation of existing projects and the completion of projects under implementation.

Funding of new investments will be undertaken through partnerships with the local and foreign private sectors, along with contributions from the OIA or its subsidiaries or from financing institutions.

Due consideration will be given to the objective of cutting down the total debts of OIA subsidiaries during the next five years, he said. Al Murshidi underscored the



The plan envisages exits from 8 investments in 2023, to be distributed as follows: 3 in the energy sector, 3 in the aviation, industry and tourism sectors, and 2 in the communications and information technology sector — thus generating returns exceeding RO 500 million.

ABDULSALAM AL MURSHIDI
Chairman, OIA

need to proceed with the Exit Plan announced by the OIA in 2022.

The plan envisages exits from 8 investments in 2023, to be distributed as follows: 3 in the energy sector, 3 in the aviation, industry and tourism sectors, and 2 in the communications and information technology sector — thus generating returns exceeding RO 500 million.

In addition, the Authority aims to work towards clearing the outstanding debt of subsidiary or associate companies, returning rotating investments that have reached maturity with investments that are still at an early stage of growth, forming partnerships with the private sector including local and international investors, as well as strategic and financial investors, and expanding the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

Market experts are unanimous in their opinion that the Sultanate of Oman has succeeded in achieving its goals by controlling inflation levels, rationalising public spending and preserving resources in general, thereby enhancing the state’s position in attracting global investments.

This in turn has boosted the confidence of investors exploring investment opportunities in Oman, especially in the renewable energy sector. At the media briefing, hosted by the Ministry of Finance, it was also announced that total public expenditure in 2023 is estimated at about RO 12.950 billion, entailing an increase of 7 per cent over the approved expenditure in the 2022 budget.

GDP of GCC economies to reach \$6 trillion by 2050

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies will grow to \$6 trillion by 2050, Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, said during the 24th annual meeting with the technical officials responsible for preparing plans at GCC states held at the Grand Millennium Hotel on December 21-22.

Al Maawali said, “The World Bank report indicates that the total GDP of the GCC states is expected to hit about \$2 trillion by the end of 2022. If the GCC states continue performing at the same

pace, their GDP will grow to \$6 trillion by 2050.”

The GCC posted an impressive 19.6 per cent growth rate in 2021, the Ministry of Economy said in a post, citing sources from the GCC-Stat. The GCC’s Gross Domestic Product reached \$1.7 trillion in 2021, which constitutes 1.8 per cent of the global GDP at the current prices.

The per capita share of the GDP at current prices is \$29,700, which represents a 21.2 per cent growth.

The growth of commodity export (52.5 per cent), increase in commodity imports (20.8 per cent) and growth in commodity balance (334.3 per cent) contribute to the rise of the GCC’s GDP for 2021.



The annual meeting aims to enhance joint coordination between the GCC states and exchange knowledge and experiences regarding best practices in the field of preparing national plans and future visions.

“It is high time now to preserve the various resources for future generations to achieve

THE GROWTH OF COMMODITY EXPORT (52.5 PER CENT), INCREASE IN COMMODITY IMPORTS (20.8 PER CENT) AND GROWTH IN COMMODITY BALANCE (334.3 PER CENT) CONTRIBUTE TO THE RISE OF THE GCC’S GDP FOR 2021.

comprehensive and sustainable development. The Sultanate of Oman issued the first voluntary report in 2019 and is now re-constituting its National Committee and National Working Group concerned with following on the implementation of the sustainable goals to prepare for the

issuance of the second voluntary report of the progress made in achieving the national goals of sustainable development 2030,” Al Maawali said.

He added, “Since the 1960s the GCC state have put their development plans at the heart of the path of economic and social development in order to achieve leaps and bounds in their economies. We must continue our efforts to achieve economic growth that balances social, environmental and institutional dimensions and objectives. GCC states follow the progress made in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals through voluntary reports and national dashboard indicators.”

IO Kitchen, NHI in tie-up to train and recruit Omani culinary talent

MUSCAT: IO Kitchens, the first Omani cloud kitchen partnered with the National Hospitality Institute (NHI) earlier this year to offer a unique nine-month training, development and mentoring programme for young Omani culinary talents looking to immerse themselves in one of the fastest growing segments in the F&B industry.

The first cohort of the programme saw four Omani culinary talent successfully graduate and join the IO Kitchens team as full-time employees, while receiving ongoing training in their chosen field by culinary experts.

Hisham Hasan, Co-Founder and CEO of IO Kitchens says: “We are very proud to support and drive national efforts to create more in-country value in the years ahead, by up-skilling and training our local community. We have also offered employment opportunities to these young talented Omani



culinary students in our hope to create a strong pipeline of Omani culinary experts.”

Hasan added: “We look forward to inducting the next cohort of Omani culinary talent into our

tailor-made programme with NHI.”

Robert MacLean, Principal at NHI said: “We are delighted to work with IO Kitchens on this project. The students have really

enjoyed the engagement with the company during their training and are excited to take up their full-time positions. We look forward to starting the next project with IO kitchens in the development of the next group of young Omani chefs.”

IO Kitchens is the first Omani-owned Cloud Kitchen concept that was established in 2020, and is focused on ‘changing the way Oman eats one kitchen at a time.’ IO Kitchens partners with restaurant owners and F&B concepts to help them expand their reach by giving them access to cloud kitchens in prime locations for delivery, a highly skilled team, and the latest technology to enhance efficiencies.

IO Kitchens currently operates over 24 local and regional brands including: Sides, Rice an’ Roll, MunchZilla, WokStars, Rice N’ Spice, Egg Story, Mix N’ Munch, Between the Bun, Healthy and Co and many others.

