

Manah Public Park inaugurated

At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Tuesday opened Manah Public Park in the Wilayat of Manah. The opening coincides with the Royal presence of His Majesty the Sultan in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The park was set up as per the Royal orders of the late Sultan Qaboos. SEE P6





HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN ADDRESSES THE NATION ON 11TH OF JANUARY ANNIVERSARY

YOUTH THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION

MANAH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday gave a speech on the occasion of the day on which he assumed the reins of power in the country, the 11th of January, reading as follows:

“Almighty Allah. Thanks be to You for bringing back this blessed occasion at a time when our march of development is forging ahead and our Renaissance Renewed and deriving impetus from a glorious history. It is anticipating the future with strong will based on the solidarity of its citizens.

LOYAL PEOPLE OF OMAN,

To safeguard our gains and the accomplishments made on this benign land and, to establish a prosperous future for our young generation in all parts of this country, we will spare no effort in utilising all means to realize the objective.

We are confident that you all perceive the volume of challenges that we have been through, that we have tackled with tact and patience, and then, with the Almighty’s divine support, proceeded with the implementation of our social and economic plans and programmes, guided by Oman Vision 2040. Our economic and fiscal performance has improved, and we started to accomplish for you and with you the march of growth and prosperity.

Sustaining the State’s ability to meet its financial obligations has been the prime aim of the current stage. We feel satisfied with the positive change in fiscal performance which, thanks be to the Almighty Allah, has improved fairly well.

This has been further consolidated by the expansion in economic stimulus policies and the establishment of a social protection scheme catering to the welfare

HM EXPRESSES SATISFACTION WITH THE POSITIVE CHANGE IN THE ECONOMY AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF OMANI JOB-SEEKERS

HM CALLS UPON CITIZENS TO ADHERE TO THE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES EMANATING FROM OMAN’S GLORIOUS HISTORY

of citizens, thus giving this improvement a humanitarian dimension.

DEAR CITIZENS,

We have placed youth at the forefront of our government’s concerns. We have followed up the efforts made to engage youth in the nation-building process. We will ensure that this partnership is more comprehensive and more effective. The State’s institutions and officials are endorsing a sustainable course of action focusing on highlighting the salient contributions of youth in this auspicious march and organising their roles in serving society.

We are impressed by the achievements made in the field of recruitment during this year, which saw the employment of a good number of Omani job-seekers, despite the difficulty of this stage. We

look forward with hope, combined with determination, that all sectors of the State and the private sector will play the role expected of them in promoting employment, being the cornerstone of the economy and development. The aim is to provide jobs for our qualified sons and daughters and to qualify those who require to gain the necessary skills to join the labour market.

As for our sons and daughters from among entrepreneurs who wish to establish their private projects, we are resolved to lend them our support and encourage their entrepreneurship programmes.

We will offer necessary support and incentives to small and medium enterprises, given their vital role in stimulating economic activity and employment opportunities.

HM greeted on 11th of January Anniversary

Royal Academy for Administration

HM confers Royal Commendation medals



His Majesty addresses the nation on 11th of January Anniversary

1

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Sustaining the State's ability to meet its financial obligations has been the prime aim of the current stage. We feel satisfied with the positive change in fiscal performance which has improved fairly well

4

We are confident that you understand the volume of challenges we have been through, that we have dealt with wisely and patiently, and moved forward in achieving our economic and social programmes with the help of God, guided by Oman Vision 2040. Our economic situation has improved and we are continuing the march of growth and prosperity with you

5

Local investment constitutes one of the basic pillars of diversification of the national income. After we launched a set of national programmes and furnished proper suitable grounds, we hereby urge all to invest funds locally

6

Over the next stage of the Renewed Renaissance, we will take action to transform government performance from the level of emergency solutions to a more sustainable level having a set of lasting and comprehensive solutions that place economic growth, fiscal sustainability and social welfare at the forefront of its priorities

7

The government will unleash all its efforts and capacities to serve cooperation and integration that ensure channelling development to the governorates

8

Based on our keenness to provide maximum levels of protection and care for citizens and residents, we hereby direct the government to speed up the rate of support and development of the early warning system and to endorse the best urban planning schemes to curb the impact of such climatic conditions

9

We salute the armed and security services for the honourable national roles they have undertaken in protecting the nation and defending its interests and sovereignty, at every time and place, willing to offer their lives in sacrifice for every inch of this dear homeland

10

Let's take pride in our identity and the core essence of our personality, while at the same time opening up to the world in a balanced and objective manner and in a positive stance that does not compromise our originality or identity or make us lose or forget either of them

11

Elevating Oman to the higher strata of progress that it deserves is a national duty and an immense responsibility to be shouldered by each and every citizen

FROM PAGE 1

LOYAL PEOPLE OF OMAN,
Local investment constitutes one of the basic pillars of diversification of the national income. After we launched a set of national programmes and furnished proper suitable grounds, we hereby urge all to invest funds locally. We have lucrative investment opportunities at hand in all fields and we look forward to seeing our country a destination for pioneering investments, notably in spheres that consolidate our approach to expand the volume of the national economy and diversify the sources of income.

Our country, thanks be to the Almighty Allah, boasts a wide range of competitive incentives, great potentials

and promising opportunities that need to be utilised. The government will unleash all its efforts and capacities to serve cooperation and integration that ensure channelling development to the governorates. They will enhance their preparedness for investment and develop their local role based on the comparative advantage of each governorate in a manner that creates development models. This will be substantiated by a set of strategic goals to be executed by the government within the context of five-year plans. Thus, the march of development can be perfected and empowered to cover all parts of this dear homeland.

