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REPUBLIC DAY
SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT
WITH TODAY'S
EDITION



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MOHAMMED EL MORABY CLINCH ODM HONOURS



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OMAN ALLOCATES 250 KM2 FOR SOLAR, WIND FARMS IN DUQM SEZ



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COSTA RICAN TRAIL OPENS A PATH TO CASH FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT OF INDIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India on his country's Republic Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Murmu. His Majesty also wished the people of India further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREET'S GOVERNOR GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to General David Hurley, Governor-General of Australia on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to Governor-General Hurley. His Majesty also wished the people of Australia further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN CONDEMNS THE HAGUE INCIDENT

The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its strong denunciation and condemnation of an extremist's tearing a copy of the Holy Quran in the city of The Hague, Netherlands, noting that such action provokes Muslims' feelings and incites violence and hatred. In a statement issued by the the Foreign Ministry here on Wednesday, Oman reiterated its stance calling for concerted international efforts to consolidate the values of tolerance, coexistence and respect among nations and peoples of different cultures. Oman's stance criminalises all acts that promote the ideology of extremism and hatred and desecrate religions and peoples' beliefs. — ONA

INSIDE



HEAVY SNOW CAUSES HAVOC IN JAPAN

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NANCY PELOSI, LIBERATED AND LOVING IT

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FAHD RECEIVES GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Minister, received on Wednesday Dr Naif Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. The meeting reviewed the march of the GCC and exchanged views on regional and international developments. **DETAILS ON P2**

PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

GCC states to consolidate food supply chains

MUSCAT: The GCC Supreme Council's Consultative Authority (GCA) on Wednesday held the first meeting of its 26th session at its headquarters in Muscat.

The meeting focused on three main topics: "Promoting and protecting GCC values", "Consolidating supply chains for food and medicine in GCC states" and "Enhancing tourism integration among GCC states in the backdrop of developments in the tourism sector".

At the opening of the meeting, Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy said that Oman will continue to utilise its capabilities in supporting the GCA, due to its essential position in the context of joint Gulf action.

Sayyid Badr wished the members of the GCA success in completing the projects entrusted

Oman will continue to utilise its capabilities in supporting the GCA, due to its essential position in the context of joint Gulf action

SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDY
Foreign Minister

to it this year by GCC leaders. He said that the GCA plays a major role which integrates with the activities undertaken by other GCC institutions, noting that the GCA is keen on elevating collective cooperation and unity to new heights. **SEE ALSO P3**

BUSES FOR TRANSPORTATION OF AWHC CHILDREN

Honourable Lady's support to handicapped children

MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has offered backing to the Association for the Welfare of the Handicapped Children (AWHC) in the form of buses to provide two-way transportation for AWHC children or those wishing to join the association or benefit from its services.

The Honourable Lady's backing seeks to empower the AWHC and enable it to pursue its humanitarian activities. It provides support for children with disability by offering them easy access to the AWHC's services and programmes. The gesture also aims to alleviate the suffering of parents and spare them the hardship of transporting the children to and from the AWHC centres.

Meanwhile, HH Assayida Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, AWHC Chairwoman, valued the Honourable Lady's keenness to have handicapped children get access to high standard services that they deserve.



She pointed out that the support offered by the Honourable Lady "stems from constant concern for segments of society. It is an evidence of the care accorded by Honourable Lady to handicapped children to qualify them to become active members in their community and capable of handling different situations in their own personal lives", she said. "This notable support will

add value to families of the beneficiaries and remove the burdens that prevent the parents from bringing their handicapped children to the AWHC," HH Assayida Hujaija explained. She said board members and affiliates of the Association express their best sentiments of thanks and appreciation to the Honourable Lady for the great material and moral support. — ONA



ALL SET FOR 'DESERT ADVENTURES FESTIVAL'

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will organise the Desert Adventures Festival at Sharqiya Sands in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah from January 29 to February 4. This festival will include various activities and will be held in cooperation with several public and private entities. The festival aims at revitalising winter tourism in the governorate in general, and in the Wilayat of Bidiya in particular. — ONA

Heavy rains in governorates, unstable weather to continue

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

In line with the forecast of Oman Meteorology for the rest of the week, several wilayats of the northern governorates, such as Mad'ha, Al Buraimi, Shinas, Liwa, Suhar and Ibri received heavy rains on Wednesday.

Temperatures are likely to drop in most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, especially in the hilly areas.

Low temperatures were recorded in various governorates,



including -4°C in Jabal Shams and 2.9 °C in Saiq. Muscat will have a maximum temperature of

22°C and a minimum of 16°C, while Suhar and Sur will have temperatures in a similar range.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), Oman will continue to be affected by air troughs or low pressure until Saturday, and the cloud cover will be spread over the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat, leading to chances of heavy rain, including thunderstorms and hail.

The impact of the air trough will be extended to North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.

According to CAA or Oman Meteorology, rainfall in the range of 10 to 60 mm will lead to flowing wadis, snowfall and frost formation on mountain peaks, and active downward winds with a speed of 15 and 40 knots may lead to rising dust in open areas.

According to an official at Oman Meteorology, "Initially rain clouds will be concentrated in Musandam, northern governorates and areas around Hajar Mountains, but will gradually extend to the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate."



GCC Secretary-General bids farewell

MUSCAT: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Minister, received on Wednesday Dr Naif Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The meeting reviewed the march of the GCC and exchanged views on regional and international developments.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed that the GCC is a main pillar for security, stability and comprehensive development in the region. The GCC countries, said HH Sayyid Fahd, always seek to maintain and promote ties of cooperation with different countries of the world.

HH Sayyid Fahd commended the sincere efforts made by Al Hajraf during his mission as GCC Secretary-General. He affirmed



that these efforts have contributed remarkably on the joint GCC action.

On his turn, Al Hajraf extended his thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for its constant

support for the GCC, wishing the Omani leadership and government permanent success.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, received in his office on Wednesday Dr Naif Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed topics related to the march of joint GCC action. They also touched on various matters that aim to bolster joint cooperation.

Sayyid Hamoud lauded the Secretary-General's role in enhancing GCC cooperation during his tour of duty and wished him success.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, also received Dr Naif Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General on the occasion of the end of his tour of duty as GCC Secretary-General.

Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for the efforts he exerted in boosting joint GCC action.

— ONA

Ministry launches framework for occupational competences



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour on Wednesday launched the National Framework for Occupational Competences (NFOC), which seeks to develop human resources in the government sector.

The NFOC is undertaken in conjunction with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Unit and other government departments concerned. It is designed to empower human resources and provide them with 'future skills' in a manner that fits with the approaches and priorities of Oman Vision 2040.

The programme's launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour.

Sayyid Salim pointed out that the National Framework for Occupational Competences complements efforts to consolidate governance in the Government Performance

Schema. It is a general framework comprising a set of data and behavioural skills needed to be mastered by the occupants of supervisory and non-supervisory jobs at units of the State's Administrative Apparatus (government units) rendering services to investors in Oman.

Sayyid Salim pointed out that the Framework's implementation constitutes a major component in improving work environment, and assisting employees to better perform their roles and realise excellence in providing government services to investors in Oman.

The NFOC emerges as one of the most advanced mechanisms of improving the functioning of government establishments by attracting prominent competencies, honing the skills of employees and evaluating their performance in accordance with standard criteria and in line with the goals set for each department.

— ONA

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

In an attempt to help deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) people empower for get better employability, the first Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Forum was held under the auspices of Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, at the Hormuz Grand Hotel on Wednesday.

Organised as a special initiative by Vertex Business Solutions and Al Massa Marketing and CSR Management, under a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Labour and with the support of the Zubair Corporation, Tanmia and Octal, the forum also aimed at promoting education, employment and empowerment of the DHH,

The panel discussions, managed by DHH students, were based on two topics, namely: 'Employment opportunities available for the DHH' and 'Education for the DHH - Between reality and hope' and provided them with the opportunity to connect with key entities, learn about different aspects of higher education, government programmes, training, business practices and corporates that are actively supporting the DHH.

"The Zubair Corporation's sponsorship of this event is a reflection of our commitment to support local communities and empower talented individuals in various artistic, cultural, sports and social fields, enhancing their skills in order to achieve their desired goals," Hilal bin Omar al Siyabi, Chief Corporate Services Officer at Al Zubair Corporation, said.

The forum presented a number of success stories related to DHH



individuals and the corporations that support them. An exhibition of DHH students' projects and initiatives was also held alongside.

"Focused on finding ways to improve the quality of life of all of the sultanate's citizens, our support to the initiative showcases our commitment to create greater economic opportunity for the DHH in Oman," a spokesperson from Tanmia stated.

A student who attended the forum said, "Such forums will help us provide us with education, training, job and entrepreneurship opportunities in our community; that will in turn spur meaningful progress for the further development of our economy in the time to come."

"We thank the government authorities and our esteemed sponsors and partners for their support to our Initiative. DHH persons can be provided with



several education, employment and training opportunities in the labour market, ensuring that their right to work is on an equal footing with others as part of Oman's Vision 2040," said Hassan Abdowani, Managing Director, Vertex Solutions, and Muna al Shukaili, CEO, Al Massa Group.

The outcome of the forum is expected to explore equal opportunities for education and employment for people with hearing disabilities, and to help them establish their own projects; and thereby continue efforts to create a more comprehensive work environment in the labour market.





■ GCC SUPREME COUNCIL’S CONSULTATIVE AUTHORITY MEETS



The GCC Supreme Council’s Consultative Authority (GCA) on Wednesday held the first meeting of its 26th session at its headquarters in Muscat. The meeting focused on three main topics: “Promoting and protecting GCC values”, “Consolidating supply chains for food and medicine in GCC states” and “Enhancing tourism integration among GCC states in the backdrop of developments in the tourism sector”. Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy said at the opening of the meeting that Oman will continue to utilise its capabilities in supporting the GCA, due to its essential position in the context of joint Gulf action. — ONA

Saudi delegation
participates in
‘Oman’s Converting
Industries Lab’



MUSCAT: A delegation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated on Wednesday in the activities of the “Converting Industries and Future Industries Laboratory”, which kicked off on January 2, to learn about the initiatives of Oman in the converting industries sector.

The delegation was led by Eng Al Badr Adel Fouda, Deputy Minister for Industrial Development and General Supervisor of Industrial Enablement, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The visit provided an opportunity to outline the Saudi experience in implementing the “Future Factories Initiative”, which focuses on the automation of factories to keep pace with modern technical trends and applications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

The presentation was attended by ministers, under-secretaries and members of the supervisory committee of the Omani Lab.

The event also included a review of programmes related to the integration of supply chains,

as well aspects of cooperation in implementing initiatives and programmes within the GCC unified industrial strategy.

The reviewed looked into joint investment in the industrial sector and motivating the private sector to this sector.

The Saudi delegation also held a meeting with Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry. The meeting discussed opportunities for supply chain integration and investment in industries between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

The visit of the Saudi delegation to Oman is aimed at exchanging expertise in developing the industrial sector, notably in conjunction with the activities of the Converting Industries and Future Industries Laboratory.

The Lab is organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and Industrial Innovation Academy. — ONA



UNSTABLE WEATHER
CONDITIONS TO CONTINUE



Several wilyats of the northern governorates, such as Mahdah, Al Buraimi, Shinas, Liwa, Sohar, and Ibri, received heavy rains on Wednesday. No untoward incidents have been reported from anywhere in the city. Temperatures are likely to drop in most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, especially in the hilly areas. Low temperatures were recorded in various governorates of the Sultanate, including -4°C in Jabel Shams, and 2.9 °C in Saiq.



A FESTIVAL OF FUN AND TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUTH



RECALL CAMPAIGN
For Chevrolet Captiva Model Vehicles

Date of Recall : 26.01.2023
Campaign Type : Safety
Recall Segment : Electrical System
Product Description : Chevrolet Captiva 2021-2023

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2021-2023	Chevrolet	Captiva	LZWADAGA0N8006564 to LZWADAGXPB040563	196

Description:
In a small number of vehicles exposed to high ambient temperatures, smoke or fire has occurred in the engine compartment while or after driving, which may affect the safe operation of the vehicle or the safety of the vehicle occupants.

Procedure:
Dealers will replace the low-speed cooling fan fuse 40A with 30A.

For More Information:
Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC.

Contact Details:
Toll free number 80050002 on all working days, 08:00am to 01:00pm and 2:00pm to 05:30pm

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With adrenaline-rushing rides and games at entertainment avenues, the Muscat Nights has many attractions for youths, just as families call it a 'complete family festival.'

Stand-up comedy shows, musical evenings, anime singers, electronic games and a lot more are in store for the youth at the event grounds. At the same time, the ROP's mobile campaign against drugs is telling the youths to be away from the menace.

Young girls can look forward to experiencing the Japanese kimono costume at the Oman Automobile Association, while tournaments and cash prizes for participating in the competitions and watching the heat of the challenge in the stands of the "Gaming" area is a sure bet.

Little ones are in for a treat at the exciting segment of making and drawing cartoons, presented by the international trainer, Bob Fahman, who has already captured the hearts of children visiting the pavilions.

Playing mobile games is no longer time-consuming at the Muscat Nights grounds. Still, a unique experience for the kids to play for their favourite teams and have fun at the regional level.



We are happy to note that the Muscat Nights has already captured the minds of both families and youth alike, and the rides and games are proving to be a wonderful bet for those who want to make the most for their children

"We are happy to note that the Muscat Nights has already captured the minds of both families and youth alike, and the rides and games are proving to be a wonderful bet for those who want to make the most for their children," Ibrahim al Hasani, one of the members of the organisers, said.

Some of the areas one shouldn't miss are the Al Taybeen, which keeps all the wonders for the youth, the upcoming events that will be hosted by the 'Drift Arena' theatre, with upcoming participation by Rasha Rizk and Japanese artist Chihori, as well as the voice of pop singer 'Nina Wells and Christy' and many others.

EXCHANGE GAME

In addition to what is presented in the sports arena at the Oman Automobile

Association, visitors to Muscat Nights can enjoy an amateur segment called 'paddle game', which is held from 4 pm to 10.30 pm daily.

The paddle game, which is considered a racket sport, differs from the well-known ground tennis sport in the United States and Canada, as it is usually played in pairs on an enclosed court that is about 25 per cent smaller than the size of a tennis court. The height of the ball during the play is at or below waist level.

CREATIVE VILLAGE

Muscat Nights invites people to the Creators Village, located in the outdoor area of the Oman Automobile Association. It is one of the activities that can be visited for free. It is established in the external space of the association, through which it is possible to move between the booths kept for the creative youth where they can unwind their creativity in colour drawing and pencil drawing.

These activities indicate that Muscat Family Nights has set aside a destination for young people and youth that enables them to choose events that suit their tastes and destinations and tickets can be pre-booked on the Muscat Nights site.

Muscat Nights will continue until the fourth of next February, keeping a bigger space for children and youth, an experience that they will cherish for life.



Oman to host Fourth International Arab Film Festival, Cinemana from Feb 4

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman will host the Fourth International Arab Film Festival, Cinemana, for the second time in a row at two locations, Muscat and Musandam, from February 3 to 8, according to the organisers of the Fest.

As many as 121 films — 43 short and long films from Oman, Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Algeria, UAE, Sudan, Iraq, Palestine, Bahrain, Iran, Serbia, Portugal, India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan and Tunisia will be screened at the two venues, Lunar Cinema in Al Muzn Mall in the Wilayat of Seeb and Musandam sports club in Khasab.