Alizz Islamic Bank’s Tharwa offers premium banking experience

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank offers a variety of sharia-compliant banking services and products including its Wealth Management segment ‘Tharwa’ service, which is one of the highest quality banking services in the Sultanate of Oman.

Tharwa members can enjoy a variety of benefits that raise their standard of living when it comes to accommodation and dining while travelling.

In addition, Tharwa provides a variety of exclusive offers and discounts and gives access to VIP lounges, special events & more than 550 various lounges at all airports worldwide and much more.

Through Tharwa, Alizz Islamic Bank is committed to providing unprecedented banking services that guarantee service quality and peace of mind. All banking solutions



have been designed to offer ideal levels of quality services that meet the customers various banking needs.

Through deposits, finance and high value deposit accounts like Izdihar Savings Account, Term Investment Deposit Accounts and Wakala Accounts, Tharwa customers will be able to know the expected profits and will be qualified to get discounts on the transaction and service charges that will be available to customers at various branches.

National Finance participates in panel discussion organised by MSX

MUSCAT: Revered as Oman’s largest finance company, National Finance recently participated in an event hosted by Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on December 20, 2022 at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

In line with MSX’s commitment to the UN Sustainable Stock Exchange (SSE), the event witnessed the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between MSX and the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Environment Authority in Oman.

Showing active support, the company’s General Manager of Risk and Controls, Bikram Monga, took part in an interactive session themed ‘Fundamentals of ESG and Sustainability’.

Monga said, “Customers in a continuously evolving market have become increasingly conscious about companies embracing sustainable practices, promoting transparency and contributing to the welfare of society as a whole. We at



National Finance are committed to establishing relevant policies for our internal operations and working in tandem with a clearly defined sustainability framework that is in sync with ongoing ESG demands. At the same time, the company continues to improve and look for sustainable solutions for all stakeholders.”

He added saying, “Our participation in the panel discussion reiterates our commitment to driving meaningful dialogues in the area of ESG and sustainable development. Through the discussion facilitated by MSX,

where industry leaders who are passionate about the cause were able to interact, engage and share ideas for further development.”

The panel discussions highlighted the importance for companies to adopt ESG whilst simultaneously diving deeper into the reasons and benefits of its integration and the ways it can improve investor relations. The conversation also evoked an interesting debate on its impact on company returns.

Meanwhile, individual companies also shared their unique experiences and reasons for embarking on the journey.

MEC celebrates graduation ceremony of batch 2022

MUSCAT: Middle East College (MEC) celebrated the graduation of its 2022 batch in ceremonies organised over two days December 3-4 at the MEC Student Hub. The ceremony was conducted in six sessions across two days in the presence of dignitaries, the Management, members of the College Board, dignitaries from government and industry, parents, faculty members, academic support staff, and the professional services team.

981 graduates were awarded degrees for several Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes in Engineering, Science and Technology, Business and Management, and Archives and Records Management. Dr Kiran G R, Dean of Middle East College, presided over the first ceremony for awarding Undergraduate Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in programmes affiliated with Coventry University and the University of Wolverhampton.

Eng Ali bin Mohammed bin Zahir al Abri, Under-Secretary for Water Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, presided over the ceremony to award various Undergraduate Bachelor’s awards in Business Administration and Business Information Systems.

Majid bin Said bin Sulaiman al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, presided over the ceremony to award Undergraduate Bachelor’s in Computing programmes and



the Quantity Surveying and Construction Management programme offered in affiliation with Coventry University.

Eng Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, presided over the ceremony to award Undergraduate Bachelor’s in Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Electronics and Telecommunications and Electronics and Instrumentation, and postgraduate programmes offered in affiliation with Coventry University.

DrAlibinAmeralShaithani, Under-Secretaryfor Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transportation, Communications, and Information Technology, presided over the ceremony to award the undergraduate degrees in the Logistics management programme offered in collaboration with the Breda University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands.

Bentley Muscat launches all-new Bentayga Extended Wheelbase

MUSCAT: Bentley Muscat launched the all-new Bentayga Extended Wheelbase at a special event held at Al Mouj Muscat’s Zunairah Villas. Bentley confirmed Type Approval and a set of performance figures that delivers the renowned effortless luxury of a Bentayga, without compromise.

Bentayga Extended Wheelbase (EWB) has increased the Bentley range to five models, the result of a nine-figure investment to create the best rear cabin experience since the Mulsanne.

It builds on the strengths of the Bentayga, a car that defined the luxury SUV sector. The EWB accounts for approximately 40

per cent of total Bentayga Global orders and further cements the model as Bentley’s best-selling. Powered by Bentley’s proven 4.0-litre 32-valve dual twin-scroll turbocharged V8 petrol engine, the Bentayga EWB V8 offers supercar performance, developing 542 bhp (550 PS) and 568 lb.ft (770 Nm) of torque, resulting in a top speed of 180 mph (290 km/h) and 0-60 mph in 4.5 seconds (100 km/h in 4.6 seconds).

To complement this performance with an unrivalled cabin, the extension of the wheelbase of the Bentayga by 180 mm includes changes to the under floor, side panels and roof. The increased length is all in the rear



door, creating an exceptionally luxurious rear cabin that is larger than any other luxury competitor. This allows an emphasis on wellness, with the introduction of the world’s first auto climate and advanced postural adjustment rear

seat. Bentley Extended Wheelbase is available with three seating configurations, including a standard, all-new 4 + 1 layout with occasional middle seat, alongside four and five-seat versions.

Luxurious, 16-way adjustment, heating, ventilation and five massage programmes help minimise fatigue throughout a journey. Optional Airline Seat Specification offers maximum relaxation in the rear, with backrests that recline to 40 degrees and make it easier to sleep.