Over the next stage of the Renewed Renaissance, we will take action to transform government performance from the level of emergency solutions

to a more sustainable level having a set of lasting and comprehensive solutions that place economic growth, fiscal sustainability and social welfare at the forefront of its priorities.

DEAR CITIZENS,
It was the Almighty Allah's will that our country was subjected to adverse climatic conditions. Based on our keenness to provide maximum levels of protection and care for citizens and residents, we hereby direct the government to speed up the rate of support and development of the early warning system and to endorse the best urban planning schemes to curb the impact of such climatic conditions.

DEAR CITIZENS,
Elevating Oman to the higher strata of

progress that it deserves is a national duty and an immense responsibility to be shouldered by each and every citizen.

We hereby urge all our sons and daughters to stick to the values and principles emanating from our glorious history. Let's take pride in our identity and the core essence of our personality, while at the same time opening up to the world in a balanced and objective manner and in a positive stance that does not compromise our originality or identity or make us lose or forget either of them.

LOYAL CITIZENS OF OMAN,
The sincere national efforts have always been the object of our appreciation and pride. In this context, we would like to register an expression

of commendation for our military and security services. We salute them for the honourable national roles they have undertaken in protecting the nation and defending its interests and sovereignty, at every time and place, willing to offer their lives in sacrifice for every inch of this dear homeland. To you, armed and security services, we proclaim our deep thanks and praise for your valuable contribution towards building the dear homeland and elevating its status. We pray to the Almighty Allah to lend us all support to bear this great responsibility. We pray to Him to grant us success to realise the good of the nation and its citizens.

May the Almighty Allah protect Oman. May He protect you all, loyal citizens of Oman!" — ONA



Decree establishes Royal Academy for Administration

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued a Royal Decree No 2/2022, on the establishment of the Royal Academy for Administration, determining its competences and approving its organisational structure.

Article (1) stipulates that an academy to be named “Royal Academy for Administration” shall be established and that it shall have a legal identity and enjoy financial and administrative autonomy.

Article (2) states that the Royal Academy for Administration shall come under the honorary patronage of His Majesty the Sultan.

Article (3) states that the Royal Academy for Administration shall have its headquarters in the Governorate of Muscat and that, with a decision from the board of trustees, the academy may have branches in other governorates.

Article (4) determines the competences of the Royal Academy for Administration as per annex No 1 attached to this decree.

Article (5) approves the organisational structure of the Royal Academy for Administration as per annex No 2 attached to this decree.

Article (6) states that, as an exemption from the

system (law) of the State Administrative Apparatus promulgated by Royal Decree No 75/2020, the Royal Academy for Administration shall have a board of trustees under the chairmanship of the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court. The Council of Ministers shall issue a decision appointing members of board of trustees and determining the duration of their membership.

The board of trustees shall have the same powers assigned to boards of directors of public entities cited in the State’s Administrative Apparatus System.

Article (7) states that the Royal Academy for Administration shall have a chairman with the Special Grade and that the chairman shall be appointed under a Royal decree.

The Chairman shall have the powers assigned to a Head of Unit cited in all laws and Royal decrees. The Chairman attends all meetings of boards of trustees without having a counted vote as stated in the aforementioned State’s Administrative Apparatus System.

Article (8) states that all allocations, rights, obligations and assets of the Institute of Public Administration and

the Institute of Capability Development at the Diwan of Royal Court shall be transferred to the Royal Academy for Administration.

Article (9) states that all employees of the Institute of Public Administration and the Institute of Capability Development at the Diwan of Royal Court shall be transferred to the Royal Academy for Administration, along with their financial grades.

Article (10) says that Chairman of the board of trustees of the Royal Academy for Administration shall issue regulations/bylaws and

decisions necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this decree. Till such time, the existing regulations, bylaws and decisions shall continue to be enforced without prejudice to the provisions of this decree.

Article (11) cancels the Institute of Public Administration and the Institute of Capability Development at the Diwan of Royal Court, as well as all that contradicts this decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (12) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced on its date of issue.

— ONA

Royal Academy for Administration aligns with needs of Oman Vision 2040

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued a Royal decree establishing the Royal Academy for Administration (RAA) under the honorary patronage of His Majesty the Sultan.

Sayyid Hilal bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy for Administration, said that the establishment of the RAA stems from His Majesty’s keenness on developing human resources and aligns with the requirements of Oman Vision 2040.

“It is a manifestation of Royal objectives of coaching Omani cadres to perform their role in serving the national economy and managing its resources at the level of public and private sectors. The RAA is envisaged to be an international edifice tasked with developing modern methodologies in line with



basics of competitiveness and innovation,” said Al Busaidy.

He added that the RAA functions three broad lines, which are Oman Vision 2040, the future needs of the new Omani economy and the employment of modern learning methods, notably Blended Learning.

Al Busaidy affirmed that the programmes and initiatives that will be launched by the RAA will endorse the 2040

Administrative Capabilities Framework, which defines the skills required for the long-term vision. The RAA will make use of its connections with global institutions, take the latest methodologies and apply them in accordance with the Sultanate of Oman’s needs, he said.

The RAA will introduce applied studies to help develop the most modern intellectual content and enrich the repertory of public sector resources with the prime aim of instilling a culture of productivity and innovation, Al Busaidy explained.