The opening ceremony will be held under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at 11 am on Saturday, February 4, at the stage of the Scout Band in Ghala Heights, in the presence of celebrities, film-makers, influencers on social media and others.

10 FILMS

In the feature film section, 10 films: from Jordan "Al Kamin" directed by Ashraf al Abadi, from Syria "Al Hakim" directed by Basil al Khatib, from Kuwait "Oscar" directed by Mohammed al Hamli,



from India "Ayisha" directed by Aamir Pallikkal, from Algeria "Halim al Ra'ad" directed by Bin Abdullah Mohammed, from Serbia, Jordan and Romania the movie "A Cross in the Desert" directed by Hadzi-Aleksandar Djurovic, from Iraq "The Last Messengers" directed by Saad al Assami, from Egypt "Wesh al Qafs" director by Dina Abdel Salam, from Saudi Arabia "Hayat a Woman" by Samir Aref, and from the UAE the movie "218 Behind the Wall of Silence" by Nahla al Fahd.

33 SHORT FILMS

Also participating in the short film competition are 33 films, including fiction, animation and documentaries, from the Sultanate of Oman the movie "Al Droof" by

Dr Hamid al Amri and the movie "Pitacarotene" by Mohammed al Darushi, from Egypt the movie "Rainy Spring" by Ahmed Khalil Ali and the movie "Phase" by the director Engy Hossam, "Sarah" by Abdullah Adel, "The Voice of God" by Shadi al Masoudi, "What We Cannot See" by Adham Yahya, "Maktoub" by Mohammed Rabie, "Two Rooms and a Hall" by Mina Maher Milad, "The Last Message" by Walid Sari, "To Live in Another Place" by Safaa al Sayed, and the movie "The Road to Ramallah" by director Mohammed Issa, from Palestine "My Crutch" by Ahmed Tariq Hamad, "Crowned with Laurel Leaves" by Hayat Amjad, and "Six Days Are Not Enough" by the two directors, Mahmoud Abu Shamsia and Thaeer Metwally, from Iraq the movie "Article 57"



by Ali Hassan Abbas, "Sherine" by Zaid Shukr, "The Last Promises" by Ali Abdel Sattar, "Sukrah" by Mohammed Abdel Amir, "Peace" by Faten Karim, "Traffic Light" by Mohammed Khudair, and "Naima" by Sami Seif, from Morocco "The Secret of the Seal" and "Inverse" by Abdelrahim Bouklas, "Clowny's Mama" by Manal Goa and "Tarifs/ Takhareef" by Aziz Bojh. From Syria and France the movie "The Odour of Orange" by the Malas brothers, and from Syria the movie "Abha" by Rabab Merhajo, "Sabbat" by Hossam Hamo, and the movie "Very Long" by Robin Issa, and from Tunisia the movie "Krenti" by Aziz al Shennawy, from Sudan "Cinnamon Dalia" by Khairy Samir, and from the UAE the movie "Curtain" directed by Majed al Jasmi and Khalifa al Bahri.

EFFECTIVE MEDIUM

"Film Festival is an effective medium to promote cinema as well as tourism and culture and we aim at identifying the cultural, civilisational and developmental features in the two governorates, as they are characterised by historical and geographical components," said Dr Khaled al Zadjali, Chairman of the Organising Committee and Vice-President of the General Union of Arab Artistes, Dr Talib bin Mohammed al Balushi, Vice-President of the Festival, and Saleh bin Mahfouz al Qasimi, Chairman of the Media Committee.

They said that since the launch of the first session in 2020, the festival has proven its importance in embracing the passion and creativity of Omani and Arab youth.

"The organising committee of the festival has made a determined and sustainable effort to continue and develop the festival with the aim of conveying the voices of young people and their artistic ideas to all parts of the world," adds Dr Talib.

OPENING CEREMONY

The opening ceremony programme will include a visual presentation of the films participating in both competitions and a speech by the festival's president and the General Union of Arab Artists, then cinematic dramas and musical performances, in addition to honouring some directors.

Al Zadjali explained that the festival's vision is based on exploiting the enormous energies of youth and creating a cinematic platform around which all film-makers and artistes gather to get to know their peers in the countries of the great Arab world, and keep pace with the trends of advancing creativity and culture among all segments of society.

"In support of the principles of love and tolerance, we, as founders and organisers of this festival, seek to disseminate works through artistic, cultural, literary and cinematic platforms around the world," he added.

ASIAN ARABIC DEBATING CHAMPIONSHIP 320 participants from 18 countries to take part in the event

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will host the 2nd edition of the Asian Arabic Debating Championship from January 29 to February 2, 2023.

As many as 320 participants from 18 countries will be taking part in the contest.

This was announced at a press conference held by the organisers, namely the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Debate Centre and Qatar Debate Centre.

The main committee of the championship is chaired by HH Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said.

All necessary preparations for the event are being finalised, said Salim bin Mutair al Shamakhi, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Debate Centre, member of the main committee of the championship.

The organisers are compiling a guidebook comprising various related details. Moreover, the



championship will be hosted at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Prior to the championship, a training programme will be organised for 20 Omani arbitrators. Another training programme will target Omani teams participating in the championship, while a third training programme will be organised for all other participants.

Abdulrahman Ibrahim al Subay'ee, Director of Programmes and Projects at Qatar Debate Centre, said that compared to the first edition in which 26 teams took part, this edition sees

the participation of 42 teams representing 42 universities.

Al Subay'ee added that the teams come from Australia, Azerbaijan, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Yemen and Oman.

Al Subay'ee pointed out that Oman is participating with four teams from Sultan Qaboos University, Al Sharqiyah University, Oman College of Health Sciences and Al Buraimi University College.

— ONA

SAUDI MILITARY DELEGATION VISITS MTC, MSC



MUSCAT: The delegation of the Saudi Command and Staff College, headed by Maj Gen Moahmmed Jadu' al Ruwaili, Commander of the College and Head of the National Defence University of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), on Wednesday visited the Military Technological College (MTC) and the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). — ONA



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

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH NOVEMBER 2022

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my pleasure to present the Annual Report on the business and operations of Sahara Hospitality Company S.A.O.G. (hereinafter referred to as "SHC") for the financial year ended November 30, 2022.

FINANCIAL RESULTS

The financial results achieved during the financial year ended November 30, 2022, are as follows:

Key Financial Indicators	Year ended November 30, 2022 R.O. 000's	Year ended November 30, 2021 R.O. 000's
Turnover	12,620	11,240
Gross Profit	3,383	2,909

The Net Profit after tax for the year was RO 2,563,932 as against RO 2,124,062 in the year 2021.

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

- The occupancy levels at Fahud, Nimr and Rima were 92%, 82% and 99% respectively.
- The net asset value per share has improved from RO 3.408 in 2021 to RO 3.427 in 2022 financial year.
- The basic earnings per share in 2022 is RO 0.324 and in 2021 it was RO 0.268.

The Board of Directors is pleased to recommend distribution of cash dividend of 25% (250 Baizas per equity share) on the paid up share capital subject to shareholders approval at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

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

Once again, the Board of Directors and Management Team would reaffirm their commitment and enthusiasm with proper planning in carrying out the business with an objective to yield attractive returns to the shareholders.

On behalf of the Shareholders and Board of Directors, it gives us great honor to express our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimour Al Said for his continued support to the private sector and I pray to the Almighty Allah to shower His everlasting blessings on His Majesty. Furthermore, we would extend our gratitude to His Majesty's government for their co-operation and assistance with special mention for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Muscat Securities Market and Capital Market Authority.

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

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

TALAL BIN QAIS AL ZAWAWI
CHAIRMAN

Statement of financial position (audited) as at 30th November 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	14,628,001	15,636,509
Right-of-use assets	61,866	82,487
Investment in term deposits	-	5,000,000
	14,689,867	20,718,996

Current assets		
Inventories	24,644	29,778
Amount due from related parties	21,334	5,568
Trade receivables	5,591,225	4,984,209
Other current assets	350,756	193,812
Investment in term deposits	5,000,000	-
Cash and bank balances	3,805,584	2,023,456
	14,793,543	7,236,823
	29,483,410	27,955,819

Total assets		
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Equity		
Share capital	7,923,300	7,546,000
Legal reserve	2,641,100	2,458,239
Retained earnings	16,586,544	15,714,673
Total Equity	27,150,944	25,718,912

LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	45,529	66,604
Deferred taxation	149,443	134,514
Employees' end of service benefits	16,258	13,758
	211,230	214,876

Current liabilities		
Current portion of lease liabilities	21,075	20,024
Amounts due to related parties	1,171,096	1,132,762
Trade and other payables	491,047	495,569
Income tax payable	438,018	373,676
	2,121,236	2,022,031

Total liabilities	2,332,466	2,236,907
Total Equity and liabilities	29,483,410	27,955,819
Net assets per share	3.427	3.408

Statement of comprehensive income (audited) for the year ended 30th November 2022

	2022 RO	2021 RO
Income from operations	12,620,245	11,240,348
Cost of operations	(9,237,141)	(8,330,866)
Gross profit	3,383,104	2,909,482
Interest on term deposits	217,500	191,219
Administrative expenses	(499,750)	(410,675)
Allowances for expected credit losses(net)	(76,101)	(159,728)
Profit from operations	3,024,753	2,530,298
Finance charges	(7,874)	(31,074)
Profit for the year before income tax	3,016,879	2,499,224
Income tax	(452,947)	(375,162)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	2,563,932	2,124,062
Earnings per share	0.324	0.268

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



Heavy snow causes havoc in Japan as cold snap sweeps through Asia

TOKYO: Heavy snow blanketed wide swathes of Japan on Wednesday, snarling traffic, forcing hundreds of flight cancellations, disrupting train travel and leaving at least one person dead.

An unusually cold weather front and extreme low pressure systems set snow falling and strong winds blowing across Japan from Tuesday after causing havoc in other Asia countries earlier this week.

At least 124 people died in freezing temperatures in Afghanistan earlier this week, according to media reports, while the temperature in Mohe, China's northernmost city, dropped to a record -53 degrees Celsius on Sunday.

In South Korea, the country's resort island Jeju cancelled nearly 500 flights in and out of its airport on Tuesday amid harsh winter weather. Japan reported that snow was particularly heavy on the side of the country facing South Korea, with the city of Maniwa hit with a record 93 cm in just 24 hours.

One person died as a result of the storm and two other deaths were being investigated as related to the storm as of Wednesday morning, chief cabinet secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told a news conference. No further details



Trucks are seen stuck due to heavy snow on the Shin-Meishin Expressway in Yokkaichi, Mie Prefecture, on Wednesday. — AFP

were immediately available.

Domestic airlines including ANA and Japan Airlines cancelled 450 flights, while 490 highway areas were blocked and 57 railway services including a high-speed rail service were suspended nationwide, the transport ministry said.

Toyota Motor Corp said it was suspending the second shift at all 14 factories in Japan on

Wednesday due to disruption from the heavy snowfall around the country.

Some 3,000 people were stranded at two train stations in the western city of Kyoto after snow and high winds forced service to be suspended on Tuesday. Some passengers were forced to sleep on the floor at Kyoto's main station. Others were stuck on at least 15 trains between

stations, in some cases from late on Tuesday to the early hours of Wednesday.

Strong winds connected to the storm may have caused the sinking of a Hong Kong-registered cargo ship between western Japan and South Korea's Jeju island early on Wednesday. Thirteen of the 22 crew members had been rescued by noon on Wednesday and the search was continuing. — Reuters

US, South Africa form task force on wildlife trafficking

HAMMANSKRAAL: The US Treasury Department and South Africa's National Treasury on Wednesday agreed to form a task force to combat illicit finance linked to the illegal wildlife trade, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said.

Speaking at the Dinokeng Game Reserve outside Pretoria, Yellen told South African officials that the new task force aims to boost information sharing between the two country's financial intelligence units and to strengthen controls to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

The move comes amid South African media reports that the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which sets standards on combating money laundering and wildlife trafficking, could add South Africa to its grey list when it meets in February 2023.

Grey-listed countries are subject to greater monitoring by the FATF on concern they are at higher risk for money laundering and terrorist financing.

"Through closer collaboration to target illicit proceeds linked to wildlife trafficking, as well as overlapping criminal activity like corruption, fraud, and drug trafficking, we are taking a step in the right direction today," Yellen said after touring the game preserve, which has suffered



US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen

from poaching of wild animals, including rhinoceros, in the past.

"To help save wildlife populations from further poaching and disrupt the associated illicit trade, we must 'follow the money' in the same way we do with other serious crimes," Yellen said.

Yellen said the U.S. Treasury already worked to provide information on wildlife trafficking to law enforcement partners, and had also worked alongside South Africa with FATF to identify indicators associated with money laundering and wildlife trafficking.

The work includes identifying and seizing the proceeds generated from the illegal wildlife trade and impeding the money laundering and cross-border transactions of transnational criminal organisations often involved in corruption, she said.

— Reuters

France to withdraw troops from Burkina Faso

PARIS: France will respect the terms of Burkina Faso's request to withdraw its forces from the West African country within a month, France's foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

On Monday, Burkina Faso said it had decided to end a military accord that allowed French troops to fight insurgents on its territory because the government wants the country to defend itself.

"On Tuesday, January 24, we formally received the denunciation, by the Burkina Faso government, of the 2018 agreement relating to the status of the French forces present in this country," the ministry said.

"In accordance with the terms of the agreement, the denunciation takes effect one month after receipt of the written notification." — AFP

Gaza fisherman gets new engine after a long wait

GAZA: Marooned for a decade by engine failure, Palestinian fisherman Falah Abu Reyala will finally be able to return to sea with a new outboard motor for his boat after Israel eased curbs on the supply of parts to Gaza.

After the Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, Israel and Egypt clamped down on its borders, citing security concerns. The measures deepened poverty in the cramped enclave, over two-thirds of whose residents depend on aid. But the curbs have been under review for months given arguments that improving the Gaza economy helps stave off conflict.

In November, Israel allowed in enough fibreglass for the repair of 10 fishing boats and, last week, permitted the import of 12 outboard engines, said the United Nations.

All the goods are paid for by the fisherman. Israel had previously barred their entry based on concern they could prove "dual

use." "I received an engine I have waited 10 years to get," said Abu Reyala, a father of seven, gazing at the newly rigged Benzine-powered propeller. "Now I will be able to resume my work"

Repairs are taking place at an UN-supervised workshop on the beach, near the so-called "Boat Graveyard" where dozens of rusty vessels have been piled up, abandoned after breakdowns.

"We are very happy about the entry of these materials and we hope it continues so that all boats can be repaired," said Manal al Najar, project coordinator on behalf of the United Nations.

"It will help fishermen pursue their work and help hundreds of families who work in the fishing sector to secure income."

Some 700 fishing boats still required repairs, she said.

COGAT, an Israeli coordination unit, confirmed it had allowed the first entry in 15 years of dual-use materials such as epoxy glue, polyester, fibreglass



Palestinians transport a fishing boat on a horse cart after being repaired at the seaport in Gaza City on Wednesday. — Reuters

and boat engines.

"This process was carried out as part of an effort COGAT is making to bolster the fishing industry in the Gaza Strip," it said in a written response to Reuters.