Other key features include Seat Auto Climate, Postural Adjustment, additional cushion and backrest bolster adjustment, plus heated rear door and centre armrests.

A spokesperson for Bentley Motors, said: “The new Bentayga Extended Wheelbase is the next chapter in the Bentayga story which, since the original luxury

SUV came to market in 2015, has transformed the sector and resulted in record sales. A

t Bentley, we collaborated with our customers to stretch the class-leading SUV’s breadth of ability even further, leading to a rear cabin experience comparable to the legendary Mulsanne.

“We combined the highest levels of innovation, craftsmanship and sustainability. Each car produced contains leading technology and is an artisanal piece of art, handcrafted using only the finest of materials, in true Bentley fashion. As part of the Bentley experience, we are proud to now deliver the first highly bespoke cars of our new sector-defining pinnacle model.”

Big Pharma will find right formula for M&A binge

Drugmakers are primed for a shopping spree in 2023. Companies like Pfizer and GSK are in relatively rude health, thanks to bumper sales from vaccines and a post-pandemic recovery in cancer treatments. Chief executives have a potential half-trillion-dollar war chest to use on dealmaking.

Their likely targets, listed biotechnology groups, are not in a position to play hardball. The year 2022 was relatively thin for pharma M&A, with deals worth nearly \$66 billion being announced by early December – 60 per cent below the 9-year average, according to Refinitiv data; 2023 will be better.

It helps that drug companies are relatively healthy, with debt around just 1.6 times forecast EBITDA in 2023, according to Berenberg analysts. Assume they could double that to 3 times EBITDA, and the top 15 listed drugmakers including Pfizer, Moderna, Novartis and Roche would have \$486 billion of firepower.

Expiring patents may put a fire under CEOs to use that money. Bristol-Myers Squibb, Amgen, Pfizer and GSK will all lose exclusivity on some of their bestselling remedies in the coming years. Buying fast-growing biotech groups is the easiest way to find new revenue. Bristol-Myers Squibb alone reckons it could lose up to \$14 billion of sales by 2025 as patents on Revlimid, a treatment for multiple myeloma, expire.

Takeover conditions also look favourable. The value of the Nasdaq Biotechnology Index had fallen around 20 per cent by the middle of December from its peak in August 2021.

Potential targets include Ascendis Pharma, which develops drugs that treat growth hormone deficiencies. Incyte, an oncology specialist, was worth \$18 billion, or 23 times forward earnings, in early December, a sharp fall from its peak in 2021, when it was trading on 30 times, according to Refinitiv data. Biotech CEOs may be reluctant to sell or demand a high takeover premium.

Seagen, for example, worth \$22 billion in early December, has fought off Merck & Co. But higher interest rates and depressed stock prices will make it increasingly difficult for cash-hungry biotechs to raise funding or fresh equity.

That puts Big Pharma in an ideal negotiating position. — Reuters

The year 2022 was relatively thin for pharma M&A, with deals worth nearly \$66 billion being announced by early December – 60 per cent below the 9-year average.



FREE MARKET

A man holds skis and looks on second hand objects at the “free supermarket” in Cervione on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica. As part of an initiative to reduce waste and to counter the rising cost of living, a small “free supermarket” on France’s Mediterranean island of Corsica has been established, where customers can freely drop-off and pick-up items such as clothing, toys, kitchenware, books, etc. — AFP

Can India fulfil its potential?



CARL BILDT
The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

In 2023, India will overtake China as the world’s most populous country. And while China has already passed its demographic zenith and begun to age, India’s ascent will continue for decades.

To be sure, after abandoning its socialist model in 1991, India has struggled to boost its economic growth, whereas China’s four decades of “reform and opening” have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and brought high-income status within sight.

As a result, its economy is now six times larger than India’s, and the difference between the two countries’ basic infrastructure is glaring. But with Chinese President Xi Jinping moving his country back in a more statist direction, growth has slowed substantially.

Meanwhile, India’s economy has been outpacing most others this year, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi seems determined to put his country on a path to close the gap with China. This fall, India surpassed the UK to become the world’s fifth-largest economy, and recent estimates suggest that its current policies and growth rates will make it the third-largest national economy in a decade or so.

While its projected growth rate for 2023 is below that of 2022 (5.9 per cent compared to 6.9 per cent), a rapid ascent up the global economic ladder remains well within reach. China outpaced India in recent decades because it was much faster and more decisive in opening its economy and tapping into global trade. While China was establishing

itself as “the factory of the world,” India was still harbouring suspicions about open trade and allowing protectionist tendencies to hold back rapid reform.

Its ability to overcome old habits in the years ahead will likely determine whether it can fulfil its ambition to achieve sustained rapid growth and broad-based prosperity. For now, global conditions remain favourable for India. China’s own success in advancing along the global value chain means that it is no longer the low-cost producer that it once was.

And with rising geopolitical tensions and many multinationals rethinking their supply chains, investors are increasingly turning their sights to India. Globalisation may be changing, but it is hardly in retreat. In fact, global trade is stronger than ever. What is new is the push to locate value chains in more politically predictable places, so that geopolitical tensions and rogue actors do not unduly affect the free flow of goods and services. India could fit the bill, but first it will need to resolve some outstanding questions.

One issue concerns India’s relationship with Europe. A free-trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union (EU) and India used to be high on the agenda for both sides, but it was shelved in the mid-2010s.

The EU wanted more than was achievable, India wanted far less, and the talks were going nowhere. But earlier this year, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and Modi decided, in a mutual leap of faith, to revive efforts to conclude an FTA.

Much will now depend on the outcome of these new talks, which follow a seven-year hiatus. The EU will have to recognise that it probably cannot achieve everything that it wants in one go.