The RAA will design specialised programmes for the development of the skills of employees in governorates. The academy will also enable its trainees to access digital educational platforms, electronic libraries and other digital resources. — ONA

Treasury bills worth RO 313m tendered

MUSCAT: A tender of government treasury bills, issue number 553, worth RO 313 million was announced this week.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting

and repurchase facilities (Repo). The results of the said issue are as follows: The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO 313 million, for a maturity period of 91 days, from January 12, 2022 until April 13, 2022. The average accepted price reached 99.821 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.820 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.71781 per cent and 0.71910 per cent,

respectively. The interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with CBO is 0.75 per cent.

Furthermore, the treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

— ONA

HM receives written message from Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The message deals with bilateral relations and

cooperation, and means of promoting them between the two countries and their peoples.

The message was delivered to Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received here on Tuesday Mohammed bin Sultan al Suwaidi, UAE Ambassador to the Sultanate

of Oman.

During the meeting, the UAE Ambassador conveyed greetings and best wishes of Shaikh Mohammed to His Majesty the Sultan. On his turn, Sayyid Badr asked the Ambassador to convey His Majesty’s greetings and best wishes to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed and the UAE people.



We extend our sincere greetings and felicitations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman on the anniversary of
His Majesty’s accession to the throne.





HIS MAJESTY GRANTS ROYAL COMMENDATION ORDER TO OMANI PERSONALITIES



Prof Sabah bint Ahmed al Sulaiman



Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saadi



Prof Khalifa bin Saif al Jabri



Shaikh Suhail bin Salim al Mukhaini's son Shaikh Ahmed

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday granted the Order of Royal Commendation, 2nd Class, to some Omani personalities in recognition of their scientific and research achievements, as well as their societal contributions.

The orders were handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, when he received them in his office on Tuesday.

The orders were conferred to:

- Prof Sabah bint Ahmed al Sulaiman, in the fields of research, innovation and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).
- Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saadi, in the fields of research, innovation and the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).
- Prof Khalifa bin Saif al Jabri, in the field of health.
- Shaikh Suhail bin Salim al Mukhaini, in the fields of civil initiatives, social responsibility, economy, labour market

and recruitment. On his behalf, the order was received by his son Shaikh Ahmed bin Suhail al Mukhaini.

- Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Barwani, in the fields of labour market, recruitment and economy.
- Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari, in the fields of environment and natural resources (food security).
- Hareb bin Abdullah al Kitani, in the fields of environment and natural resources (liquefied gas).
- Hunaina bint Sultan al Mughairiyah, in the fields of administrative and institutional development (diplomatic work).

During the meeting, Sayyid Khalid affirmed that the orders were granted by His Majesty in appreciation of their efforts. He wished them continuous success in their current and future endeavours in serving the homeland. — ONA



Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Barwani



Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari



Hareb bin Abdullah al Kitani



Hunaina bint Sultan al Mughairiyah



HM greeted on 11th of January Anniversary

Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received greetings from His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on the 11th of January Anniversary, the day when His Majesty assumed reign of power, reading as follows:

“Your Majesty, May the Almighty Allah protect you.

On the second anniversary of the day on which Your Majesty assumed the reins of power in the country, I am greatly honoured to greet Your Majesty on my own behalf and on behalf of the Council of Ministers, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect Your Majesty and grant you good health, happiness and long life.

The Sultanate of Oman, under Your Majesty’s wise leadership and by the will of its people, is pressing ahead with firm resolve to safeguard the accomplishments



made in all economic and social spheres. It is exerting sincere efforts to consolidate the march of comprehensive and sustainable development aimed to secure a decent life for citizens in a stable, forward-looking society where equality in rights and duties prevails.

We pray to the Almighty Allah to assist Your Majesty with success to continue the benign march of progress and prosperity.”

Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday received greetings from His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, on the 11th of January Anniversary, the day when His Majesty assumed reins of power, reading as follows:

“Your Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, may the Almighty Allah protect you.

On this anniversary of the 11th of January, the day when Your Majesty assumed the reins of power in the country, Oman is witnessing an immersive spirit of happiness that prevails everywhere. A new era unfolds within the purviews of



a Renewed Renaissance envisaging a bright future of progress and prosperity. On this auspicious national occasion, I am honoured to greet Your Majesty on behalf of myself and on behalf of all personnel of your Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence, praying to the Almighty Allah to endow Your Majesty with good health and happiness and to make Oman an oasis of peace and prosperity.

Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received greetings from Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, on the 11th of January Anniversary, reading as follows:

Your Majesty, As the happy anniversary of Your Majesty’s accession to power in the country arrives, I am honoured and so are the staff of the Diwan of Royal Court, to extend to Your Majesty our sincerest greetings on this blessed and auspicious occasion, praying to Allah Almighty to bestow upon Your Majesty abundant blessings, and to return this occasion



and similar ones while you are enjoying good health and well-being.

Your Majesty, The day Your Majesty assumed the reins in the Sultanate of Oman embodies an extension of Oman’s glorious history and its happy bright present. This day heralds God’s help and success in a promising future for comprehensive development and lasting glory.

Gen Sultan Mohammed al Numani

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received greetings from Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister the Royal Office, Head of the Office of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, on the 11th of January Anniversary, reading as follows:

Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik,

It gives me pleasure on this gracious day to extend my sincerest greetings to Your Majesty.

This proud homeland



has always had a place among nations, and the historical and civilisational evidence in the land of Oman and abroad attests to this and confirms the roles and contributions that emerged from this good

land and yielded goodness and righteousness.

Your Majesty, you continue to spread peace and wisdom all over the world and with your visits strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and friendship as per that is vouched for by those in far and near.

Your Majesty, you inspire your loyal sons to reserve all the remarkable Omani gains, and work on the making of the bright future under your leadership and according to your wise directives.

Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday received greetings from Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on the 11th of January Anniversary, the day when His Majesty assumed reins of power, reading as follows:

Your Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik,

On my own behalf and on behalf of the honourable members and employees of the State Council, we have the honour to

extend to Your Majesty our sincere greetings on the second anniversary of Your Majesty’s accession to the throne, expressing our loyalty to Your Majesty, emphasising our commitment to your approach and following your directives and making every effort to enhance the contributions of the State Council to achieve the objectives of development.

Your Majesty, As we are pleased to express to Your Majesty our pride and honour



on this glorious national occasion, we express our greetings to Your Majesty praying to Allah Almighty to guide and support you and preserve you as an asset and pride for the nation and a haven

for your people and as a leader of its renewed Renaissance. We, at the same time express our full confidence that the approach that Your Majesty had announced in the Royal speech on the day you assumed the throne and the legislations and structural amendments that you issued afterwards, will push the wheel of development forward with God’s help and support and with your firm determination and care.

Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali

His Majesty the Sultan received greetings from Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura, reading as follows:

Your Majesty,

It is my honour on my own behalf and on behalf of the members of Majlis Ashshura employees of General Secretariat, to convey to Your Majesty our sincerest greetings and on the second anniversary of Your Majesty’s accession to the throne, praying to Allah Almighty to protect Your Majesty and return the occasion while you enjoy good health and well-being.

Your Majesty,

Your Majesty’s Royal meetings with your people and listening to their aspirations and hopes have delighted the souls of your sons and filled their hearts with pride. What



Your Majesty has established of a constructive shura (consultation) and dialogue as well as your wise directives and close follow-up to your loyal people, stem from Your Majesty’s attention to your people and your lofty will to anticipate the future with determination to achieve the noble goals and objectives that serve stability, security, and a dignified life for the people of this dear country.

Lt Gen Hassan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi

His Majesty the Sultan received greetings from Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector-General of Police and Customs as follows:

Your Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, on the occasion of the 11th of January, the day when Your Majesty assumed reins of power, It’s my honour and on behalf of the ROP affiliates to extend our sincere greetings and best wishes to Your Majesty, praying to Allah Almighty to return the occasion while Your Majesty enjoy happiness and well-being and the Sultanate of Oman and its people bounties.

Your Majesty, your sons



affiliates of ROP, while enjoying God’s bounties in their homeland, are aware about the importance of preserving the achievements.

They stay vigil to deliver their pledge to undertake the trust, taking Your Majesty as an example of diligent and sincere work so that the Sultanate of Oman remains as an oasis for all people living in it.

Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali

His Majesty the Sultan received greetings from Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service (ISS), reading as follows:

Your Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik,

It’s my honour to extend to Your Majesty the greetings of your faithful apparatus on the occasion of the second anniversary of Your Majesty’s

accession to the throne, beseeching Allah Almighty to grant Your Majesty great care and to make you blessed wherever you go and to return this auspicious occasion and similar ones while Your Majesty has achieved your noble goals and paved the way of further prosperity and development for the nation.

Your Majesty,



Allah Almighty has endowed the Sultanate of Oman with high honour

and lofty status and it has always been the abode of peace and harmony and the home of great leaders. The past two years have seen exceptional events and you have faced great challenges with a wise vision. You have successfully converted these challenges to an inspiring start to the building of the state, organising its public affairs.



Sultan Qaboos University

ANNOUNCEMENT

Selling used computers and their accessories in sealed envelopes

Sultan Qaboos University announces its desire to sell used computers and their accessories in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used computers and their accessories in auction stores and receive the bidding form on Sunday and Monday, 16-17/01/2022, from 03:00 to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) OMR in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the items, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used computers and their accessories and putting the envelope in the bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Wednesday and Thursday, 19-20/01/2022 from 08:00 am to 02:00 pm.
- The devices are sold in their current condition, and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold items if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) OMR will be imposed for each day after 23/01/2022.

Note:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through Visa Card.
- Commitment to Precautionary measures and wearing a mask and only one person is allowed to enter the auction's location with the buyer.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact 95721637.





AT HIS MAJESTY’S BEHEST

Interior Minister opens Manah Public Park

MANAH: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Tuesday opened Manah Public Park in the Wilayat of Manah. The opening coincides with the Royal presence of His Majesty the

Sultan in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The park was set up as per the Royal orders of the late Sultan Qaboos. Locals of Manah and the neighbouring wilayats can benefit from the park, which also serves

as a haven for travellers on Nizwa-Thumrait road. The park is built on a space of 120,000 square metres and includes several facilities and amenities, such as four open theatres. Two of the theatres have a capacity of 500 people each,

which makes them suitable to hold events. Green landscapes occupy approximately 45,000 square metres of the park’s space. In addition, over 130 palm trees, 800 saplings of flowers and various ornamental trees were planted.

The park also contains shaded nurseries on a space of 800 square metres. As per the royal orders, the management of the park shall come under the purview of the Al Dakhiliyah Governor’s Office. The opening ceremony was

attended by the Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, the Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, Walis of Manah and Adam, as well as shaiks and members of the Municipal Council of the two wilayats. — ONA

Chief of Bahrain Defence Force received

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za’abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Lt Gen Theyab Saqr al Nuaimi, Chief of Bahrain Defence Force (BDF), and his accompanying military delegation. The two sides exchanged viewpoints and discussed several matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and a number of senior SAF officers. Separately, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi



received Lt Gen Theyab Saqr al Nuaimi and his accompanying military delegation at Muaskar Al Murtafaa. The two sides exchanged viewpoints and discussed several military matters of common interest. The meeting was attended

by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Manthri, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and a number of senior COSAF officers. — ONA