The current allotment will enable the repair of 35 fishing boats - with more possible "if the newly crafted mechanism meets the agreed security and economic parameters", COGAT said.

Even if seaworthy, Gaza's fishing boats are limited to waters delineated by Israel and Egypt, reducing the size of the catch and in some cases discouraging them from even going out. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

Lebanese protest as pound hits new low

Lebanese protesters on Wednesday blocked roads and burnt tires near the central bank in Beirut as the weakened local currency plummeted to a new low against the dollar.

Since 2019, Lebanon has been in the throes of an economic crisis dubbed by the World Bank as one of the worst in recent global history, pushing much of the population into poverty. Alaa Kharchib of the Depositors' Outcry Association that had organised the demonstration



warned of an impending "social explosion". Lebanese banks have imposed draconian restrictions on withdrawals since the country's economy collapsed three years ago.

HONG KONG

China says peak infections exceeded 7m daily

China's daily new Covid-19 infections hit a peak of more than 7 million per day around December 22, while deaths reached a daily peak of more than 4,000 on January 4, the country's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said on Wednesday.

The figures, published on the centre's website, come after a prominent government scientist said over the weekend that 80 per cent of China's 1.4 billion population have already been infected, making the possibility



of a big Covid-19 rebound remote. "Around December 22, 2022, the number of infected people and the number of fever outpatient consultations reached a peak," it said.

SEOUL

6 dead as freighter sinks off South Korea

At least five crew members have survived after a cargo ship sank in the sea between South Korea and Japan, a spokesperson for the South Korean coastguard said on Wednesday.

Of the 14 crew members accounted for, six have been confirmed dead, he said, while the condition of the other three was not initially known by the evening. Eight of the presumed total of 22 crew members are still missing. The ship sent a distress call early on Wednesday



morning about 150 km south-east off the South Korean island of Jeju, Yonhap news agency reported. When the coastguard reached the location, the vessel had already sunk.



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In brief

■ RAMALLAH



ISRAELI ARMY KILLS PALESTINIAN IN WEST BANK

The Israeli army said it had shot a Palestinian who tried to stab Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday.

The official Palestinian news agency WAFA said a 20-year-old man from Jenin refugee camp was killed in the incident between the town of Qalqilya and the Jewish settlement of Kedumim. Violence in the West Bank has surged over the past year, following stepped-up raids by Israel in response to a spate of Palestinian street attacks in its cities.

At least 19 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since January 1.

■ BRASILIA



BOLSONARO TO HAVE SURGERY AFTER RETURN

Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro will have gut surgery once he is back from the United States, his Brazilian doctor said on Wednesday.

Dr Antonio Macedo said he expects the operation to happen in February, though Bolsonaro has yet to announce when he will return from Florida, where he has been staying since late 2022. Bolsonaro has undergone six surgeries since a stabbing he suffered during the 2018 election campaign, four of them directly linked to the attack.

He has also been hospitalised multiple times with intestinal discomfort or gut blockages, including one hospitalisation in Florida earlier this year.

■ DAR ES SALAAM



TANZANIAN OPPOSITION LEADER RETURNS HOME

Tanzanian opposition leader and former presidential candidate Tundu Lissu returned home after more than two years in exile in Europe to a cheering crowd on Wednesday, after the government lifted a ban on political rallies.

A former lawmaker and a fierce critic of the government, Lissu initially left the country to seek treatment abroad after he was shot 16 times, mostly in his lower abdomen, in an attack by unknown gunmen in the administrative capital Dodoma in 2017.

He had been arrested eight times in the year leading up to the attack.

RUSSIA CALLS IT AN 'EXTREMELY DANGEROUS DECISION'

Germany agrees to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine, allies to follow

BERLIN: Germany said on Wednesday it would supply its Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, overcoming misgivings about sending heavy weaponry that Kyiv sees as crucial to defeat Russia's war but Moscow casts as a dangerous provocation.

Pressure has been building for weeks on German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government to send the tanks and allow Nato allies to do the same before expected spring offensives by both sides.

Scholz's government had stalled, wary of moves that could prompt Russia to escalate the war or draw Nato into becoming a party to the conflict.

Germany's decision paves the way for other countries such as Poland, Spain, Finland, the Netherlands and Norway to supply some of their Leopard tanks to Ukraine, going some way towards delivering the hundreds of tanks that Ukraine says it needs.

"Germany will always be at the forefront when it comes to supporting Ukraine," Scholz told German parliament to applause. "...because there really is a war in Europe - not far from here in Berlin it is taking place against a big country like Ukraine."



This file photo shows German soldiers on Leopard tanks arriving for a friendship shooting of several nations during the exercise at the military training area in Grafenwoehr, near Eschenbach, southern Germany. — AFP

Germany must do everything possible "but at the same time we must prevent the war from escalating into a war between Russia and Nato," he said.

Hoping to allay concerns about sending the weapons, Scholz asked Germans to trust his government to ensure there was no increased

risk to their country and to coordinate steps with allies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy thanked Scholz for Germany's "important and timely decisions", saying they were a "green light for partners to supply similar weapons". Germany aims to quickly establish two battalions

with Leopard 2 tanks for Ukraine and initially provide 14 Leopard 2 tanks from its own inventory.

A battalion normally comprises three or four companies with around 14 tanks each. Poland has also pledged 14 tanks and Britain has promised 14 of its own Challengers. — Reuters

■ INDIA, EGYPT SEEK TO DEEPEN MILITARY CO-OPERATION



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi after their joint media briefing at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Wednesday. India and Egypt will seek to deepen military cooperation, including between their defence industries, India's foreign secretary said on Wednesday. — AFP

EU grapples with reform as migrant entries surge

STOCKHOLM: Eight years after facing a refugee crisis in 2015, the European Union is still struggling with how to reform its asylum system — just as migrant entries are once again rising.

Reaching consensus among the bloc's 27 nations has become more complicated with the growing influence of the far-right in the politics of several member states.

The issue, kicked along the road for years, will be on the agenda of a Thursday meeting of EU interior ministers, with a focus on how to speed up the process of returning undocumented migrants to their country of origin in cases where their asylum bid fails.

Sweden, the current holder of the EU presidency, will host



Migrants hold signs reading "We're tired to sleep outside" as they block the Rivoli street to ask for housing allocations, in Paris, on Tuesday. — AFP

the meeting. The Scandinavian country, among the more generous in terms of giving asylum before 2015-2016, has since October had a coalition government reliant on a nationalist far-right party, the Sweden Democrats (SD).

That alliance "is really stepping up the restrictive approach" introduced under the previous Swedish government, an expert at Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Bernd Parusel, said. The aim, he said, is to reduce all immigration, not only asylum, and Stockholm would not back "any deal or any compromise that would increase the number of people arriving in Sweden to apply for asylum". A spokesman for the SD, lawmaker Ludvig

Aspling, confirmed that "we don't want any mandatory relocation of migrants," as has been mooted under EU plans to reform the system. The area the Swedish EU presidency is expected to focus on is increasing the number of irregular migrants sent back to their countries of origin.

Currently, only around 20 per cent of those denied asylum in the EU are sent home.

Some aspects of the proposed EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, set out by the European Commission in 2020, have made progress, notably on expanded use of EURODAC, a bloc-wide database of fingerprints taken from irregular migrants and asylum-seekers. — AFP



New Zealand's Prime Minister Chris Hipkins speaks to the media during his first official post cabinet press conference at Parliament in Wellington on Wednesday. — AFP

Ardern replaced by Chris Hipkins as New Zealand PM

WELLINGTON: Hundreds gathered to applaud Jacinda Ardern as she left New Zealand's parliament to resign as prime minister on Wednesday, before Chris Hipkins was swiftly sworn in as her replacement.

Ardern said last week she no longer had "enough in the tank" after steering the country through natural disasters, its worst-ever terror attack and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hipkins was sworn in by Governor-General Cindy Kiro during a ceremony in the capital Wellington, saying he was "energised and excited by the challenges ahead".

"This is the biggest privilege and responsibility of my life," he said. The 44-year-old is now tasked with reversing the government's sagging popularity, which has been hampered by a deteriorating economy and a resurgent conservative opposition.

Ardern made her last public appearance as prime minister earlier on Wednesday, walking out of the distinctive Beehive parliament building as hundreds of staff and onlookers broke into a spontaneous round of applause.

Prince William was among the first to congratulate Ardern.

"Thank you Jacinda Ardern for your friendship, leadership and support over the years, not least at the time of my grandmother's death," he wrote on Twitter.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak thanked Ardern "for her kindness and strong leadership".

He also said he looked forward to working with Hipkins, adding a joke about the new leader's self-professed love for sausage rolls. — AFP

In YouTube’s company



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The writer is a certified skills trainer and author of *The World According to Bahja*

Mom always said: “Not only that you look like your dad, but you also inherited all his unfortunate traits.” With that she meant two things: my disorganisation and insomnia. I’d sleep for a few hours and then stay wide awake till early morning. While awake I’d either read or watch YouTube.

Lately, YouTube got bored and tired of my choices (history, general knowledge quizzes and depressing personality psychoanalysis) that suggested more fun stuff to watch.

It started with Joey B videos of TikTok and idiocracy that were hilarious.

To me - a woman with limited access to social media - these videos were enlightening and horrifying; observing the limits many are willing to cross for recognition and being momentarily famous.

Not only that, but also how technology had created a whole generation of self-obsessed youngsters that would spend their whole day shooting meaningless videos of themselves dancing,

eating, or even staring at nothing while gaining millions of followers and becoming influencers in the course.

It gets worse when these influencers speak and display their immense ignorance publicly; with such courage and confidence that we - the older, self-conscious generations - are incapable of.

Luckily, there are many like Joey B who criticise the current wave of shallowness and narcissism, the inevitable side-effects of social media and being on smartphones all day long. After watching almost all of Joey B’s videos, YouTube introduced me to the topic that was the highlight of 2022: gender identity.

The year started with gender pronouns that seem outrageous in our part of the world.

This was followed by a general confusion of the definition of a woman - that sadly included biologists around the world - calling us as birthing and menstruating persons (now we’re

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT ALSO HOW TECHNOLOGY HAD CREATED A WHOLE GENERATION OF SELF-OBSSESSED YOUNGSTERS THAT WOULD SPEND THEIR WHOLE DAY SHOOTING MEANINGLESS VIDEOS OF THEMSELVES DANCING, EATING, OR EVEN STARING AT NOTHING WHILE GAINING MILLIONS OF FOLLOWERS AND BECOMING INFLUENCERS IN THE COURSE

called cis women!).

Everybody was trying to be ‘politically correct’ about the issue in fear of being called a bigot or being cancelled on social media. There was a movie released on YouTube by Matt Walsh called: What’s a Woman? that debated many issues including trans

women and puberty blockers that are given to children who feel confused about their gender identity.

As if this wasn’t enough, trans women’s participation in biological women sport’s competition and winning effortlessly due to their biological advantage was another issue debated long and hard on different YouTube channels.

YouTube then started focusing on American schools’ board meetings where parents were fighting against teachers spreading gender identity confusion among children and school libraries providing books with unsuitable sexual content.

Not to mention in some states where female students are forced to share toilets with trans students which led to few assault incidents. YouTube became a battlefield of videos between American conservatives and liberals, with each having on their side the best and most convincing spokespeople. Jordan Peterson,

Matt Walsh, and Candice Owens joined the Daily Wire, which comments on news updates and promotes Christian values that according to them the far left is trying to eradicate along with traditional family structure.

As I try to digest all this bewilderment, YouTube suggests that I watch Andrew Tate, a famous social media personality that had recently converted to Islam. Tate is described by many as a bigot, a misogynist and someone who promotes toxic masculinity.

I watched his videos and discovered that he’s an intelligent man who depends on shocking the audience with his direct comments, especially those that support gender inequality. He later got arrested in Romania on suspicions of human trafficking and shared his point of view. I switch off YouTube and decide that I had enough of the world’s mad affairs. After all, books are always the best of companions as Al Mutanabi said.

Western tanks — political and military boost for Ukraine

DAPHNÉ BENOIT

Germany’s move to deliver battle tanks to Ukraine, expected to be followed by a similar announcement from the US, marks a politically weighty step that could also offer Kyiv increased ability to breach Russian lines.

After weeks of pressure from Ukraine and other allies, Berlin finally agreed to send 14 of its Leopard 2 tanks, seen as among the best in the world.

The move also opens the way for other European nations that operate Leopards to send tanks from their own fleets to Ukraine, further building up the combined-arms arsenal Kyiv needs to launch counter-offensives.

“From offering 5,000 helmets to sending the Leos into Ukraine,” commented German Marshall Fund researcher Bruno Lete, referring to a widely-mocked early German contribution to Ukraine’s war effort.

“In less than a year, Germany deconstructed seven decades of pacifist policy” since World War II. “Perhaps reluctantly — but still a major Zeitenwende (turning point) in its own right.”

Britain has already promised a similar number of Challenger tanks, while media reports suggest an American announcement is coming soon.

President Joe Biden will address Americans at 17:00 GMT on Wednesday about US support for Ukraine, the White House announced.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Sunday indicated Paris was also considering sending French-made heavy Leclerc tanks for Ukraine.

Coming on top of lighter vehicles promised by Berlin, Paris and Washington earlier this month, the united front behind Kyiv marks a setback for Russia, which has long been banking on Western support for its neighbour running out of steam.

Fears in some capitals — especially Berlin — that the front-line battle tanks could be seen as a new step in escalation appear to have been soothed, not least in light of taboos that have already fallen since the Russian war.

“Howitzers and multiple rocket launchers delivered in 2022 were just as serious, if not more so than tanks, because artillery is more powerful” in deciding military engagements, Ukrainian military analyst Mykola Bielieskov said. — AFP



Maureen Dowd

A New York Times Op-Ed columnist, writes about American politics, popular culture and international affairs

Nancy Pelosi, liberated and loving it

It’s not a pretty sight when pols lose power. They wilt. They crumple. They cling to the vestiges. They mourn their vanished entourage and perks.

How can their day in the sun be over? One minute, they’re running the world, and the next, they’re in the room where it doesn’t happen.

Donald Trump was so freaked out at losing power that he was willing to destroy the country to keep it.

I went to lunch with Nancy Pelosi at the Four Seasons to find out how she was faring now that she has gone from being one of the most powerful women in the world — second in line to the presidency — and one of the most formidable speakers in American history to a mere House backbencher.

I was expecting King Lear, howling at the storm, but I found Gene Kelly, singing in the rain.

Pelosi was not crying in her soup. She was basking as she scarfed down French fries, a truffle-butter roll and chocolate-covered macadamia nuts — all before the main course.

She was literally in the pink, ablaze in a hot-pink pantsuit and matching Jimmy Choo stilettos, shooting the breeze about Broadway, music and sports. Showing off her 4-inch heels, the 82-year-old said, “I highly recommend suede because it’s like a bedroom slipper.”

Fans dropped by our booth to thank Pelosi, and women in the restaurant gave me thumbs-ups, simply because I was sitting with her.

“I wonder, Maureen, girl to girl, I keep thinking I should feel a little more, I don’t know,” she hesitated, looking for the right word. Over the course of our conversation, she said the word was “regretful,” and she thought about it in church and during morning and night prayers, but she just wasn’t feeling it.

“It’s just the time, and that’s it. Upward and onward. I’m thrilled with the transition. I think it was beautiful.”