And India, for its part, will have to jettison a lot of political baggage. If it really wants to capitalise on the global rearrangement of value chains, it must open itself up in ways that it has resisted in the past. Neither the negotiations nor the associated reforms will be easy.

Progress ultimately will depend on political leadership in both New Delhi and Brussels. If trade negotiators are going to break new ground, as is necessary in this case, they will need a clear vision and consistent will from their respective capitals. Indian leaders, in particular, should bear in mind what the policies of the past few decades have wrought.

Divergent national approaches to the global economy explain why China now represents 16 per cent of the EU’s foreign trade, whereas India represents only 2 per cent. The latter figure obviously must rise in the coming decade, but the extent to which it does will depend heavily on the outcome of the new talks.

The rest of the world has much to gain from a more prosperous, confident, and powerful India. In addition to being the world’s most populous country soon, India is also its largest democracy, and its voice will only grow in importance as its economy develops. But, ultimately, the soft power that it wields in the future will reflect the trade and economic policy choices it makes today. © Project Syndicate, 2022

Marketing Qatar through the World Cup



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

The curtain has fallen on the World Cup 2022 hosted by Qatar. It was the best version of a World Cup in terms of efficient organisation, standard of facilities, entertainment and honest competition.

Thanks and appreciation are due in abundant measure to Qatar, an Arab Gulf country that was able, in a matter of a few years, to establish luxurious stadiums and provide the requisite infrastructure for those who came to Doha to partake of cultural and artistic activities while appreciating Qatari tolerance, love and respect for everyone’s customs and traditions, except those

that breach the nation’s religious beliefs.

I wonder how much effort, money and skill that Qatar needed to market itself as sporting destination at the global level before Fifa itself stepped in as the organiser of this event?

It truly succeeded in defining and marketing itself on the global level, culturally, economically, and on the tourist level as well.

While the cost of hosting the World Cup has been immense, Qatar has demonstrated to everyone that it is gigantic in its visionary thinking as a destination for sports, education, logistics, construction, as well as an appealing place to live and work for millions of expatriates from across the world.

The World Cup fixtures itself attracted millions of fans from across five continents who came to this country to watch and enjoy international matches, and learn about its people, culture and everything that exists in it.

Many people do not know much about the Gulf countries and their economic, cultural, social and sports conditions. But their presence in the region on the occasion of the World Cup gave them an opportunity, especially the youth, to learn about the Gulf countries, their peoples, customs, traditions, and love and tolerance towards people of all faiths and backgrounds.

And if a study is conducted by us, for example, on the extent of the knowledge of the peoples

of Latin America and Africa who competed during that tournament to reach the region and their knowledge of it, the results will surprise us about their ignorance about us.

This is what we can also conclude if we ask questions to Gulf citizens about the extent of their knowledge and understanding of the conditions of large and small countries located in Latin America, with which we are similar in shapes, descriptions, and other matters.

This World Cup has strengthened the status of the State of Qatar and the region in the global arena, whether today or beyond, at the sports, tourism and cultural levels, at a time when Qatar will soon celebrate

that it has become the capital of Arab tourism for the year 2023, according to the decision of the Arab Tourism Organisation at its recent meeting in Cairo.

And therefore, it will be a destination for many Arabs who will come to find out about the developments it witnessed in building majestic stadiums, its markets and its commercial centres.

Millions of people followed the World Cup event hailed as the best to date. Many of them believe that Qatar displayed tolerance, courtesy and generous hospitality in front of every visitor who set foot in the country, repudiating the falsehoods spread during the past twelve years.

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A graphic of a smartphone screen displaying a WhatsApp QR code. Above the screen, the text 'Now get news on the go' is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below the QR code, the text 'To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,' is written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. Below that, the text 'WhatsApp' is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, followed by '<your name> to' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the screen, the number '96473232' is written in a large, bold, blue, sans-serif font. The background of the screen is a light beige color with a pattern of small, faint icons related to communication and media. At the very bottom of the image, there is a blue bar containing social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and a website icon, along with the text 'omanobserver.om' and '@omanobserver'.

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Be Careful Be Responsible

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDOULAH BIN SALIM AL SHARBI VOL. 39 NO. 229

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER



MUSCAT: Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Zay Saad

Sayed bin Khalifa bin Al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Dhaith Al Mushtar

Sayed bin Khalifa bin Al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Dhaith Al Mushtar

Sayed bin Khalifa bin Al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Dhaith Al Mushtar

ALSO FE

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMEL SUFFY

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Oman Banknotes and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a new series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. **TURN TO 4**