ONA chairs FANA General Assembly

RIYADH: Oman News Agency (ONA) chaired the 48th conference of the General Assembly of the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA), which began here on Tuesday. Chairmen of the new agencies expressed their thanks and appreciation to ONA for the

sincere efforts it exerted while chairing the previous term. ONA strived to promote the level of cooperation among the member news agencies. During the meeting, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Saudi Press Agency was elected as a president of

FANA for the new term. The two-day conference discusses means of enhancing media performance of the member news agencies at the regional and international levels, as well as reviewing FANA’s activities during last year and its agenda for this year. — ONA

Information Ministry officially launches Ayn platform

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information on Tuesday celebrated the official launch of Ayn platform, which is considered the largest Omani audiovisual content outlet. This project comes to keep pace with the tremendous developments in the media in terms of content, model and technology. The platform presents the Sultanate of Oman’s civilisation through its history, present and future to broaden the prospects and influence of the media’s message. A statement was issued on this occasion by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, during which he said that the launch of this platform coincides with the Sultanate of Oman’s celebrations of the 11th of



January anniversary, the day when His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik assumed reins of power as the architect of Oman’s Renewed Renaissance. This move comes to keep pace with the digital transformation within the goals of Oman Vision 2040, affirmed Dr Abdullah. He added, “Ayn platform

represents a complete shift in the field of modern electronic media services that are based on high efficiency. The platform increases the Omani presence in various electronic mediums. It also sheds light on national achievements. The platform, through its website and smart devices application, offers a unique experience, which is more fun and easy to use.” Ayn’s library contains a huge collection of audiovisual content produced by Oman’s radio and television over a span of decades. The Ministry of Information invites all people to use the platform by downloading the Ayn app on their smart devices or through the website to give feedback that will contribute to developing and enhancing the provided services. — ONA

Surge in Covid-19 infections

KABEER YOUSUF
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For the first time since July 19, 2021, the number of new infections exceeded 600 in the country. The Ministry of Health reported 609 cases of coronavirus on Monday. No death was reported, and the recovery rate showed slight improvement as 91 patients left hospitals after successfully recovering from the virus infection. Currently, 3,059 are sick with the virus, while six are admitted to the ICUs. With 14 new admissions,

there are 40 new admissions in various hospitals. The country’s total number of Covid-19 testing reached 571,472 since the first virus case was reported in the Sultanate of Oman on February 24, 2020. According to the MoH statistics, Sultanate of Oman recorded 308,262 cases till Tuesday, comprising 215,081 men and 93,180 females. The total recovery reached 301,083, while 4,119 deaths occurred due to coronavirus. Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has sounded caution, saying overall

risk related to Omicron remains very high for a number of reasons. “First, the global risk of Covid-19 remains very high overall. Secondly, current data indicate that Omicron has a significant growth advantage over Delta, leading to rapid spread in the community. The rapid increase in cases will lead to an increase in hospitalisations, may pose overwhelming demands on healthcare systems and lead to significant morbidity, particularly in vulnerable populations,” a regional press statement from the WHO said.



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In brief

■ BERLIN



NEW MINISTER SET FOR CLIMATE POLICY PUSH

Germany's new Economy and Climate Action Minister, Robert Habeck, said that the country had to make up for a 'considerable backlog' in climate change policy at all levels. The co-leader of the Green party, which came into government as part of a three-way coalition in December, said that without far-reaching counter-measures, Germany would significantly miss its climate targets in 2030. "We must become more efficient and faster in the coming years. The pace and consistency must increase", Habeck said, as he presented a climate change "balance sheet" that will frame numerous policy initiatives in the coming months and years.

"If we continue on the path of the measures we have taken so far, we will see the target shortfall even more clearly in 2030", Habeck told reporters. The task is "gigantic", he said. — dpa

■ GENEVA



UN TO SPEND \$5.1 BN ON AID FOR AFGHANISTAN

UN aid for Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries will cost at least \$5.1 billion this year, according to a key UN agency. The UN Office for Emergency Relief (OCHA) announced in Geneva that this is the largest humanitarian appeal the United Nations has ever made for a country. "Without support, tens of thousands of children risk dying from malnutrition because the most basic health services have collapsed", OCHA said. According to UN figures, 4.7 million people in Afghanistan are expected to suffer from severe malnutrition this year, including 3.9 million children. Without additional aid, 131,000 children are at risk of starvation, it said. "A huge humanitarian disaster is looming", said UN emergency relief coordinator Martin Griffiths. Such appeals for donations are primarily directed at governments and foundations. — dpa

■ NEW DELHI



OMICRON SHUTS OFFICES AND EATERIES

New Delhi ordered the closure of non-essential offices and restaurants and bars but offered free online yoga classes to those in home isolation, as Covid cases soared in the Indian capital and nationwide. With case numbers rising six-fold over the past week, the Indian government is terrified of a repeat of last year when thousands died of the virus everyday and the health system teetered on the brink of collapse. While stopping short of a full lockdown, authorities have steadily increased restrictions nationwide and capacity at private offices and eateries in the capital was already restricted to 50 per cent. But those in home isolation can take free online yoga classes, with Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying that it would help patients "boost their immunity and attain mental and spiritual peace". — AFP

Troops to quit Kazakhstan, says president

NUR-SULTAN: Russian-led forces will begin withdrawing from Kazakhstan in two days' time after stabilising the Central Asian nation following serious unrest, the president said on Tuesday, in a speech that took aim at wealthy associates of his predecessor.

In a video call with parliament after putting down what he has called an attempted coup, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev appointed a new government headed by career public servant Alikhan Smailov.