Her daughter Alexandra Pelosi, a documentary film-maker, assured me that it’s not an act. “I can tell you, in my 52 years of being alive on this Earth, I have never had the kind of weekend I’m



“IT’S JUST THE TIME, AND THAT’S IT. UPWARD AND ONWARD,” PELOSI SAID OF THE END OF HER LEADERSHIP ROLE

having right now,” she said last Sunday. “My mother is at peak happiness. I’ve never seen her like this. It’s like she’s floating through the air. It’s fascinating for my kids because they don’t know this person.

“I think you want to enjoy being old. I don’t think you want to spend your final days fighting with Kevin McCarthy about how many seats you get on Appropriations,” she said.

Before I could broach the humiliating spectacle of McCarthy abasing himself to the loonies on the far-right and being tortured by preposterous Matt Gaetz, Nancy Pelosi brought up her successor.

She looked at me, her brown eyes widening, and said, “I’m sad for Kevin that he couldn’t do that in a way that brought a little more dignity to the House of Representatives. It’s strange.” She added, “What happened was inexplicable.”

The woman is, as her friend and fellow California lawmaker Anna Eshoo said, “satin and steel.” I tried to keep a straight face at Pelosi’s satiny solicitude. She had, after all, called the Jello-spined McCarthy “a moron” in 2021 after he criticised the Capitol physician’s mask mandate.

I dryly asked the devout Catholic if she was praying for McCarthy, the way she once prayed for her nemesis Trump.

“Yeah, I was, because I was praying for the House,” she said. “It was just stunning that he wouldn’t be ready. You know what your challenges are. Just be ready.

What they were seeing, whether they realised or not, was an incredible shrinking speakership.

“Really, in order to even honour — ‘honour’ isn’t the word — in order to recognise some of the requests that were being made, you have to have the leverage to get the job done.

They were undoing his ability to do what they were asking him to do. That was most unfortunate. I don’t want to see the job turn into something else. It has to be the speakership.”

Did she give McCarthy any advice? Yes, she said; before the first vote, when he seemed confident, she told him, “Get it done.”

— *The New York Times*

The Quotidian

Where is your husband? It was not the first time such a question has been asked. Whether it is funny or not is another matter, but returning ‘home’ and having been asked such a query raises an eyebrow.

I wondered if all unaccompanied women entering the country are asked the same. Why bother, after all, it could be a cultural trait.

An eagle-eyed to images, sounds, words, or behaviour has been an integral part of my reporting skills. Each experience or interaction can be related to a bigger narrative.

It is fascinating what can be learned from remarks and observations.

On the way to Heathrow airport, I spent over an hour in a taxi listening to stories about social injustice.

The driver, an Afghan, spent much of the trip complaining about how bad it is to live and work in London. The topics ranged from small houses to long working hours, the cost of living, the political system, and the media.

There was nothing new until he started condemning how the British media reported on the Taliban government.

And so, I heard that his wife, who cannot speak English, was allowed to enter the UK following the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2021, and how she thinks he is becoming a religious radical.

The driver got my full attention when he started defending the educational segregation and reforms happening in Afghanistan under the new regime.

It became hard to hold back my tongue. “If life in the UK is so bad, why don’t you move to another country or go back to Afghanistan?” I asked. “Not all countries accept asylum seekers,” he explained, while at the same time condemning countries in the Middle East that do not accept asylees. I could not resist offering advises. The driver admitted



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ONE OF MY FAVOURITE DISTRACTIONS WHEN IN LONDON IS TRAVELLING BY BUS. IT IS LIKE BEING IN ANOTHER WORLD

that returning to his country was not an option for economic and social reasons. It is better not to spit on one’s plate while eating.

One of my favourite distractions when in London is travelling by bus. It is like being in another world. Observing people, architecture, and even the traffic can be like scenes from different movies.

People who need to take a bus to go to work may not agree with the romanticisation of bus rides, but their efficiency, comfort, and stress-free travel make them highly appealing.

I just love to hop on buses to see the changes that have happened over the years. At bus stations, people talk about situations, read books, or talk on the phone.

I met a ballerina who had just become a first-time mum. We ended up becoming bus stop friends. There are so many interesting things to learn and discover while on a bus ride. It sounds weird, I know.

I still remember and cherish when I chose to travel by bus from Oman to the Emirates a few years ago. Not everyone’s cup of tea, I recognise.

A good bus driver can be as important as a good musician, according to a popular saying.

Then, came the visits to bookshops in London. It is another must-do on my list. Bookstores as spaces for sociability and the practice of reading can offer new dimensions about types of texts, reading spaces, and events.

The biggest impact was finding that the shelves for books on journalism education and media studies have shrunk considerably.

One of my preferred bookstores in central London that had the best and most groundbreaking books on the discipline is now into digital data, studies on the Internet, and the sociology of social media.

Even so, the suitcase came packed with new releases, except ‘Spare’.

Next time I am asked where my husband is, I will say, ‘he is in the suitcase’.

KITE FESTIVAL



School girls prepare kites to fly as they celebrate the festival of Basant Panchami at a school in Amritsar, India, on Wednesday. – AFP

Responsibilities of a scientific researcher

Given the importance of the subject and its significant impact on human life and development, I will attempt to shed light on all of these issues in this article.

Any student or scientific researcher should thoroughly read the scientific researcher’s duties, specifications, and ethics.

Useful scientific research is that which is directed towards positive and beneficial outcomes rather than negative outcomes that may cause destruction.

Scientific researchers have the following responsibilities to the community: The researcher should be connected to society and understand its problems and needs in order to diagnose these problems, study them, and find appropriate solutions that contribute to the development of society.

The researcher should be interested in involving all civil society institutions in research and granting them the right to benefit from the findings and solutions of scientific research and attempting to keep any damages to a bare minimum.

Scientific researcher’s responsibilities for scientific researchers participating in the study: Commitment to everything that has been agreed upon with these scientists.

Dealing with them in an ethical manner while adhering to fair and equitable rules. Participants in scientific research must protect their personal rights while adhering to all



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THE RESEARCHER SHOULD BE CONNECTED TO SOCIETY AND UNDERSTAND ITS PROBLEMS AND NEEDS IN ORDER TO DIAGNOSE THESE PROBLEMS

safety and security regulations.

The scientific researcher’s responsibilities in relation to the research study are as follows: Setting a deadline for completing the scientific study and demonstrating its significance and anticipated benefits.

Reliance on organisation and objectivity in all stages of scientific research preparation, study, and writing, beginning with defining the problem and gathering information about it and progressing through all stages until scientific research is completed, and reaching accurate results proven and proven by evidence and evidence.

All scientific procedures and standards are used with great precision.

Ensuring scientific integrity, documenting references and sources in a scientific and academic manner, and adhering to accepted quotation limits.

General responsibilities of a scientific researcher: Preparing and conducting scientific research on one of the specific phenomena or problems to which the scientific researcher belongs.

The scientific research should be planned and written in accordance with internationally accepted academic scientific procedures.

The student should continue his studies with the scientific supervisor and follow his and the scientific research that



he is preparing instructions. Identifying and adhering to the optimal conditions for each step of scientific research in order to achieve an accurate and coherent scientific research that is supported by evidence and evidence.

After selecting a phenomenon or problem for scientific research, one of the scientific researcher’s responsibilities is to collect and review as many previous studies as possible on the subject of his scientific study.

If the student encounters any problem, defect, or confusion

while carrying out the steps of the scientific research, he/she can seek the assistance of the supervisor to help him get out of it and overcome it in the best way possible.

Ascertain that the reliable sources are scientific sources, and that these sources and references are related to the problem of scientific research, in whole or in part, in order to be useful for scientific study and not to deviate from it.

One of the most important duties of the scientific researcher is to rely on the method or

scientific methods appropriate to the subject or problem of the research, as well as to choose the sample of the study that is appropriate to the study community, in a neutral manner free of whims, while selecting the appropriate study tools for research and statistical methods that help to reach accurate research results.

Documentation of previous studies according to one of the internationally known scientific documentation methods is another challenging task for any scientific researcher.

sport

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ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Morocco's Mohammed El Morabity won the top honours of the eighth edition of annual Oman Desert Marathon (ODM) in Bidiyah on Tuesday. Mohammed, brother of six-time champion, Rachid El Morabity claimed the top spot in the men's category with an overall time of 14 hours 13 minutes and 15 seconds.

Switzerland's Corina Sommer took home the women's prize with an overall time of 19 hours 39 minutes and 28 seconds.

"The dunes were beautiful, however the night race was a bit scary. I was on my own for so long that it made me pick up my speed. This was both my first desert run and my first night run as well," Sommer said.

A ceremony was held on Wednesday at the Jawharat Bidiyah Resort under the auspices of Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Al Sharqiyah, to honour the runners as well as those who worked behind the scenes during the course of the race.

Morocco's TGCC team, which consisted of international champions Mohammed and Rachid El Morabity, emerged team champions.

SALEH THIRD OVERALL

Saleh al Saidi of Army A team was third overall and the first Omani with a finishing time of 15:31:30. His teammates Sami al Saadi (16:17:10) and Hamdan al Khatri (16:24:30) claimed the fourth and fifth positions respectively.

Oman Army B team's Moosa al Balushi (17:58:29) and Gaith Saif were sixth and seventh in the race. Evgenii Glyva of Ukraine (19:50:18) and Khalid al Jabri of Oman (21:55:41) finished in the next two positions.

In the women's section, Moroccans Aziza El Amrany (19:46:10) and Aziza Raji (20:28:07) claimed the second and third spots. Italy's Billi Francesca (31:13:17) and Great Britain's Julie Johnstone (31:39:38) finished fourth and fifth.

The 165 km desert run started on January 21 from Al Wasil Fort with 42 runners, and it ended in Jawharat al Bidiyah Resort on January 24 with 37 runners, after five had quit during the race.

This year's race also included a children's 2 km run, a 5 km run, and 10 km, which were run on day one.

The 165 km run is usually divided into six stages, run over the span of one week. This year it was divided into four stages: 47 km distance on day one, 55 km on day two, 42 km night run on day three and 21 km on the fourth and final day.

The race was sponsored by a host of entities including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman Athletic Association, Tanuf, Omantel, Oman LNG, Jawharat Bidiyah Resort, OTSO, Asaffa, Pocari Sweat, Mwasalat, Camelback, Lulu Hypermarket, Oman Air, Tactical Trading, and Al Forn Cafe.

In total, 18 Omani runners and 24 international runners from Italy, Germany, Poland, the UK, Morocco, France, Spain, Belgium, Ukraine and Switzerland took part in ODM 2023.

Alfonso Sciaratta, a 67-year-old surgeon from Italy, also took part in this year's race and he finished the 165 km run in 42:17:46.

DESERT RUN CHAMPIONS

Some of the runners shared their experience of running at the Bidiyah golden sands.

Cecile Bertin, from France, said: "I came to run ODM 5 years ago and there were barely any Omani runners. Those who were there were not well prepared for this kind of race. This time, I was impressed with how the participation has grown and also with the quality of their runners. I see Oman as the champions of desert running!"

David Sanchez from Spain said: "Oman Desert Marathon was a new way of running for me. It is very different from the mountain running that I have been doing for years. It was a fantastic change for me to run in a new trail environment."

Albert Jorquera Mestres of Spain said: "This was my first stage race and my first desert race. This gave an opportunity to learn about a culture, experience new sensations and the desert, rather than just visiting as a tourist. I have suffered a lot but I had a great time."

SWISS SOMMER TAKES
WOMEN'S TITLE
IN BIDIYAH

OMANI RUNNERS IMPRESS
BY TAKING THIRD TO
SEVENTH SPOTS

MOHAMMED
EL MORABITY
CLINCH ODM HONOURS



Badr Al Samaa holds social media football contest



MUSCAT: Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in association with Oman Football Association (OFA) held a prize distribution ceremony for social media contest winners.

Badr Al Samaa in collaboration with OFA had recently run a social media contest on Instagram and Facebook for the football lovers namely 'Score with Badr and Win'. In the Instagram and Facebook Reels, the national football players of Oman asked a series of questions to the social media users to test their knowledge about the game. Owing to the immense support and following for football in Oman and also football being the national sport of Oman, the contest witnessed a lot of engagement from the users and many of them responded with the right answers. For each question winners were chose through lucky draw system and in total 29 winners were selected.

A gift handing over ceremony was held in the conference hall of

Oman Football Association. The gifts to the winners were handed over by the management of OFA; Hilal al Sinani, General Secretary, Shabib al Hosni, Assistant General Secretary and Dr Majid al Wardi, Head of Medical Services and management of Badr Al Samaa; Firsath Hassan, Executive Director and Sameer PT, CEO.

A co-branded T-Shirt, Executive Health Check-Up and a hypermarket gift voucher was given to the winners.

Speaking on this occasion, Hilal Al Sinani said the journey with Badr Al Samaa has been incredible and he appreciated the extraordinary medical support provided by Badr Al Samaa to OFA.

Firsath Hassan assured continuous support to OFA and said that sport is the best way to send across the message of fitness and good health. He said they will continue to support all sports in Oman.

Sports day at Pakistan School Seeb concludes



The Annual Sports Day of Pakistan School Seeb concluded at Tamrin Seeb Club where multiple matches of cricket and football along with several games were played. The chief guest was Faiz Muhammad Riaz, Managing Director of Muhammad Riaz Group Companies. The Johar House marked the ground and won the overall first trophy. The event was a great source for the students and an opportunity to showcase their talents in a productive way.

Djokovic, Sabalenka roll into Australian Open semi-finals

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic was two wins away from a 22nd Grand Slam crown after bulldozing into the Australian Open semi-finals on Wednesday, while Aryna Sabalenka was equally impressive in reaching the women's last four.

Serbia's Djokovic delivered a masterclass to crush Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena and set up a meeting with Tommy Paul for a place in Sunday's final.

Djokovic's quest to go level with great rival Rafael Nadal on a leading 22 major titles carries an air of inevitability.

The 35-year-old has struggled with a hamstring injury in the early rounds at Melbourne Park but was dominant during his fourth-round demolition of Alex de Minaur and was equally clinical against the outclassed Rublev.

"I cannot be happier with my tennis, honestly," Djokovic told an adoring Rod Laver Arena.

"I've been playing very solid from the back of the court and I really love playing in these conditions and this court."

Victory for the red-hot favourite propelled him into a 44th Grand Slam semi-final to close the gap on Roger Federer's all-time record of 46.

Anything other than a rampant win for Djokovic against unseeded Paul would amount to a massive upset, albeit at a tournament that has seen numerous shocks in the men's and women's draws.

Paul defeated his fellow American Ben Shelton 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to reach his first major semi-final.

But former world number one Djokovic, who can return to the top of the rankings if he wins the Australian Open for a record-extending 10th time, will be a whole new prospect.

Paul, ranked 35, and the Serb great have never played each other before. "I saw him in the locker room after I finished my match. He said, congrats," said the 25-year-old, adding they had practised together before.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his quarter final match against Russia's Andrey Rublev. – Reuters



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka reacts during her quarter final match against Croatia's Donna Vekic. – Reuters

"Obviously he's pretty comfortable here in Australia," the American added. "It's going to be a challenging match but I'm playing some of my best tennis, so it's a good time."

The other semi-final is between third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas and Russian 18th seed Karen Khachanov.