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES

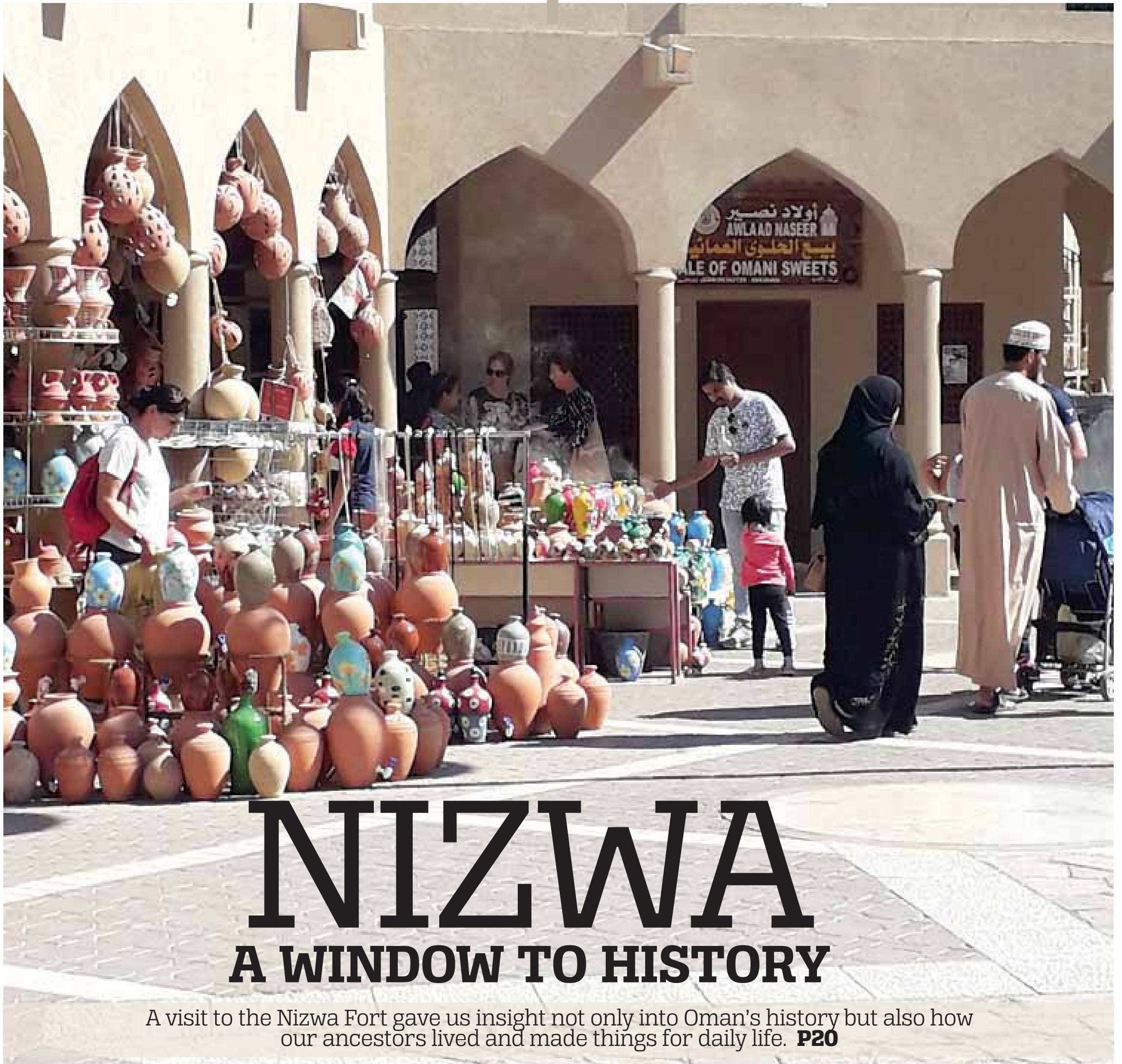
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and repeated appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are being ignored.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

are not. In these critical moments of uncertainty with health, physical and mental health, we should strengthen ourselves.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well. I said that the spread of the virus is not just a health issue, it is a social issue, and it is a challenge for all of us.



NIZWA A WINDOW TO HISTORY

A visit to the Nizwa Fort gave us insight not only into Oman's history but also how our ancestors lived and made things for daily life. **P20**

Endangered pink iguana hatchlings seen for first time on Galapagos island

Scientists have discovered hatchling and juvenile populations of the Galapagos pink land iguana, an endangered reptile native to a sole island on the Ecuadorean archipelago, for the first time since the species' discovery just decades ago.

Native only to the slopes of Wolf Volcano on the Galapagos' Isabela Island, the iguana is considered critically endangered and just several hundred are left, according to estimates.

"This discovery marks a significant step forward, which allows us to identify a path going forward to save the pink iguana," Director of the Galapagos National Park Danny Rueda said in a statement on Tuesday.

The iguanas, which can stretch up to 18.5 inches (47 cm) in length, were first discovered by national park rangers in 1986. However, scientists took decades to recognize the pink iguana as a separate species from others on the island.

Their population is threatened by introduced species on the island,

particularly rodents, the national park said.

"Knowing all the aspects that make their existence vulnerable will allow us to take timely actions, mainly against invasive species and thus avoid interrupting the natural cycles of these fragile ecosystems," Rueda said.

The Galapagos Islands, with its unique wildlife, was a key force behind British scientist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It is home to a number of species not found anywhere else including giant tortoises, flightless cormorants and several species of iguanas, including the pink iguana.

The Wolf Volcano is one of the most remote spots monitored by the national park, which installed a research and monitoring station at its base.

—Reuters

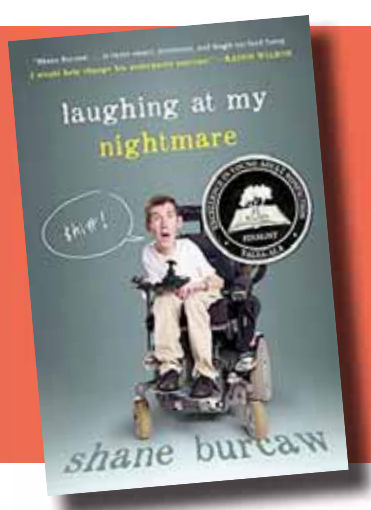


READ

LAUGHING AT MY NIGHTMARE

BY SHANE BURCAW

21-year-old Burcaw sheds light on what it has been like to grow up with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA).



LIFESTYLE

Francesena, who lost his vision a decade ago, is the current world champion in adaptive surfing and is competing in the Open LPA Surf City 2022 championship.

—Reuters



TALENTS

Inmates at a prison north of Barcelona have produced thousands of clay figurines of world leaders and celebrities.