In what looked like his latest attempt to distance himself from his predecessor, Tokayev said that public discontent over income inequality was justified and that he wanted associates of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the ex-president, to share their wealth.

Many Central Asia analysts believe intra-clan infighting among the elite may have played a major role in what was the deadliest violence in the ex-Soviet republic's 30 years of independence from Moscow.

As protesters torched buildings in the biggest city Almaty last week, Tokayev said former leader Nazarbayev was leaving his post as head of the powerful Security Council — where he had continued



A general view of a burnt-out Almaty City Administration building in central Almaty, following violent protests over the price increase of the fuel. — AFP

to pull the strings despite handing over the presidency in 2019.

Nazarbayev, 81, who ran the country for almost three decades and backed Tokayev as his successor, has not made a public appearance since.

Thanks to Nazarbayev, "a group of very profitable companies emerged in the country as well as a group of people wealthy even by

international standards", Tokayev told parliament.

"I think it is time they pay their dues to the people of Kazakhstan and help them on a systemic and regular basis."

He gave no names, but the list of Kazakhstan's richest people includes several members of Nazarbayev's extended family, including his daughter Dinara with

her husband, and a father-in-law of the ex-president's late grandson.

Tokayev said the financial system was dominated by large business groups "based on the principle 'everything for friends, and laws for everyone else'".

He spoke of initiatives to narrow the wealth gap, raise taxes on the mining sector, and eliminate irregularities in state procurement



Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev attends a session of parliament via a video link in Nur-Sultan. — Reuters

and areas where associates of Nazarbayev have business interests.

Tokayev also rounded on security officials, accusing them of abandoning their posts and letting protesters capture weapons and sensitive documents.

He has blamed the violence on foreign-trained fighters and "terrorists".

He said on Tuesday that the National Security Committee, the Kazakh successor to the Soviet KGB, had not only missed the looming threat, but had failed to act properly during the unrest. In some cities its officials had abandoned buildings and left behind firearms and classified documents, he said. — Reuters

■ BLAZE DESTROYS HOUSES



Aerial view of a fire that affected the 'Laguna Verde' camp at the hills of the city of Iquique, Chile. Around 100 houses were consumed by the fire. The lack of water due to being irregular constructions facilitated the spread of the fire. — AFP

N Korea launches 'more advanced' missile

SEOUL: North Korea appeared to test-fire a ballistic missile on Tuesday that may be more advanced than a "hypersonic" one it launched less than a week ago, South Korea's military said, as Pyongyang pursues increasingly powerful weapons.

Tuesday's launch, condemned by authorities in Washington and Tokyo, underscored leader Kim Jong Un's New Year's vow to bolster the military with cutting-edge technology at a time when talks with South Korea and the United States have stalled.

Initial estimates found the missile travelled more than 700 km to a maximum altitude of 60 km at up to 10 times the speed of sound (12,348 kmh/), South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.

"We assess that this is more advanced than the missile North

Japanese prime minister says repeated tests by North Korea 'extremely regrettable'

Korea fired on January 5, though South Korean and US intelligence authorities are conducting detailed analysis", the JCS said.

The launch was detected around 7:27 am from North Korea's Jagang Province towards the ocean off its east coast, the same location as last week's test.

North Korea has joined a global race in developing hypersonic missiles, usually defined as reaching at least five times the speed of sound — or about 6,200 kms per hour — and can manoeuvre at relatively low trajectories, making them much harder to detect and intercept.

Last week, South Korean military officials cast doubts on the capabilities of the hypersonic missile North Korea claimed to have test-fired on Wednesday, saying it appeared to represent limited progress over Pyongyang's existing ballistic missiles.

"Today's test might be intended to send a message to the South after authorities here said the earlier test was a failure and did not involve a hypersonic missile", Kim Dong-Yup, a former South Korea Navy officer who now teaches at Seoul's Kyungnam University.

South Korea's National Security Council held an emergency meeting and President Moon Jae-In later expressed concerns over the series of launches coming ahead of the March 9 presidential election in South Korea, his office said. — Reuters

Russia-Ukraine stand-off move to Nato for talks

BRUSSELS: The United States briefed its western allies on Tuesday ahead of new Nato-Russia talks to defuse the Ukrainian border crisis, as Kyiv demanded an international summit. Envoys from Washington and Moscow held inconclusive talks on Monday in Geneva after Moscow deployed forces near Ukraine and demanded wide-ranging security concessions.

The western alliance on Wednesday will renew contact with Moscow officials at a round of talks between senior diplomats from Russia and Nato member states in Brussels.

Then on Thursday the parties head to Vienna for a meeting of the permanent council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The United States hopes the diplomacy will head off what it sees as Russia's threat to launch a new military incursion into Ukraine — without giving much ground on Russia's demands.

But Washington's European allies are keen not to be sidelined, as President Vladimir Putin's Kremlin seeks to roll back what it sees as the West's post Cold War encroachment on its turf.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday reiterated his demand that France and Germany join a new international summit between Moscow and Kyiv to end the conflict.

As the Ukrainian leader pressed for a revival of Paris and Berlin's role, US negotiator Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman was at Nato headquarters to brief European allies.

She brought Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg up to date on the Geneva talks with Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and then met Nato ambassadors. "The United States is committed to working in lockstep with our allies and partners to urge de-escalation and respond to the security crisis caused by Russia", she tweeted. — AFP

6 scribes among 14 dead in Tanzania road crash

DAR ES SALAAM: Fourteen people including six journalists were killed on Tuesday in a road crash near Lake Victoria in Tanzania, officials said. Another nine people lost their lives in an accident in neighbouring Uganda when their overloaded truck rolled over at high speed, police said.