OMINOUS SABALENKA
Sabalenka set up a semi-final with surprise-package Magda Linette after once again displaying the kind of form and finesse which has made her favourite for the women's title.

The Belarusian fifth seed defeated Croatia's Donna Vekic 6-3, 6-2 as she closes on a first

Grand Slam title.
The match was closer than the score suggested, but Sabalenka was in scintillating form — she is yet to drop a set in Melbourne and has won all nine matches in 2023.

It is a far cry from a year ago, when she struggled badly with her serve and was reduced to tears at an Australian Open warm-up tournament.

"It feels really special to be in the semi-finals here, it was a tough match," said Sabalenka, 24, who was competing in her first Australian Open quarter-final.

"I'm super happy with the win and it was so great to play here today, the atmosphere was unbelievable."

Sabalenka will play unseeded Linette for a place in Saturday's final after the Pole marched into her first major semi-final at the age of 30.

Linette stunned former world number one Karolina Pliskova 6-3, 7-5 to continue flying the flag for Poland after the shock exit of world number one Iga Swiatek.

"I'm so emotional, I can't really believe it," said Linette, ranked 45 in the world.

— AFP

Darsait Titans claim D20 Championship

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket's Oman D20's 14 day extravaganza of high voltage action packed cricket saw Darsait Titans beat Qurum Thunders by 5 wickets to lift the coveted trophy at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground.

The Darsait Titans, co-owned by Majees Technical Services LLC, came out to be the underdogs to win the title from ending the league stage on the fourth position winning just 3 out of 7 games before winning two back-to-back games to claim the championship while Qurum Thunders were 2nd in the league stage winning 6 out of 7 of their matches and beating Amerat Royals in the semifinals.

Winning the toss and playing to their strengths, Darsait Titans opted to bowl first. The Thunders openers got off to a salient start courtesy Kashyap Prajapati (45 of 30;6x4,1x6) and Aiyappa CR. Shoaib Khan (59 of 42;9x4) cruised the Qurum innings in the middle overs with Ayaan Khan finishing off in style to mark 189 runs in 20 overs. Jan Shafiq (2/33) was



Champions – Darsait Titans

the pick of the bowlers for the Titans. In response, Darsait Titans couldn't get off a start they wanted but the experience and expertise of Zeeshan Maqsood (90 of 52; 6x4,7x6) takes them over the line with a six of the 2nd ball in the last over to seal the match for the Titans. He was well supported by Sahil Shaik, Karan Kannan and Ravindra L to ensure Darsait go home with the biggest piece.

Zeeshan Maqsood, awarded Man of the Match for his stellar performance, said, "It was a wicket



Kashyap Prajapati – Player of the Tournament



Runners Up – Qurum Thunders



Zeeshan Maqsood – Man of the Match – Final

I would like to bat on any day. I thank our ground staff enabling us with such magnificent facilities. I have always loved batting at No 4 and with the situation and magnitude of the game, I knew I have to give my all to get over the line. I also sincerely thank Majees Cricket's owners, management, support staff and my fellow teammates because of which we stand here. I would dedicate this Man of the Match to my younger daughter and of course my family who have been supportive to me always.

I would love carrying this form ahead in the season and for Oman in International Cricket to be able to contribute at my optimum."

The post match presentation ceremony was graced by Hisham bin Juma al Sinani, Sports Development and Welfare for Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth, along with Paul Sheridan, Oman Cricket's Vice-Chairman, Alkesh Joshi, Oman Cricket's Treasurer, Kiran Asher, Board Member, Oman Cricket, and Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket.

Zeeshan Maqsood was handed the Player of the Match by Kiran Asher, and Kashyap Prajapati was handed Player of the Tournament and a cash award for scoring 358 runs at an average of 51.

The Oman D20 was thoroughly enjoyed by the domestic audience and gained a spectra of wide audience from across the globe through its quality broadcast consolidating the 14-day cricketing festival.

Oman international rally gets underway on Thursday afternoon

MUSCAT: The 2023 Oman International Rally gets underway with a ceremonial start at Muscat Drift Arena from 15.00hrs on Thursday afternoon. This will then be followed by a 3.01-km super special stage, starting at 16.07hrs.

The Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) flagship motor sporting event will kick-start the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) once again, with competitors from nine nations set to tackle 13 gravel special stages over the weekend before the finish back at the Muscat Drift Arena on Saturday afternoon. In a route of 613.06km, 229.98km will be timed against the clock.

The defending regional champion Nasser Saleh al Attiyah and his Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel top an FIA field of 15 cars. The Qatari will be hoping to earn a record-breaking eighth success on the Oman event to add to his previous wins in 2003-2006, 2015, 2020 and 2022.

Baumel has enjoyed the top step of the podium on two occasions, with Steve Lancaster and Chris Patterson also earning two wins apiece and Spanish girl Alba Sánchez González partnering Al Attiyah last year when Baumel was side lined through illness.

Competition for the Volkswagen Polo GTi crew comes from the Oman Rally Team's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud. They won the Oman event in 2021, the feat making Al Rawahi the second ever Omani national to win a round of the MERC as a driver.

The Czech crew of Petr Kačirek and Petra Řiháková wheel out a



2023 OMAN INTERNATIONAL RALLY - LEADING ENTRIES:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Volkswagen Polo GTI | 15. Petr Kačirek (CZE)/Petra Řiháková (CZE) Škoda Fabia R5 |
| 2. Abdullah al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al Hmoud (JOR) Škoda Fabia Evo | 16. Zakariya al Aamri (OMN)/Mohammed al Aamri (OMN)Subaru Impreza STI |
| 3. Nasser Khalifa al Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5 | |
| 4. Ihab al Shorafa (JOR)/ Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX | 2023 OMAN NATIONAL RALLY - LEADING ENTRIES: |
| 5. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX | 17. Haitham al Soomar (OMN)/Wael al Shabani (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII |
| 6. Sheikh Bader al Fayed (JOR)/ TBA Mitsubishi Lanver Evo X | 18. Ghaith al Qasmi (OMN)/Ahmed Salim (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII |
| 7. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X | 19. Alain Nawfal (LEB)/Bashar al Qassimi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R |
| 8. Mohammed al Zafiri (KWT)/Suleiman al Helal (KWT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX | 20. Mohammed al Mazroui (OMN)/Sana al Shukaili (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R |
| 9. Meshari al Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X | 21. Mutasim al Balushi (OMN)/Ammar al Balushi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R |
| 10. Abdullah al Zubair (OMN)/Taha Soomar (OMN)Subaru Impreza STI | 22. Salim al Touqi (OMN)/Issa al Wardi (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII |
| 11. Yousef al Dhefiri (KWT)/Carlos Hanna (LEB)/Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X | 23. Abdullah al Touqi (OMN)/Ilka Minor (AUT) Toyota Yaris |
| 12. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX | 24. Faisal al Rashdi (OMN)/Yaqdhan al Rashdi (OMN) Subaru Impreza STI |
| 14. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Nancy al Majali (JOR)/Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X | 25. Musab Soomar (OMN)/Nasr Ibrahim al Qasmi (OMN) Kia Rio |

Duck Racing Škoda Fabia and Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al Atya and Italian team-mate Giovanni Bernacchini crew a Ford Fiesta R5.

While the Rally2 quartet should fight it out for overall victory, there is strength in depth in an MERC2 section where the multiple champion Meshari al Thefiri will be hoping to win back a title that was fought out between the Jordanian duo of Issa Abu Jamous and Ihab al Shorafa in 2022.

Ninth and 10th generations of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution dominate a category that will also see three further Jordanian drivers - Shadi Shaban, Sheikh Bader al Fayed and Shaker Jweihan – take the start.

Local hopes rest on the shoulders of Abdullah al Zubair and Zakariya al Aamri in a pair of Subaru Imprezas, while Kuwait's Mohammed al Zafiri and Yousef al Dhefiri and Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled add strength in depth to the fight for honours in their Mitsubishi's.

A national rally will run behind the main FIA event and has attracted a provisional nine starters (subject to final scrutineering).

Haitham al Soomar and Wael al Shabani topped the standings in 2022 in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII and return to battle against the likes of Ghaith al Qasmi and Salim al Touqi and a Subaru for Faisal al Rashdi.

There are also a trio of Yamaha YXZs for Oman's Mohammed al Mazroui and Mutasim al Balushi and Lebanon's Alain Nawfal, while Abdullah al Touqi teams up with Austrian WRC star co-driver Ilka Minor in a Toyota Yaris.

Al Rustaq, Seeb, Al Suwaiq, Oman Club post crucial wins



ADIL AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, JAN 25

The second-leg of 2022-23 Omantel League began on Tuesday night after a 40 days stop due to the national team's participation in the Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq's Basra.

The week-14 featured Seeb's triumph over Al Bashayer 2-1 while Al Rustaq registered a crucial 1-0 win against Bahla. Oman Club edged Al Ittihad 2-1 while Al Suwaiq managed to end their fixture against Al Oruba on a 1-0 winning note with a goal by Issam al Subhi.

This week games will conclude with two matches that will take place on Thursday as Al Musannah will host Sur in Al Rustaq Sports Complex while Al Nasr will face Suhar in the Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah.

Seeb's Mohsin al Ghassani led his team as he registered the opening goal in their match against Al Bashayer in Nizwa Sports Complex.

Al Ghassani was the star of the match as he netted the second goal in the 58th minute while Al Bashayer's Deop scored their consolation goal in

the dying minutes. The win took the Muscat-based team to fifth place with 22 points while Al Bashayer are in 12th position with eight points.

Al HASANI LIFTS OMAN CLUB

Mahmood al Hasani netted the most important goal for Oman Club to assist his team in delivering a crucial 2-1 win against Al Ittihad.

Al Hasani's goal in the dying minutes gave Oman Club their fifth triumph in the league and to reach 21 points in the eighth place as well while Muthanna al Shujaibi struck the only goal for Al Ittihad.

Al Rustaq's Linja Bersi scored the only goal in the Al Rustaq-Bahla match that took place in Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The goal came in the 67th minute of the match. The victory raised Southern Batinah team's credit to 28 points in second place behind toppers Al Nahda while Bahla remained in seventh place with 21 points.

Rahia, Balsha and Naseem claim early round honours

AHMED AL KAABI MUSCAT, JAN 19

The second day of the third and last qualifying camel race for the season 2022-2023 continued the competition at the Al Fulajj camel race track in Barka on Wednesday.

The race was organised by Oman Camels Racing Federation (OCRF) with support of the Royal Camels Corps (RCC).

The qualifying race within the annual festival of the 20th private race continued on the second day with 20 rounds, including 13 rounds for 'Al Lagaya' category Abkar and Qadan for distance of 4 km, and seven rounds for the 'Al Yathaa' category for 5 km.

AL LAGAYA CATEGORY

'Rahia' claimed the first round, owned by Mubarak bin Hamad al Jedili.

The first place in the second round was taken by 'Balsha' owned by Salem Rashid Ali al Ghilani.

In the third round, 'Naseem' owned by Salem bin Ali al Mushaifri won the first place.

In the fourth round 'Al Asimah' came on top, owned by Saud bin



Ali al Jabri.

'Zalh' was top ranked in the fifth round, owned by Ali bin Rashid al Omari.

For the sixth round 'Al Shakla' claimed the top spot, owned by Butti bin Nasser al Malki.

'Shebel' won the first place in the seventh round, owned by Nayef bin Salim al Jahhafi.

In the eighth round 'Samha' was top ranked, owned by Saud bin Ali al Jabri.

'Shawahin' claimed the ninth round, owned by Mohammed bin Al Abd al Junaibi.

In the 10th round, 'Hamlool', owned by Jamil bin Abdullah al Saeedi, came on top.

'Hdad' won the 11th round, owned by Suhail bin Amer al Ghufaili.

In the 12th round, 'Mishaal' claimed the top spot, owned by Abdulaziz bin Hamad al Wahibi.

In the 13th round, 'Mklab'

came on top, owned by Ali bin Mohammed al Wahibi.

Yathaa category

'Mtaibh' claimed the 14th round, owned by Hamid bin Mohammed al Jahhafi.

'Hawajis' was top ranked in the 15th round, owned by Al Handi bin Salem al Daree.

In the 16th round, 'Al Dhab' came on top, owned by Amer bin Saeed al Wahibi.

The 17th round was claimed by 'Showq', owned by Badr bin Abdullah al Daree.

'Shaqr', owned by Hamad bin Salem al Dewaiki, won the 18th round.

'Mozahim' came on top in the 19th round, owned by Ahmed bin Nasser al Mushrafi.

The 20th and last round was claimed by 'Shibal', owned by Nayef bin Salem al Jahhafi.

The competitions of the third qualifying race conclude on Thursday with nine rounds. Three rounds will be held for 'Yathaa' category for 8 km, and one round for 'Al Zamoul' for 8 km. In addition, two rounds will be run for 'Yathaa' and 'Al Lagaya' category for 2km distance.



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New Standard Credit Life Insurance Policy to safeguard against loan liability

Enhancing regulation: The new policy aims at ensuring the protection of borrowers’ rights and provide them with social and economic protection: CMA Executive President

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 25

Aiming at regulating the contractual relationship among the borrower, bank and the insurance company, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued Decision 4/2023 on the Standard Credit Life Insurance Policy.

The Decision prescribes standardised insurance coverage for a borrower’s life in case of death or permanent disability by obligating the insurance company to pay the outstanding balance of the loan. The new policy includes the basic and optional benefits for the insurance coverage in addition

to the cases of exclusions.

The policy clearly clarifies the rights and obligations of the stakeholders (the borrower, the insurance company and the finance entity) which contributes in reducing disputes which could occur among the parties in case the risks becomes reality.

On the importance of the policy, the Executive President of the CMA, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi said the policy aims at ensuring the protection of policyholders of the Standard Credit Life Insurance Policy to support accomplishing the developmental objectives which have social dimensions represented by enhancing social security through simplifying the process for receiving the suitable finance on one hand and providing protection for the borrowers and their inheritors on the other hand.

The policy provides a legal framework which includes a financial centre for all the parties



The decision prescribes standardised insurance coverage for a borrower’s life in case of death or permanent disability by obligating the insurance company to pay the outstanding balance of the loan.

SHAIKH ABDULLAH
BIN SALIM AL SALMI
Executive President, CMA

in case the risk comes to reality for the borrower whether by death, permanent total disability or even permanent partial disability exceeding 75 per cent as a result of an accident or sickness.

Al Salmi also added that regulating such insurance products, by the Standard Credit Life Insurance Policy, accomplishes an economic dimension which is enhancing the role of insurance in reducing credit risks which means providing financial facilities to the public, reflecting positively on the activity of real estate or personal finance.

He also said that the policy clearly clarified the rights and mainly focused on the coverage limits, the basic benefits for the policyholders and the exclusions and the cases where right forfeits.

The schedule of the coverage application enhances an important insurance principle, good faith; which stands on transparency and disclosure to

specify the health status of the borrower.

This simplifies the specification of the volume of the insurance risk and setting adequate criteria for underwriting and pricing the coverage.

Al Salmi also emphasised that all these inputs will positively reflect on reducing disputes among the parties of the loan relationship including the borrower, the insurance company and the finance entity in addition to reducing other negative practices. This will eventually be reflected positively on reducing insurance costs.

The policy includes some conditions and provisions to protect the rights of all the parties such as compliance of parties to good faith when disclosing material facts related to the health status with total honesty and based on the illness specified in the insurance policy.