—Reuters





The austere beauty of Egypt’s hiking trails

OVER THE PAST 15 years, new long-distance trails, some inspired by the US Appalachian Trail, have been developed in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and the occupied West Bank, ranging between 300 and 400 miles in length. Those routes joined lengthy trails already established in Israel and Turkey in the 1990s. Other long-distance trails are under development in Saudi Arabia, as part of futuristic megaprojects being created by the kingdom in its western deserts, and in the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

And now, some of the key players in the hiking movement in the region are envisioning clusters or transnational trails that, for the first time, would physically or symbolically link these rediscovered ancient nomadic pathways and newly forged routes, traversing modern national borders.

For the past three years, Hoffer has been working in southern Jordan with Bedouin tribes and Tony Howard, a hiking and climbing pioneer in the region, to create a sister trail to the Bedouin-governed routes in the Sinai and the Red Sea Mountains.

There has long been talk, though nothing conclusive has come of it yet, of a route that would link the Nabatean archaeological sites at Petra, in Jordan, and the Al Ula sites in Saudi Arabia, some 300 miles to the southwest.

And a new long-distance trail network is taking shape to unite the Jordan Trail, the Palestine Heritage Trail and the Lebanon Mountain Trail, in a partnership with European backers and a trail system in France.

All of this echoes the efforts of the Abraham Path Initiative, an American non-profit that has been promoting trail building and trail networks in the region since 2007, though its main focus now is funding and supporting work on the Kurdistan trail.

What many of the trails have in common is a determination by their creators to bring tourists

and jobs to distressed villages in the deserts and mountains. These creators are also intent on preserving long-overlooked natural wonders, and introducing them to visitors and their own citizens, and on using the trails to dispel negative perceptions of the historically turbulent region.

As a cluster, the embryonic network that includes the Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon routes could share best practices for the marking of



trails, the establishment of emergency services and the cross-promotion of hiking, according to the organisers. Trekking exchanges, however, run into the reality of geographic and political impediments. Physically linking the trails in Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon, for example, is impossible since Lebanon shares no border with the West Bank or Jordan. And the political obstacles seem equally insurmountable, since Israeli and Palestinian passport holders are barred from entering Lebanon.

To Howard, who spearheaded the popularisation of climbing and hiking in Wadi Rum, a valley in Jordan, in the mid-1980s, the orchestration of what he calls super trails in the region makes too much sense not to bring to fruition.

“In itself, it’s an exciting thing. It sounds good and it’s easy to promote, and people will walk it,” Howard said. But trails also benefit the areas they pass through by increasing tourism

ancestors, centuries ago, forged many of the pathways on foot and camelback. Unlike the self-guided trails in Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, the Sinai and Red Sea Mountain trails require Bedouin guides.

And in contrast to the planned Neom megaproject in northwest Saudi Arabia, whose website promises 750 miles of trails in the coming years, features renderings of luxury chalets and boasts of “immersive digital experiences,” Egypt’s trails try to replicate how the nomads’ forebears moved through the wilderness. Hikers drink from wells, sleep fireside under the stars (or in tents), and dine on flatbread baked in acacia coals and seasoned with mountain salt. The Bedouins are relying more on camels to haul the cooking and camping supplies and colourful woven rugs.

The Sinai Trail was founded by Hoffer and three Bedouin tribes, whose members serve as guides, cameleers and cooks. And when it was extended in 2018, five more tribes joined the group. The tribes saw the trail as a way to create sustainable tourism while preserving ancient pathways and traditions that were fading in this era of smartphones and pickup trucks.

The Bedouin guides on the trail say they find peace in the desert wilderness, feeling a strong connection to their tribes and lands. They know the way over sprawling passes and through mazelike gorges, which plants can be used to make soap and poultices, which animals leave behind what kinds of droppings and tracks.

They also maintain the legends tied to the most prominent places on the route, like the tale of the sisters who tied their long locks of hair together and jumped to their deaths from Jebel El Banat, a mountain peak along the route, to escape arranged marriages.

—NYT

BEDOUIN INFLUENCES AND ORIGINS

Among all the long-distance routes in the region, Egypt’s trails are unique in that they are owned and managed by Bedouins, whose nomadic

MUSIC

In troubled South Africa, a boys' choir gives cause for hope



A HUSH GRIPS the auditorium as the long-awaited concert by one of the world’s most renowned chorales gets underway.

Wearing neatly-ironed shirts and white frills over royal-blue waistcoats, the Drakensberg Boys School Choir launches into Vivaldi’s “Gloria” and a collective thrill runs through the audience.

The music and the dramatic backdrop of the Drakensberg mountains set the seal on the choir’s first in-person Christmas concert since the Covid pandemic.

The ensemble, whose members are aged between nine and 15 years, is one South Africa’s finest cultural exports — its most racially and culturally diverse chorale, and a beacon of hope in a troubled country.

The choir uses “music as vehicle for social mobility, for academic success (and) personality-building in a country that has been riddled by issues of race,” said Pitika Ntulia, a cultural historian.

“The school is almost magical, the location in the mountains... the fact that we can sing almost in the mountains everyday, it’s amazing,” said Nicholas Robinson, 14, standing tall on manicured lawns, sporting a black blazer.

A fellow student at the boarding school, built on a 100-acre (40-hectare) estate in the Champagne Valley near the border with Lesotho, Ethan Palagangwe, 12, hails from Mitchells Plain, a crime-riddled Cape Town suburb.

Palagangwe landed a scholarship out of 1,600 boys auditioned after his mother responded to an ad in a local newspaper.

Born to a law-enforcement officer and a singer, the short and round-faced boy smiles, reminiscing how he started singing at home, aged eight.