Those who died in northern Tanzania were on a tour with the Mwanza regional commissioner, and included local communications officials and

their driver as well as television and newspaper journalists.

"A minibus was trying to overtake another vehicle, then it collided with the vehicle carrying journalists and government officials", said Gabriel Zacharia, district commissioner for Busega, where the accident took place. President Samia Suluhu Hassan said on Twitter expressing her condolences to the families of the dead and praying for the quick recovery of the injured. — AFP

Fighting deforestation on the ground



PEDRO FRIZO

The writer is an economist and associate at Instituto Conexões Sustentáveis - Conexus

The protection and conservation of biomes, especially tropical rainforests, is critical to achieve climate goals, especially in countries with abundant forest cover. Nevertheless, the latest monitoring data show significant deforestation in many of these areas, including the world’s most extensive.

In October 2021, Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research reported the highest level of forest loss in the Amazon recorded in that month since monitoring began five years ago. And the problem is not limited to the Amazon. The world’s second-largest tropical forest, the Congo River Basin, lost more than 15 million hectares, or 8 per cent of its original covering, between 2001 and 2020.

Global goals to promote biodiversity, such as those agreed on at the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26), are critical to raise awareness about ecosystem loss and ensure accountability at the international level. But much of the actual conservation work necessarily must be carried out locally.

Enabling people in these

biodiverse regions to coexist with their environment is essential to ensuring the survival of forest biomes. But earning a livelihood from forests is not a simple task. Activities like mining and logging are more lucrative – at least in the short term – than, say, forest management, sustainable farming, and ecotourism.

A recent survey of land-use dynamics in the Brazilian Amazon conducted over the course of two years offers some insights into how governments and non-governmental actors can promote forest conservation at the local level. For starters, understanding the needs and concerns of residents is critical.

Civil-society organisations working in the Amazon, for example, learned that economic stability is a top concern for rural farmers. With this knowledge, NGOs introduced new agricultural practices based on the latest science. Doing so enabled activities such as cattle ranching and coffee production to coexist with recovering forests.

Other programmes implanted during this period taught small

PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY IS A KEY PART OF THE GLOBAL CLIMATE AGENDA, BUT ORGANISATIONS THAT WORK IN THIS DOMAIN OFTEN LACK FUNDING AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

rural farmers forest-management techniques and how to replant native species. Extension agents working with the NGOs provided technical assistance to the farmers and set up demonstration units to help residents understand the benefits of the new methods. Enthusiastic promotion of the techniques and evidence that they improved production were decisive factors in encouraging local farmers to adopt them and engage in sustainable forestry activities.

In addition to introducing forest-friendly farming practices, civil-society organisations in the Amazon work with small producer cooperatives to integrate remote communities into bigger markets. These networks allow farmers to earn money from the forests without harming them.

But this infrastructure is fragile. According to data collected by Conexus, the annual income sustainable cooperatives in the Brazilian Amazon generated for their members in 2019 was under half of Brazil’s minimum wage for that year. Such low returns make it difficult to attract farmers away from more profitable, but less sustainable activities.

To embrace sustainable forestry, residents of rural communities must view it as a reliable source of stable income. Government institutions could reduce economic uncertainty through legislation and incentives.

Unfortunately, recent policy changes actually limit the viability of sustainable forestry in Brazil. The gradual weakening of the national bodies responsible for controlling and monitoring land use is one of the main causes of the recent increase in deforestation in the Amazon Basin, and Brazil’s rural credit policy also does little to support environmentally sustainable economic initiatives. In 2019 and 2020, only 3 per cent of disbursements made by financial institutions in the Amazon region

were directed towards sustainable activities; most of the rest went to industries known to be damaging the local ecosystem, such as soybean production and large-scale cattle ranching.

Community-led organisations are key to promoting sustainable forestry, but their ability to effect change is limited, owing to a lack of capital. Activities like teaching rural farmers more sustainable techniques, creating markets that encourage investment in forest products, and developing ways to integrate Amazon communities into value chains are time-consuming and expensive.

Forest preservation depends on several interconnected factors. Legislation to support conservation efforts and more funding for initiatives like those mentioned here will help promote work that is positive for the environment. But without structural changes at both the national and local level to enable rural residents to earn a living from sustainable forest activities, the destruction of Earth’s most important forest biomes will continue.

— © Project Syndicate Services

Efforts to resolve post-coup crisis

NAFISA ELTAHIR

The United Nations said it was starting consultations in Sudan on Monday to try to salvage the country’s move to democracy after a military coup.

UN officials were contacting parties to look for a way forward, and the army had raised no objections to the initiative, UN special representative Volker Perthes said. “We want to move quickly,” he said.

The UN plan amounts to the only substantial effort at present to resolve the political crisis.

The military takeover in October wrecked a power-sharing arrangement with civilian leaders that was meant to pave the way to elections after the overthrow of leader Omar al Bashir in 2019.

The coup also halted a Western-backed opening up of the economy after decades of isolation and sanctions.

I do hope that these consultations can become something like a confidence-building measure and would help to at least reduce the violence

VOLKER PERTHES
UN special representative

Protest groups and the political parties ousted by the coup have so far refused to negotiate directly with the military.

So the United Nations would start by approaching groups individually, in the hope of moving onto to a second phase of direct or indirect negotiations, Perthes said.

The first sessions on Monday would involve civil society groups. “We will have every day a mix of stakeholders we are talking to,” he said.

UN officials have asked the groups to present their visions for a way forward, with the aim of producing a consensus on points of agreement and disagreement at the conclusion of talks.