TURN TO PAGE 14

TRA workshop focuses on postal service quality

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 25

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) held a two-day workshop on the theme ‘Quality Assessment of Postal Service’ as part of the service quality assessment project for licensed postal companies.

The workshop included the mechanism and criteria for evaluation and how plans work. Methods of collecting audit evidence and documenting observations were also identified, including techniques for asking questions, effective listening, and how to prepare audit reports.

Through the Postal Service Quality Assessment Project, TRA seeks to develop a flexible regulatory environment in line with developments, represented in evaluating and measuring the quality of service for local and international licensed postal service providers, and applying best practices that comply with international standards.

World-class events lined up for 2023 at OCEC

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 25

With 2023 in full swing, the Sultanate of Oman’s premier events destination Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) is rolling out another world-class line-up of events and activities for the year – including a total of seven regional and international events in the coming months.

This follows on from OCEC successfully hosting in 2022 a combined total of 215 events (including six regional and ten international events), which attracted over 1.2 million visitors and over 10,000 delegates from over 85 countries to the venue through the year.

OCEC’s 2023 calendar reflects the venue’s internationally recognised status as an events destination in the Middle East with a proven track record of delivering exceptional services and facilities for event organisers, and for the many event delegates and visitors who have made their way to the OCEC since its inception.

Furthermore, the 2023 events schedule represents the OCEC’s capability in bidding for and securing high-profile, internationally recognised events for the nation of Oman – to add greater value to the country’s economy, society and cultural



legacy.

Speaking about the 2023 calendar, Eng Said al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer, OCEC, stated: “Our commitment to hosting international and regional events avails numerous benefits for the Sultanate of Oman. Most visibly, international and regional events hosted by OCEC boost the volume of hotel bookings in Oman, as well as the number of arrivals at our flagship Muscat International Airport, which is just a few minutes away from OCEC by road.

“It should be kept in mind that research indicates business travellers are likely to spend – on average – up to four times more than leisure travellers while residing in a country.

“Furthermore, international events hosted by OCEC serve to attract greater foreign investment and foreign spend in our country’s economic ecosystem. Lastly and most importantly is the knowledge exchange and legacy creation that takes place in Oman as a result of these events.”

Oman allocates 250 km2 for solar, wind farms in Duqm SEZ

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 25

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), with its concentration of green energy related investments, is poised to make the largest contribution to Oman’s energy sustainability goals, according to Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

SEZAD’s outsized role in the nation’s green hydrogen strategy was outlined by Dr Al Sunaidy in an interview featured in The Business Year, a leading news portal.

The interview highlights the vital role of OPAZ and its constituent SEZs and free zones in allocating vast swathes of land for the upstream, midstream and downstream components of the growing portfolio of green hydrogen projects planned for implementation across the Sultanate of Oman.

“On a bigger scale, Duqm is expected to become the biggest contributor to sustainability.

“We have allocated 250 sq km for solar and wind farms that will then produce green hydrogen and green ammonia for local use and for export and two licences have already been granted in fact



one of which is at the stage of implementing an initial 300MW plant while the other is at the stage of detailed studies for a much larger capacity,” Dr Al Sunaidy explained.

Last month, Green Hydrogen and Chemicals Company (GHC), a joint venture between the UK unit of Indian energy developer ACME Group and Norway-based Scatec ASA, a leading renewable energy solutions provider, announced that it is developing Oman’s maiden green energy venture in the SEZ.

Phase 1 targets the production of 100,000 metric tonnes per annum of green ammonia. In the second phase, green ammonia output is anticipated to grow 12-fold to around 1.2 million metric tonnes annually. Importantly, a rejig of SEZAD’s

master plan is currently underway to allow for the creation of utility corridors and other infrastructure to support major green energy investments planned in Duqm, Dr Al Sunaidy noted.

“We are now revisiting the master plan to create large enough new corridors throughout the SEZ at Duqm that will allow the transport of electricity (electrons) into the city and vice versa pipe corridors that will allow the flexibility of transferring green hydrogen (molecules) if produced at the concession areas around Duqm to bring into industrial zone against to the Port area for local industrial consumption or for converting it into green ammonia then export it. The same corridors will allow the pumping of desalinated water from the beach to the sites of solar

and wind farms,” he stated.

Separately, some strategic partners are involved in a study to explore the potential for blue hydrogen export from Duqm. This initiative envisions the establishment of a corridor linking Duqm with retired oilfields distributed in the wider Wusta area.

The proposed corridor will allow for carbon captured in Duqm to be reinjected back into the oil and gas fields – an initiative that will also open up the potential for carbon credits to be earned by future steel plants, he pointed out.

Additionally, OPAZ is working with various stakeholders to explore the potential for hydrogen production that will be set aside for use by a new generation of ships that will be powered by green energy, he added.

Bank Muscat Board of Directors approves financial results, proposes 15 per cent dividend for 2022

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has proposed a 15 per cent dividend for the year 2022.

The meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bank, chaired by Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Maashani, Chairman, on Tuesday, January 24, 2023, approved the 2022 financial results and dividend payout, subject to the formal approval of the Annual General Meeting of the shareholders and regulatory authorities.

The Board of Directors has proposed a 15 per cent cash dividend for the year 2022. Shareholders would receive a cash dividend of RO 0.015 per ordinary share aggregating to RO 112.596 million on the Bank's existing share capital.

The Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) after the cash dividend payout will be 21.25 per cent which is well above the regulatory minimum.

Bank Muscat posted a net profit of RO 200.75 million for the year 2022 compared to RO



189.63 million reported in 2021, an increase of 5.9 per cent.

Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net

for the same period in 2021, an increase of 2.8 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 157.96 million for the year ended December 31, 2022 as compared to RO 139.94 million for the same period in 2021, an increase of 12.9 per cent mainly due to higher investment income.

Operating expenses for the year ended December 31, 2022 was RO 207.30 million as compared to RO 191.46 million for the same period in 2021, an increase of 8.3 per cent.

Net Impairment for credit and

other losses for the year ended December 31, 2022 was RO 59.94 million as against RO 60.22 million for the same period in 2021.

Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 2.5 per cent to RO 9,417 million as against RO 9,191 million as at December 31, 2021.

Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits decreased by 1.5 per cent to RO 8,647 million as against RO 8,775 million as at December 31, 2021.

New Standard Credit Life Insurance Policy to safeguard against loan liability

FROM PAGE 13

The policy also gave the insurance company maximum two years for rejection of claims in case false material information or data is provided, and the company shall not reject a claim for breaching the principle of disclosure afterwards.

The policy also provides legal remedies by calculating the insurance premium which was calculated as One Single Premium; that should be determined at the commencement of the contract, maintaining the premium cost without being affected by any future volatility resulting from changing the pricing policy of the insurance company or the bank's desire to sign a contract with another insurance company;

which allows the coverage period to be the repayment of the loan, not the period of the agreement between the bank and the insurance company.

The policy also includes five exclusions where the right for the insurance coverage falls for this type of the insurance products and took into consideration the long length of such policies and the variables that could occur during this period and set exclusions of the insurance coverage in case a previously diagnosed illness was not disclosed before purchasing the policy which have led to disability or death within two years only from the commencement of the policy in addition to intended death or injury during one year only from the date of loan.

Vodafone's special gold and diamond numbers raise more than RO 100,000 for charity

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of HH Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Secretary General of the General Secretariat to the Cabinet of Ministers, and in collaboration with the Telecom Regulatory Authority, Vodafone hosted a first of its kind live auction of special gold and diamond numbers, successfully raising over RO 100,000.

All proceeds will be donated to charitable associations and organisations.

Sayyid Fahd al Busaidy, Chief Corporate Affairs at Vodafone Oman, said: "This unique auction reinforced Vodafone's dedication to support initiatives that give back to society. The fantastic response we received, raising over RO 100,000 for worthy causes, exceeded all our



expectations.

We had over 900 bidders competing to get their hands on 100 of our best numbers and we thank them all for their participation and generosity that made our event a success."

Although not a new concept

to the market, Vodafone certainly 'did a number of it' by hosting it live, while maintaining regulatory and data privacy processes, all the while showcasing its sector-leading digital capabilities and commitment to bringing new

experiences to customers.

The public were invited to pre-register their interest in buying the gold and diamond numbers, which went up for sale during the event. Bidders were then able to submit their silent offers through Mazadcom online auction platform.

Since launching its operations in Oman in March 2022, Vodafone has been determined to do things differently – and digitally. Today, it is the new-generation telco that is changing the game.

Its digital business model makes its offering unique, with fully digital onboarding; e-stores; highly customised digital solutions regarding customer care/complaints; fully integrated IT and networks; and subscription-based services.

10 SMEs graduate from be'ah's Eco-Innovate Oman programme

MUSCAT: The Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) concluded its SME Accelerator, Eco-Innovate Oman (EiO), with a graduation ceremony and pitch event in which several EiO companies pitched for almost RO 400,000 in growth funding.

The event was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat earlier this week. The event also included the graduation of be'ah's second EiO cohort.

The pitch event provided the platform for the EiO small business owners to present their businesses and funding requirements in front of a wide variety of investors.

Attending investors included Bank Muscat, Bank Sohar, the Sharakah Fund, and the Oman Development Bank, in addition to be'ah senior management and many other stakeholders.

According to one of the SMEs which pitched, Sumaya al Rawahi CEO of Green Universe Enterprise, the event was "an amazing opportunity to showcase the success of Omani SMEs like mine which operate in renewable solar energy and drone services.



I am confident that we enhanced our market presence and will obtain the growth funding we presented in the pitch event."

Speaking about the event, Dr Mohab bin Ali al Hinai, VP - Sustainability and Circular Economy at be'ah said: "At be'ah, we view innovation as one of the only ways to amplify the achievement of our environmental goals in the Sultanate of Oman. Working together with SMEs and entrepreneurs empowers them to create new ways of doing things to effectively achieve environmental goals. The EiO programme brings us closer to the companies that are helping us achieve these goals

together, and in line with Oman's Vision 2040." The second edition of the programme was dedicated to training SMEs on limiting the environmental impact of their operations, suppliers, and employees, through calculating greenhouse gas emissions.

Running over the course of 9 months, the programme was divided into three phases. Phase one lasted for 4 months and was comprised of dense training on aspects significant to the development of business operations. The second phase was focused on training pertaining to the specific needs of the participating SMEs over a

period of 3 months. The training was led by a team of local and international experts and aimed at guiding SMEs through designing specialised programmes to prepare for domestic and foreign investment. The programme touched on an array of subjects including prototype development, market research and investor matchmaking. In its third and final phase, spread over a period of 2 months, the programme centred around training participating SMEs on marketing their products and projects.

Launched in early 2020, Eco-Innovate Oman (EiO) has now graduated two distinct cohorts of Omani small business owner (SMEs). The first cohort was predominantly early stage start ups, with the second cohort being established small businesses. All SMEs in both cohorts shared the goals of focusing not only on financial returns, but also on environmental and social returns. The second cohort, launched in 2021 had the added focus of using the ESG principals (environment, Social, and Governance) in order to operationalise sustainable business practices.

NBO continues to support Omani SMEs



MUSCAT: In keeping with its mission to give back to its community, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has recently launched 'Thursday Café', an initiative to promote local food and beverage businesses at the bank's headquarters.

The aim is to further engage NBO employees, while small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Oman are able to showcase and sell their culinary highlights as NBO is keen to work together with local partners to unlock opportunities for all.

Thursday Café will benefit the employee connection while the bank has always been open to pushing the boundaries of what is possible at the workplace.

Employees and visitors can have a food and beverage tasting experience towards the end of every week, while participating SMEs will not be charged any fee to participate in the weekly event.

NBO has long been an active participant in local, community-centred initiatives that aim to support local businesses and therefore contribute to Oman's economic growth and diversification.

The bank will continue to seize opportunities that drive progress, prosperity and create value for Oman and its people. NBO, the first local commercial bank in the Sultanate of Oman, was founded in 1973 and is today one of the leading banks in Oman.

Implications of declining Chinese demographics for the world



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

In this region, there is great interest in developments witnessed by China in the fields of trade, industry and innovation, in addition to the issue of population growth. Relations between the GCC and China are prolific, with the Asian powerhouse importing big quantities of oil that, in turn, support our region's financial annual budgets. Chinese economic development and its appetite for Gulf oil help stabilise the price of oil in the interest of both sides. Whenever Chinese economic and commercial activities decline, oil prices tend to decline as well. This was evident recently when the coronavirus pandemic

disrupted the Chinese economy, resulting in oil prices falling to less than \$40 a barrel during some periods. Therefore, we see that the vitality of the Chinese economy and the increase in their annual population growth relative to the past six decades is now the subject of discussion in this region. Any decline in their numbers has the potential to affect global economic growth. According to the latest new trends, the Chinese population declined for the first time in the last sixty years, reaching a figure of 1.4118 billion out of a global population of around 8 billion, which was lower by 850K people from 2021.

Policies to slow the birth rate in China have resulted in this negative growth. The number of births decreased according to the statistics of Chinese National Bureau to 7.52 births per thousand people in 2022, compared to more than 11 births in 2021, while India recorded 16.4 births per thousand during the past year. This resulted due to the Chinese decision of opting a one-child policy since 1979 to influence population growth, which led to the imposition of fines on families found in breach, and forced abortions by some women as well. This policy was withdrawn in 2016 with China allowing women to have two children. Later in

2021, the government allowed couples to have three children. The government provided tax exemptions, health care for families, stimulus, and cash aid to counter the decline in their number, but these measures have not succeeded in stopping the demographic decline in a country known for relying on the workforce for the growth of its economic movement. China is not the only country that has taken an interest in reducing its population. Many countries in the world, including some Arab countries, follow this demographic policy. However, it has been unable until today to find a solution to the rising population growth

that requires governments to provide the necessary support and services to the people. In China, some experts expect that the population will continue to shrink during the year and beyond, bringing its number to 750 million in 2100. Everyone is aware that large population growth means an increase in the cost of living for families, especially in poor countries, most of whose governments suffer from failure in financial and economic policies, lack of job opportunities and problems in providing necessary services in the field of education, health and others. Are policies driving birth rate reductions the best solution?