“We would sing out of nowhere, singing karaoke,” he says.

He is now one of the school’s top musical achievers.

Boarding and tuition at the school cost between \$8,600 and \$11,500 annually, depending on age.

Palagangwe’s fees are jointly raised between well-wishers in a scholarship scheme dubbed “back-a-buddy”.

Rainbow voices

The multilingual choir’s repertoire ranges from classics to contemporary pop and traditional tunes.

“This is the only choir in the world that can sing in any genre,” boasts conductor Vaughan van Zyl, mopping his brow between rehearsals at the height of the South African summer.

“Give these boys anything classical, pop, African traditional music from other countries — different languages... sacred music, secular music, they can do it all.”

Styled on Austria’s Vienna Boys choir, the Drakensberg chorale started 55 years ago at the height of the apartheid era with 21 boys, all white.

Today, it has a multi-racial roll call of 70 students, who perform at home or around the globe when they are not busy with lessons and exams.

One of the choir’s proudest moments was to stage a show for Nelson Mandela atop the Drakensberg mountain.

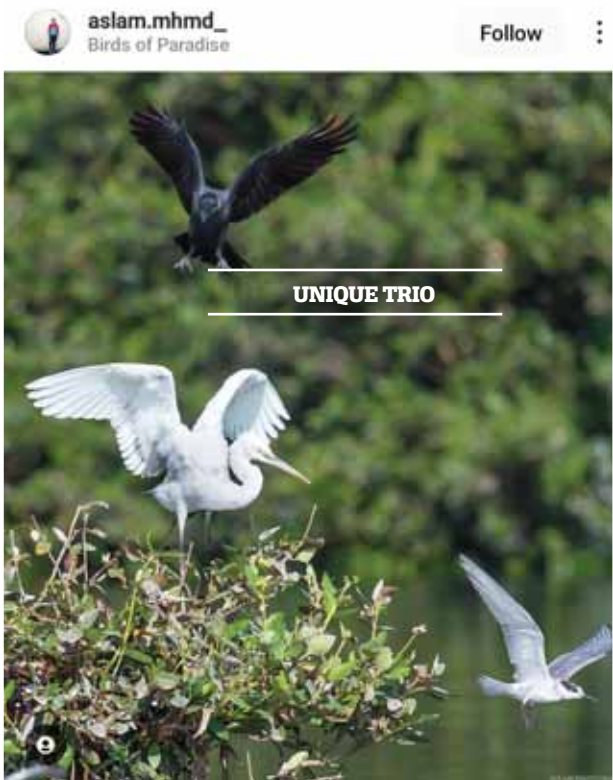
“In that choir you hear the rainbow voices,” said historian Ntulia, in reference to the “Rainbow Nation” term used by Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa.

Lulo Dzulane, 11, recently joined the school. He wants to pursue a career in music production and composing. — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

volunteers
make army
uniforms for
women



YULIYA MYKYTENKO SMILES as she adjusts her new trousers, confident she's finally found a Ukrainian army uniform that fits after 10 months of war with Russia.

The tens of thousands of women in Ukraine's armed forces have long had to make do with men's uniforms. That is now changing, thanks to volunteers who have started designing military clothing for women.

"I know that finding the right uniform is a problem for many women. Some have hips too wide, or a chest too narrow. You can't loosen up uniforms in the armed forces," Mykytenko, 27, said.

"So, if you get a size 44, it can be good on the hips but too big on the shoulders. Or a 46, or a 48."

Mykytenko joined the armed forces long before Russia's February 24 invasion. Both her father and husband have been killed since the start of the war.

Before receiving her new uniform, she faced many problems with army clothing designed for men which she said did not cater for women's wider hips and thinner waists.

"My waist is thinner. So I'd have to either wear my trousers on the hips, or get a bigger size. Then I'd have to tie them in with a belt, so they wouldn't hang or fall off," she said.

She now has a uniform produced by Stanyslav Bitus, a fashion designer who volunteered his services.

"We had long thought about designing female military uniforms but didn't have anywhere to do it," he said.

That changed when a friend suggested using a non-governmental organisation's premises.

Bitus' new line of work comes with special demands.

"The kneecap pocket part is very important when you fall on the ground. When you fall, it's more comfortable," he said.

"In male uniforms, the kneecap was much lower, and when you fell it rose up. This doesn't only not help but can bring on more trauma." — **Reuters**

LIFESTYLE

Ethiopia's celebrated
circus offers youth
discipline and hope



IN A FADED HALL with tattered carpets, young acrobats launch off their partners' feet high into the air with a spin, as others perform juggling feats, somersaults or twist into contortions.

Despite meagre resources, the Dire Dawa Circus in eastern Ethiopia teaches young people discipline and hard work, and has distinguished itself at prestigious international festivals.

Endale Haile, its artistic director, has 35 aspiring and established performers in his troupe. Its youngest member is just five years old, but most are in their 20s.

Among them is 18-year-old Nardos Awilitu, who spoke fondly of her many years in the circus, as she tossed half a dozen hoops back and forth with a friend.

"I started (at) the circus when I was seven years old," she said, as a child nearby rehearsed somersaulting onto the shoulders of a friend standing atop two strong men.

"First, it helps us to have a good attitude, and second, it allows us to work better at school. Generally, it helps in everything in our life.

"We love and care for each other, and there is

unity."

The circus is a lifeline for youngsters here. Once an economic hub and Ethiopia's second largest city, Dire Dawa has faded as the railroad that put it on the map fell into disrepair.

There is little to keep young people entertained and out of trouble.

"In Dire Dawa, the most popular sport is football. There are fenced football fields, but there are few recreational places. The circus is essential. It attracts many young people," said Endale, who co-founded the troupe in 1997.