DAVOS 2023

Big oil comes in from the cold on energy transition

MAHA EL DAHAN

A different type of energy transition has taken place at this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting. Unlike 2021's COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, where oil and gas executives were personae non-gratae, fossil fuel chiefs and renewable energy bosses sat cheek by jowl in Davos. Activists like Greta Thunberg don't like it. But some in the solar, wind and hydro industry are warming to the carbon crowd. Tejpreet Chopra, who heads one of India's clean energy firms Bharat Light and Power, was surprised to be invited to a side-event with more than 60 top oil and gas executives. "The course of this transition will have to take a more inclusive approach until we all get to the finish line of where we all want to be," he said. This shift, partly triggered by the energy crunch after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has been front and centre in Davos, where United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres dedicated his speech to it. As soaring prices drove up inflation, forced industries to shut production and hiked energy bills, European leaders reversed plans to cut down on investments in new fossil fuels. Opec Secretary General Haitham al Ghais, who was in Davos this week, has warned that the sheer magnitude of economic growth means energy demand cannot be met by renewables alone. That message, echoed by many in the industry, be it traditional fossil fuel producers or renewable energy throughout the past year, found a bullhorn at this year's WEF. "Certainly the war (in Ukraine) added a premium but the root cause is structural," Joseph McMonigle, Secretary General of the International Energy Forum, said. "We've tried to limit supply, whereas demand is not decreasing," he added. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), in its 2022 World Oil Outlook, estimated \$12.1 trillion would be needed to be invested to meet oil demand to 2045 to avert energy crises. Thunberg's was not the only voice at Davos with strong objections to the industry's new mantra that the energy crisis justifies new oil investments. International Energy Agency (IEA)

chief Fatih Birol, in a meeting with Thunberg on the sidelines of WEF, said that new investments in oil fields would take years to become operational. They would be too late to allay the energy crunch, but would contribute to the climate crisis. Like Birol, British opposition leader Keir Starmer said the oil and gas sector has a role to play in the energy transition. "But not new investment, not new fields up in the North Sea, because we need to go towards net-zero, we need to ensure that renewable energy is where we go next," Starmer said. A consensus appears to be building within the energy industry that demands to immediately drop oil and gas investments and leave it in the ground are counterproductive. "Energy companies have to be part of the solution here," McMonigle said, adding: "These are big integrated companies that are really good at doing things, lots of engineers right?" New technologies need the weight of big oil to be able to scale up solutions, McMonigle said. Apart from expertise, oil firms are also awash with cash after a year of record high prices, giving them the means to fund more solar, wind and hydrogen projects. But that does not assuage the fears of climate activists. Some protesting in Davos expressed disappointment over the United Arab Emirates appointing the head of its oil company ADNOC and its climate envoy, as president of the COP28 summit that the Gulf Opec producer is hosting this year. The role involves overseeing negotiations among the nearly 200 countries that typically attend the annual talks, which at COP28 will be the first Global Stocktake since the landmark Paris Agreement of 2015.

"The climate crisis does threaten to destroy everything we know and we care about, and the only solution state leaders are finding is giving more power to those who brought us this crisis from the beginning," said Nicola Siegrist president of the Young Socialist Party in Switzerland. Jaber, who is the founding CEO of Abu Dhabi's renewable energy firm Masdar and has overseen the UAE's mandate to adopt renewables is not without green credentials. His advocates say his appointment is a healthy change and that a more inclusive approach can help achieve climate targets the world is increasingly failing to reach.

— Reuters

Bank earnings become a post-Covid parlor game



JOHN FOLEY
The author is a Reuters Breakingviews columnist.

After three years of upheaval, it's natural to yearn for a bit of normal. According to America's biggest banks, which have unrivalled insight into what makes households and companies tick, normal is a long way off. Based on the full-year earnings they disclosed over the last two weeks, financial institutions exited 2022 in a very different state from how they ended 2019. They have more deposits, more loans and more staff. And while some important numbers, such as deal-making fees, have collapsed, others remain inflated, including the revenue generated from trading stocks and bonds. Where all these things settle is a giant parlor game. Chief among the mysteries is how much interest banks will harvest in 2023 and beyond. It's a critical valuation input, as it typically represents half their revenue. Some are

giving clues, but others are cagey. JPMorgan said interest income could be \$73 billion this year, its highest ever, but finance chief Jeremy Barnum warned that involves "a lot of guessing." Bank of America won't be drawn on what it expects. No wonder they're cautious. Interest rates have risen at their fastest pace on record as the US Federal Reserve has gone all out to tackle inflation, which is now slowing but sits higher than the central bank's 2 per cent target. Even a 25-basis point shift can have significant effects on a \$1 trillion loan book like Bank of America's, as well as on enormous securities holdings. The central bank reckons rates could crest at just over 5 per cent, but JPMorgan boss Jamie Dimon on Thursday suggested to CNBC that he thinks 6 per cent is more likely. Even then, the link between benchmark interest rates and the rate banks actually charge is getting harder to forecast. One reason is that non-bank lenders, from private equity firms to credit funds, have proliferated since official borrowing rates were last this high, in 2007. The premium companies pay over risk-free rates, which ought to reflect their relative chances of default, has barely budged above 2019's level, according to the BofA ICE index, even though economic

forecasts have weakened. This environment creates more dissonance over what constitutes normal, and when it might return. While most banks have a reasonable idea of what kind of bad debts to expect in a traditional credit cycle, they are for now under pressure to lend at rates that jar with their broader view of the world. As PNC Financial Services boss Bill Demchak puts it: "Either spreads are going to widen or our economic forecast is wrong." Customers, who make up the other side of the interest equation, are equally enigmatic. Their deposits soared during Covid-19, and their spending came down. Bank of America boss Brian Moynihan said that depositors who used to have roughly \$3,500 with the bank now have almost four times more. The figure is falling, but not evenly. The richest clients, Moynihan says, already have moved much of their wealth to more lucrative investments. Most are trying to offer extra services to stop customers going elsewhere, or at least to be less demanding about what they get paid on their savings. An example is Bank of America's artificial-intelligence financial assistant, Erica. But the free money feast will surely end. At PNC, deposits that pay no interest account for 29 per cent of total customer balances.

Before Covid-19 struck, they were 25 per cent. There's no reason they couldn't end up lower, as they were before the 2008 financial crisis. Then there are the wobbly markets. Profit generated from buying and selling stocks, bonds and commodities at Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and elsewhere shot up through the pandemic and hasn't receded. The five biggest trading firms made \$110 billion in 2022, around \$30 billion more than in 2019. Will it go back to that level? Maybe not. Morgan Stanley finance chief Sharon Yeshaya postulated last week that future revenue might be higher than it used to be, as international monetary policies diverge. All these abnormal factors are a problem for investors, but they're a bigger problem for the banks themselves. They have to decide where to put assets, human as well as financial. Goldman just laid off 6 per cent of its workforce, but it remains bigger than it was in 2019; Bank of America says it's still hiring. That's always a gamble, but with so much up in the air, such decisions get riskier, especially for Main Street banks, where most pay is less geared to individual performance. To that end, the fog is arguably less troublesome for Goldman and Morgan Stanley than it is for JPMorgan, Bank of America and Citigroup.

— Reuters



Customers use ATMs at a Bank of America branch office. — Reuters

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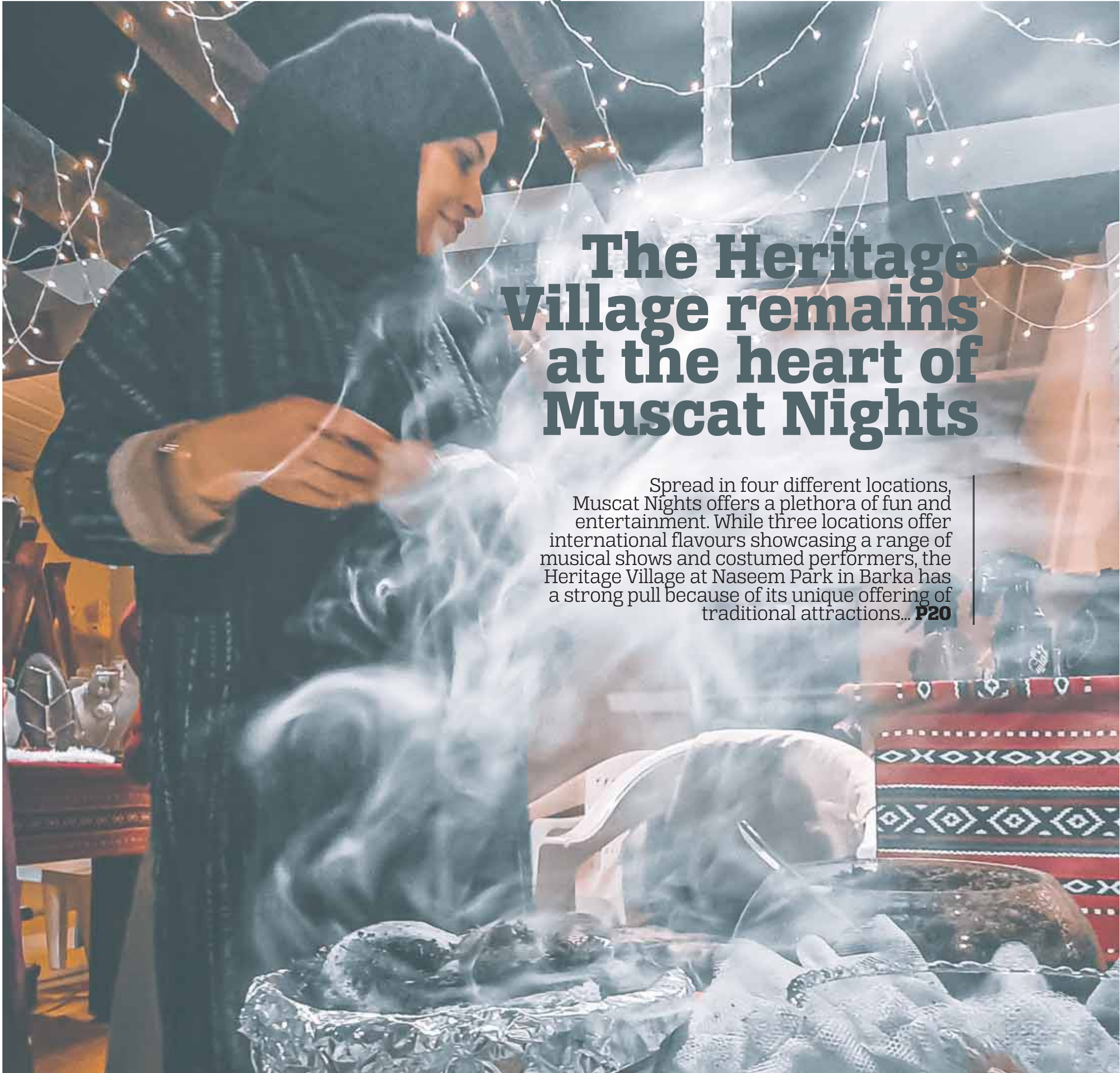
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The Heritage Village remains at the heart of Muscat Nights

Spread in four different locations, Muscat Nights offers a plethora of fun and entertainment. While three locations offer international flavours showcasing a range of musical shows and costumed performers, the Heritage Village at Naseem Park in Barka has a strong pull because of its unique offering of traditional attractions... **P20**

Japan divers capture rare footage of live giant squid

A PAIR OF SCUBA divers has captured rare video and photos of a 2.5-metre (eight-foot) giant squid swimming in the waters off Japan's west coast. Earlier this month, Yosuke Tanaka and his wife Miki, who operate a diving business in Toyooka

city in the Hyogo region, were alerted to the squid by a fishing equipment vendor who had spotted it in a bay. The couple took their boat out to reach the creature as it floated near a rocky shoreline. "There it was. It was an enor-



mous squid," Yosuke Tanaka said on Thursday. "We didn't see the kinds of agile

movements that many fish and marine creatures normally show," he said. "Its tentacles and fins were

moving very slowly." The sheer size of the animal and its enormous eyes were striking, and Tanaka said he was imagining the power squid use to tackle whales, which are among their main predators. "I could see its tentacles moving. I thought it would be dangerous to be grabbed hard by them and taken off somewhere," he said. Giant squid are known to live in the waters around Japan, and occasionally wash ashore. But seeing them alive in the wild remains relatively rare. The squid appeared weak and moved only "very sluggishly," Tanaka said. Pieces of its skin were peeling off from its trunk. He said the experience would stick with him. "It was very exciting. I think there is nothing rarer than this," he said. "I have heard not a lot is known about this creature. I'd be happy if this helps us learn more." — AFP

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HELL BENT

BY LEIGH BARDUGO

The second book in the Alex Stern series. Alex risks her future at Lethe and Yale to get Darlington out of purgatory.



ENTERTAINMENT

Moviegoers pose for pictures in front of a poster of the Bollywood movie 'Pathaan' outside a cinema hall in Prayagraj. Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan returned to the silver screen on January 25 for the first time in four years with an action-packed rollercoaster film that has sparked ire from Hindu right-wingers. — AFP



AUCTION

A client shows a violin in Rieumes, southwestern France, before having it appraised by Marc Labarbe, an auctioneer who works in his "Expertibus", a truck with which he travels across the villages of Haute-Garonne to offer his expertise services. — AFP





Costa Rican trail opens a path to cash for nature and people

A CLATTER OF BIRD call erupts and a few berries fall from the forest canopy high overhead, dislodged by toucans.

Indigenous guide Osvaldo Martinez stoops to pick them up and presses them in his hand to release a pungent scent like cinnamon.

"We use these to flavour a rice pudding that we make," he explains.

A member of the Nairi-Awari indigenous community, Martinez is a guide leading intrepid hikers across one of the most remote and inaccessible tracts of rainforest in Costa Rica, in the Cordillera de Talamanca mountain range, miles from the nearest road.

Striding in rubber boots between tangled tree roots on a steep muddy trail, he points out a tree whose ground bark is used to treat stomach upsets, and identifies the shrieks of parrots that frequent the primary forests.

"Most of the clients who come are grateful to us," he says of his work guiding on a section of the Camino de Costa Rica, a 174-mile (280 km) foot trail linking the Central American country's Caribbean and Pacific coasts.

"We treat them well, we show them the beauty of nature, we tell them a bit about our culture, medicinal plants, and the animals," he added.

Nature-rich Costa Rica, which has nearly 6 per cent of the world's animal and plant species, is the most visited country in Central America, although most tourist development has remained around towns and parks on the coasts.

The Camino, founded by a rural development non-profit, instead takes adventurous hikers over backcountry trails through rainforests, cloud forests, farmland and indigenous territories, seeking to bring economic benefits to the remote communities that live there. "It was a no-brainer, as the tourist money goes to very specific coastal areas and most of those places are owned by foreigners," said Conchita Espino, executive director of Mar a Mar, the association that designed and built the trail.

"We planned out a Camino through villages that really needed a new source of income," she added.

With nature losses accelerating globally, almost 200 countries agreed an ambitious goal at a landmark biodiversity protection conference in December: to try to preserve 30 per cent of the planet's land and oceans by 2030.

One key to turning that pledge into a reality is ensuring communities that live in and near natural areas find ways to benefit from them, giving new incentives for their protection, conservation experts say. That is a priority in Costa Rica, which already has about a quarter of its land in protected

parks and reserves and which led a successful national reforestation push that has left more than half its land forested.

MORE INCOME

Costa Rica's Camino was inspired by its namesake Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in northern Spain - which Espino hiked in 2011 - and the Ravenber Way, a long distance coast-



to-coast path across northern England.

While Costa Rica's trail has been open since 2018, Mar a Mar is using funding from foundations and private individuals to further develop infrastructure along the path, designed to take about 16 days to complete.

The association works with residents of indigenous territory, private reserves, farms and out-of-the-way villages to help them develop small, sustainable businesses that offer guiding, meals and lodging in small hotels and homestays.

The added income is paying off for local people in a country where around 20 per cent of the population lives in poverty, with the poor concentrated in rural areas.

Martinez now earns about C80,000 (\$138) to guide each group of hikers across his indigenous community's land, earning about \$250 a month in total. With the added income he is saving to buy a laptop and he plans to finish high school, with hopes to study

economics at university.

"Before the Camino, we grew crops for our own consumption," he said. The added work has not only boosted incomes but also helped "people get to study and to learn. It's helping a lot of young people."

Across steep forest-covered mountains in the small town of Turrialba, 22-year-old Alejandro Montoya also makes a living from the trail, earning

creepers, cuckoos, owls, hawks and elusive resplendent quetzals that haunt the high cloud forests.

He saved to buy binoculars to better show off the birds and is studying for a tourism diploma.

"I feel that I'm doing what I really enjoy," he said. "I can walk, spot birds, share, meet new people. It's what I like to do and it makes me very, very happy."

IMPROVEMENTS UNDERWAY

At present, most of the hikers on the Camino are Costa Rican, around 400 of whom set out each month to trek short sections, many from the capital San Jose.

But after two years of disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic, the footpath is also now attracting 40-50 foreigners a month - a number that Mar a Mar hopes to increase tenfold over the next three years.

The association estimates that foreign hikers spend \$65 to \$150 per day, depending on the degree of logistical support that they need, such as guiding and luggage transport.

To improve the experience for hikers, Mar a Mar is working closely with municipalities and local communities to improve the trail, adding signage and providing training and seed money to residents along it to develop sustainable micro-businesses.

It also hopes to work with the Nairi-Awari to add three suspension bridges and make the trek across the rugged territory more manageable.

But "we want to keep it very authentic and very local. We do not want hotels being built along the Camino. We want it to be local families improving their cabins so that they're receiving 10 hikers a day instead of three," she said.

As the footpath turns five this year, the changes are already underway.

In the small, highland coffee-growing community of Napoles, some 140 miles into the trek, several women from the local community are improving their offering for hikers.

They welcomed their first visitors from the United States and Denmark early in 2021, and since then have been hosting and cooking meals for a growing number of trekkers.

Footsore visitors used to sleep overnight in the local church hall but now stay in a snug cabin with long views down the cloud-wreathed mountainside toward the Pacific Ocean.

"We're looking at identifying other ways we can attend to tourists. We could learn English, sell them products, offer them local tours. We'll see what we can come up with," said Marianela Fallas Cordero, who, with her two sisters, is buzzing with ideas.

"It's a dream we want to achieve," she said. — Thomson Reuters

FASHION

Armani spins harlequin patterns into ballgowns for haute couture lineup in Paris



GIORGIO ARMANI TOOK to the haute couture catwalk in Paris on Tuesday with evening wear spun from a traditional, diamond-patterned harlequin motif in pale pastels.

Models moved steadily down a glossy runway carrying the motif, their clothing echoing the colours underfoot - pale pink, green and purple.



The show opened with elegant trouser ensembles - black, satin pants paired with bolero jackets in pink as well as in emerald green.

Slim gowns followed, the diamond patterns delineated with sparkling beadwork that shimmered with movement, often worn with matching shoes and mini handbags.



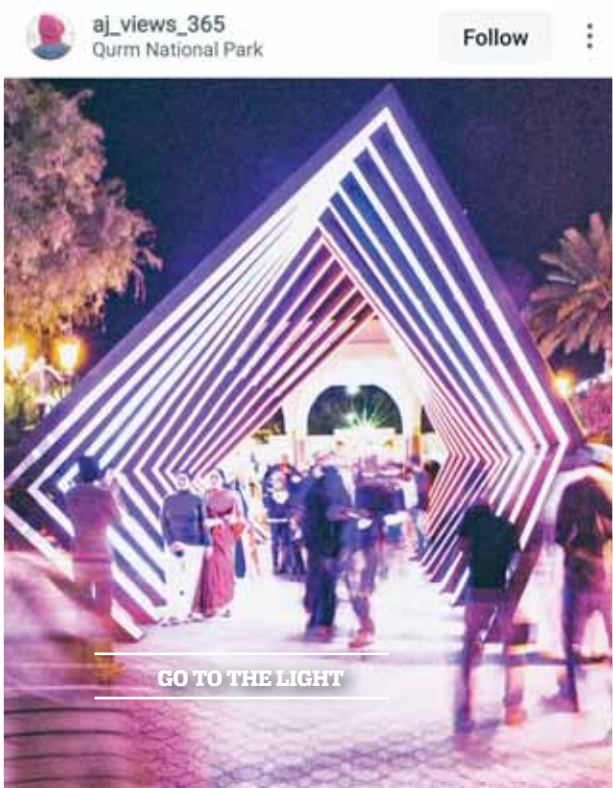
At the end of the show, the 88-year old Italian designer took his bow in a dark, velvet suit jacket and tie, waving at the crowd before exiting with one of the models.

Haute Couture Week in Paris runs through Thursday and features some of the most prestigious fashion houses, including Christian Dior, Chanel, Fendi and Jean Paul Gaultier. — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Josephine Baker and the Roaring Twenties celebrated by Dior



FROM CABARET feathers to sleek suits and velvet robes, Dior celebrated Josephine Baker and the wild freedom of the Roaring Twenties in a celeb-packed show on Monday to kick-start haute couture week in Paris.

A parade of stars were in the front row, including Anya Taylor-Joy, Kirsten Dunst, Rosamund Pike and K-Pop's Jisoo, to see Chiuru's homage to the American icon who made Paris her home and recently became the first woman of colour to gain a place in the Pantheon, where French greats are buried.

Singer, dancer, activist and member of the French Resistance, "Baker was a great artist... who used her clothes to establish herself and her position," Maria Grazia Chiuri, head designer for Dior womenswear, said ahead of the show.

Baker was a client and muse of Christian Dior himself — her athletic body and short hair representing a different femininity from the slim-waisted figure of his iconic "New Look" of the 1930s with its famous bar jacket and corolla skirt.

Baker came to Paris in 1925 to perform in the Revue Negre at the Champs-Elysees Theatre where she was expected to play up to the racial stereotypes of the day.

But rapid success freed her to radically change her look, becoming an Art Deco style icon and later embracing modern suits.

Chiuri's collection paid tribute to each of her manifestations, with feathers and silver fringes evoking her cabaret day, through the flowing sleek suits of her later style, and the more masculine suits evoking her swinging sexuality.

Baker fled France during World War II after the Nazis became (rightly) suspicious that she was helping the resistance, but she returned to Paris after its liberation and dressed in a military uniform to help the rebuilding effort.

"The images of her in uniform are extraordinary. She had an incredible awareness of what she could do with her notoriety, how to put it to the benefit of other women," said Chiuri.

The collection also took inspiration from one of Baker's contemporaries, and another friend of Dior, actor Marlene Dietrich.

Together, they "represent young women far ahead of their time," said Chiuri.

The Roaring Twenties was "a particular historical moment," she added. "Especially in Paris where women had a great deal of freedom, silhouettes were simplified, corsets disappeared. Their way of dressing was comfortable while remaining feminine and very glamorous." — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Oscar nominations: Five takeaways



THE NOMINATIONS FOR the Academy Awards were unveiled on Tuesday, with "Everything Everywhere All at Once" leading the way with 11 nods.

But as usual, the announcement stoked plenty of controversy, from the absence of female directors to the surprise inclusion of an actress from a film almost nobody has seen.

Here are five key takeaways:

#OSCARSSOMALE

No women received best director nominations this year — an absence that quickly prompted anger and claims of sexism on social media.

It has been a regular source of criticism for the Oscars over the years. Until 2021, Kathryn Bigelow ("The Hurt Locker") was the only female to ever win Hollywood's top directing prize.

But the Oscar has gone to women for the past two years, with Chloe Zhao ("Nomadland") and Jane Campion ("The Power of the Dog") appearing to finally end decades of male domination.

This year, however, strong candidates including Sarah Polley ("The Fabelmans"), Martin McDonagh ("The Banshees of Inisherin"), Todd Field ("Tar"), Ruben Ostlund ("Triangle of Sadness") and Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert ("Everything Everywhere All at Once").

'TO LESLIE'

One of the more startling nominations went to Andrea

Riseborough for "To Leslie" — a tiny independent film about a Texas single mother struggling with alcoholism who won the lottery but quickly squandered her wealth.

While her performance had been widely praised, very few people have seen the movie — it has netted a paltry \$27,322 in total, according to BoxOfficeMojo.

However, Riseborough benefited from an intense, last-minute social media campaign mounted on her behalf by celebrity friends including Edward Norton, Gwyneth Paltrow and Sarah Paulson.

'FABELMANS' SURPRISE

Few doubted that Spielberg's semi-autobiographical drama "The Fabelmans" would land a best supporting actor nomination, with Paul Dano receiving widespread acclaim for his portrayal of the director's father.

But instead Academy voters cast ballots for 87-year-old Judd Hirsch, who appears in the film for less than 10 minutes.

Hirsch plays a cantankerous and highly eccentric great-uncle who shows up unexpectedly to offer a young Spielberg advice about pursuing his filmmaking dreams.

The Academy has previous form in rewarding brief cameos with golden statuettes, including Judi Dench "for Shakespeare in Love" and Beatrice Straight for barely five minutes in "Network."

'RRR'

Despite not being submitted as India's official Oscars pick, the unapologetically over-the-top action film "RRR" has built grassroots support to become a hugely popular favourite in Hollywood in recent months.

Fans include "Avatar" director James Cameron, who was seen praising its director S S Rajamouli in a recent video that went viral on social media, prompting hopes the film could land a best picture Oscar nomination.

While that did not happen, its catchy musical number "Naatu Naatu" was nominated for best original song.

The film that India instead submitted for best international feature, "Last Film Show," failed to land a nomination.

"No shade to the movie they did choose, which is actually very good, but 'RRR' was a slam dunk," Variety senior awards editor Clayton Davis said.

RIHANNA V GAGA

With award show television ratings plummeting in recent years, Oscars producers will be keen to ensure some of showbiz's biggest names attend the ceremony in March.

No category is more star-studded than best original song, which features Lady Gaga, Rihanna and David Byrne.

Gaga sang "Hold My Hand" in "Top Gun: Maverick," Rihanna performed "Lift Me Up" in superhero sequel "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," and Talking Heads frontman Byrne penned "This Is A Life" from "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

The category is rounded out by M M Keeravaani's "Naatu Naatu" and "Applause" by Diane Warren.

Warren has now been nominated an astonishing 14 times without winning best original song — although she did receive an honorary Academy Award last year for a song-writing career including Aerosmith's "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing" — AFP

MUSIC

Award-winning US saxophonist heads to Cuba for rare collaborative performance



GRAMMY-WINNING US jazz saxophonist-composer Ted Nash travelled to Cuba this week to perform with fellow musicians from the Caribbean island nation, part of a week-long celebration of jazz in the Cuban capital of Havana.

Nash, one of the United States' best-known contemporary jazz performers, will lead a project called Jazz X. He and several Cuban musicians will compose new works inspired by visual art in Cuba's National Museum of Fine Arts, then present them together to the public in several sessions.

Well-known Cuban musicians Alejandro Falcón, Arnulfo Guerra y Ruy López Nussa will perform alongside Nash.

The project, Nash said, brings together musicians from the two countries, and art of different forms, in a fusion of creativity across cultures and mediums.

"For me, there is no better time to talk about collaboration than the present," Nash said.

Nash said the project is not political, but any collaboration between citizens of the United States and Cuba, neighbours at odds since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, raises eyebrows.

The US economic embargo on Cuba has for decades restricted most travel and official collaboration between the two countries.

Music has long defied the odds, forming a cultural bridge between the countries regardless of political relations. Afro-Cuban rhythms like the habanera have fed into Afro-American music as early as the 19th century.

Havana's jazz festival has long featured US musicians and attracted US visitors under exceptions to the travel embargo for educational visits.

Nash said he hopes his visit continues that tradition and inspires fresh ideas and music, but also, further opening between the two countries.

"If this project, can teach the world, that people want to be together... and that the walls and fences we put between us, have nothing to do with music and people... that's fantastic," he said. — Reuters

art & life

Local Scene

THURSDAY | JANUARY 26 | 2023

The Heritage Village remains at the heart of Muscat Nights

By Yeru Ebuen

The four different locations of Muscat Nights offer plenty of entertainment. Visiting two of these locations and seeing clips on social media proved that every location is unique, each offering a plethora of fun and entertainment all connected under the banner of the reformatting and truly missed Muscat Festival.

While Qurum Park, the Oman Automobile Association venue and The Carnival at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre offer international flavours showcasing nightly a range of musical shows and costumed performers roaming the grounds, the Heritage Village at Naseem Park in Barka has a strong pull and unique than the three other locations. Visiting Naseem Park on its first weekend, there were long queues everywhere and it took nearly 15 minutes before we could get a ticket.

Naseem Park shares a few characteristics with the other venues. There are sections for food. There is a massive stage dedicated to musical performances with big screens where even people from far distances can still see the action happening on stage. There are fairy lights almost everywhere and the park is so wide that a pair of good shoes is necessary.

One section is dedicated to pony and horse riding and there are also corners dedicated to children's rides.

Unlike the other parks, Naseem Park has one specific corner for halwa makers. Here, the air is thick with delicious-smelling smoke as dozens of people line up to both watch as the halwa is being made and to purchase the different versions available at the display area.

Nearly a hundred steps away, the huge banner of the Heritage Village calls out to visitors. Right in the middle of the square is a man-made pond, a lever constantly moving as the water flows through it. There was a tiny bridge in the middle of the pond and seated at the front side of this pond are fishermen tending to their fishing gears — from simple fishing nets to the more elaborate contraption used to catch crabs and other sea creatures.

On the right side near the entrance, a group of performers gather. It is here where traditional folk songs and dances are performed. There are a set of drummers masterfully tapping into their instruments and amidst the chaos is the loud melody of a bagpipe. Performances are usually scheduled and with every beat of the drum, the singing and the dancing later on follow. The loud, thunderous voices of the men performers can be heard throughout the whole square.

Next to this are a collection of traditional Omani women's dresses strategically placed on an elevated platform showcasing fashion from different areas of Oman — from the elaborate dresses of Al Batinah and Sharqiyah to the intricate traditional articles of clothing of Salalah and other areas.

Traditional games are being played right beside this small clothing museum and a small souq displaying traditional crafts is receiving inquiries from left and right.

At the very far corner of the square is my favourite — the section for traditional food. Although the area dedicated to traditional food was small, it was as diverse as it can get. Women are selling my favourite luqaimat beside another seller who sells the wafer-thin Omani bread usually complemented with cheese, Chips Oman and usually drizzled with honey. Some sell dingo (boiled chickpeas) and a few more were hard to get to because of the long lines of patrons trying to get their fill.

There's a space for bukhoor and frankincense sellers, for traditional crafts including khanjars, silver accessories and canes and even products from the Bedus including traditional mats, rose oil, henna and kohl. It was a beautiful small souq filled with a collection of proudly Omani products.

There are open majlis areas where people can take photos as souvenirs.

The Heritage Village is an amalgam of different nationalities. While there was a huge number of locals visiting, there was also an equal interest from the expat communities. Throughout the nearly one hour we spent there, people kept on coming and it was the kind of fun vibe you would not want to miss.

For many expats, the Heritage Village is the perfect place to get to know Oman. It brings a sense of nostalgia both to citizens and residents alike. It's a place for discovery and rediscovery and floating doesn't boast magical beings or unicorns and enhanced lighted creatures, it is a magical place all the same filled with things that made everyone fall in love with Oman.

At the heart of Muscat Nights is to create a fun, entertaining environment where the people of Oman can enjoy when the embrace of an amazing temperature makes it ideal to go out at night. The Heritage Village is the soul of this whole event, one that needed to be always included and enhanced and ultimately elevated so that it too can become an attraction worthy of international recognition and presentation.