"We have helped young people not to spend their time on addictive substances. As you have seen, most people around here chew khat (a narcotic shrub) and take drugs, but we taught them disciplines with gymnastics."

Rewarding

Joining is free, and the circus has no trouble recruiting.

"The number of children that want to train here is more than our capacity," said Endale.

"We go on tours overseas, and the youngsters improve their life with the money they get. When other families see this, they come to us and ask

the kids to join us."

Abduldefar Rameto, who at 24 has been attending the circus since he was six, is a hand-to-hand acrobat skilled in several circus disciplines and high-level gymnastics.

"When other kids played football, I was more interested in acrobatics," he said after dismounting from an aerial headstand position atop his partner, Ekariya.

He now earns a living from performing, but the road to success was long and hard.

"Discipline is the most important thing. You can be a high performer, but without discipline, it is nothing. The second thing is hard work. You have to practise for at least three years to master one performance," he said.

Dire Dawa Circus has won awards at renowned festivals, including in China and Russia.

In 2019, a hand-to-hand double act, Abdurahim and Abele, took home seven awards — including the most prestigious gong — at the "New Generation" competition of the Monte Carlo International Circus Festival.—**AFP**

SPECIES

Beloved
'Hollywood Cat'
mountain lion
euthanised in
Los Angeles



HOLLYWOOD CAT is no longer.

The Los Angeles area's most famous mountain lion, an aged wild male feline sighted around the city's Griffith Park, was euthanised on Saturday, wildlife officials said.

For years, it was known to prowl around the hillside "Hollywood" sign visible around much of Los Angeles, a fitting setting for a celebrity cat.

It earned the nickname Hollywood Cat, but the mountain lion — estimated to be around 11 years old — is officially called P-22.

State and federal wildlife officers decided earlier this month to capture it due to its erratic behaviour, perhaps associated with being struck by a vehicle.

Veterinarians found "significant trauma" to its head, right eye and internal organs, California's Department of Fish and Wildlife said in a statement.

The experts also found underlying health issues, including "irreversible kidney disease, chronic weight loss, extensive parasitic skin infection over his entire body and localised arthritis."

"The most difficult, but compassionate choice was to respectfully minimise his suffering and stress by humanely ending his journey," the statement said.

"Mountain lion P-22 has had an extraordinary life and captured the hearts of the people of Los Angeles and beyond."

Euthanising the cougar was a punch to the gut for game experts who had grown to love the animal.

"This really hurts," said Chuck Bonham, director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, when he announced P-22's death, according to *USA Today*.

"It's been an incredibly difficult several days."

Our favourite celebrity

Congressman Adam Schiff, who represents part of Los Angeles County, said he was "heartbroken" at P-22's passing.

"He was our favourite celebrity neighbour, occasional troublemaker, and beloved L A mascot," Schiff tweeted.

"But most of all he was a magnificent, wild creature, who reminded us that we are part of a natural world much bigger than ourselves."

California Governor Gavin Newsom praised P-22's "incredible journey" in a statement.

"P-22's survival on an island of wilderness in the heart of Los Angeles captivated people around the world," Newsom said.

Griffith Park, where P-22 lived for perhaps a decade, is hemmed in by freeways and urban sprawl. It is a nine-square-mile (23-square-kilometre) isolated patch of nature.

Experts marvelled at how the wild cat got across either of two major Los Angeles freeways — the 405 and 101 — to get to Griffith Park as early as 2012.

Officials said they were not looking for the driver who hit it.—**AFP**



art & life

Local Scene

f t i y u @omranobserver

THURSDAY | DECEMBER 22 | 2022

NIZWA

A WINDOW TO HISTORY

Mohammed Anwar Al Balushi

It took us about one hour and thirty-seven minutes to reach Nizwa from Al Maabala, where we left exactly at 5 am. It was a little difficult to drive from Al Rusail industrial area to Bidbid, so drivers had to be careful due to ongoing roadworks.

It was not my first time touring Nizwa, but it was for my wife. Our exploration of Nizwa in the past hadn't been done the way it was this time, so I kept in mind that we must reach the Nizwa market before noon and we reached around 11.34 am. Having parked the car, we walked to the market from there.

My eyes couldn't believe the crowd that was there, and tourists came from different parts of the world including like Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Of course, many locals were there as well. Upon entering the market, we found Souq Al Gharbia (The West Market) on the right and Souq Al Sharqiyah (The East Market) on the left.

"I have been here half past five since the market opened", said Mundhir, a young Omani seller who was selling Halwa. "You can have a taste, it was made today", he offered us politely. There was another young Omani who was selling honey to Mundher's left.

Omani Khanjar, Bedu jewellery, traditional wooden walking sticks, pottery, and clothes attracted tourists.

In front of the Nizwa Fort, we saw some women cooking Omani food, and tourists were purchasing and eating. Their faces revealed that they were enjoying it.



"Are you two individuals?", said the young Omani lady who was selling the tickets, cheerfully. "Yes, we are two", I replied. "You need to pay RO 4", she said.

A visit to the Nizwa Fort gave us insight not only into Oman's history but also how our ancestors lived, made things, and established rules of living. Inside

the fort, there were different rooms for different purposes.

"Painting is my passion, and I am studying economics at Sultan Qaboos University, in my final year", said Ibrahim al Rashidi, a young Omani artist who was coaching kids and promoting his work.

"When did you start painting?"

I asked. "I've been doing it since I was a kid", he said.

"It is not only about painting, but I get immersed in a completely different world while I am painting. I forget all my troubles and sorrows, and according to some research, painting has become a tool for treating psychological patients", he explained.