— Reuters

From TV journalist to EU parliament chief



DAVID SASSOLI

IN A SIGN OF SOLIDARITY DURING THE PANDEMIC, DAVID SASSOLI MADE THE DESERTED PARLIAMENTARY PREMISES, AVAILABLE TO PREPARE MEALS FOR FAMILIES IN NEED AND TO TEST FOR COVID

European Parliament President David Sassoli, who died on Tuesday at the age of 65, was a former television journalist who turned to politics a decade earlier as a centre-left MEP.

Elected in 2019 as president, a role similar to that of speaker in a national parliament, his two-and-a-half-year mandate was dominated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Good-natured Sassoli earned the parliament’s respect with his sense of organisation, the attention his team paid to teleworking, a remote voting system and his ability to resist French pressure to bring elected officials back to Strasbourg.

In a sign of solidarity during the pandemic, he made the deserted parliamentary premises, available to prepare meals for families in need and to test for Covid. Health was his own Achilles heel, having recovered from leukaemia.

A heavy smoker, Sassoli was hospitalised in September 2021 due to pneumonia, which kept him away from parliament for several weeks.

On December 26, he was hospitalised again with “a serious complication due to a dysfunction of the immune system”, according to his spokesman.

Born in Florence on May 30, 1956, Sassoli studied political science before starting work as a newspaper and news agency journalist.

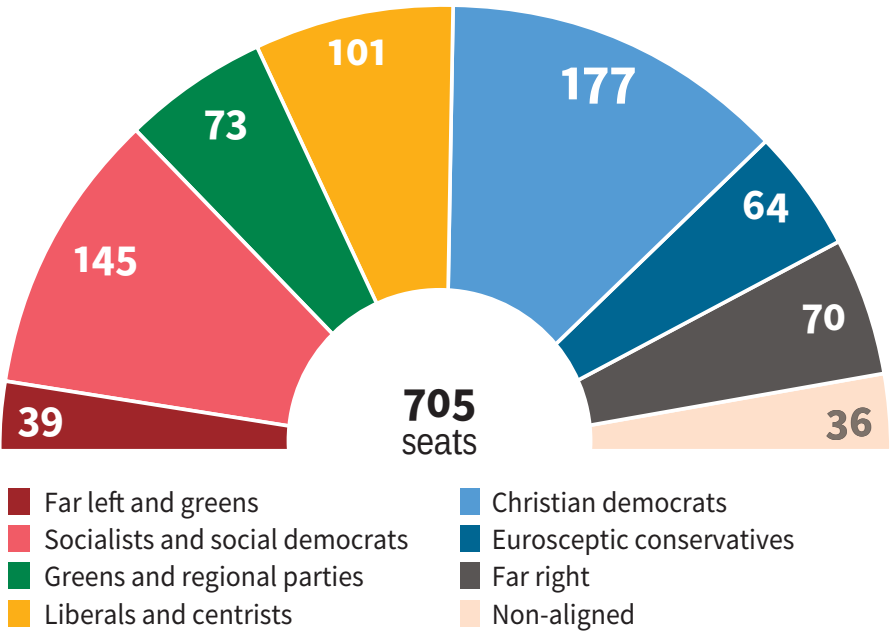
The father of two began working for national broadcaster RAI in 1992, rising through the ranks to become a familiar face for millions of Italians, presenting the evening news on the main channel, of which he also became deputy-director.

NOTHING IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT PEOPLE

In 2009, Sassoli joined the Democratic Party, formed by former Rome mayor Walter Veltroni’s union of the two main left-wing and centre-left parties.

His celebrity status meant he was

The European Parliament



Source: European Parliament



elected MEP with a whopping 400,000 votes, catapulting him from Italian television screens to a new career at the European parliament.

Sassoli became head of the DP’s European group and briefly attempted to enter national politics as the party’s candidate in Rome’s mayoral primaries but was beaten by Ignazio Marino, who won the office.

Re-elected MEP in 2014, Sassoli became parliament’s vice-president in charge of the budget and Euro-Mediterranean policy.

“While in charge of this policy, I represented the European parliament at numerous official occasions, developing dialogue with institutions in Mediterranean and Middle East countries,” Sassoli wrote on his webpage. He was the joint author of the Sassoli-Dijksma European railway reform which liberalised rail travel in 2017 after three years of complex negotiations.

“I have not completely abandoned

my journalist career, I still collaborate in an active way with various dailies and periodicals,” he wrote.

He co-wrote a book with Francesco Saverio Romano about the drama of cabinet meetings during the 1978 kidnap and murder of former prime minister Aldo Moro by far-left militants.

“If you put your trust in me, we will fight together for a parliament that is modern, more transparent, environmentally sound, accessible to citizens,” Sassoli promised fellow MEPs ahead of the vote on his nomination in 2019.

“Nothing is possible without people, nothing is durable without institutions,” he added, quoting one of the EU’s founding fathers, Jean Monnet.

His election as president of the European Parliament in 2019 had meant Italy kept one of the three key European jobs, following the departure of European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi and of EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. — AFP

It's time for facts, not fear



SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

It has been almost two years since the Covid-19 outbreak was first reported. Compared with the amount of knowledge that we had about the infection in the beginning to what we know today, it is a remarkable achievement that we get the updates on the pandemic on a regular basis. At the same time, this constant barrage of new information and advice, which seem to be unending in view of the emergence of new variants, have become a challenge to keep up with. A news piece you read one day could be entirely out-of-date by the next morning.

While for a journalist, of course, the changing information makes the story difficult, for an ordinary reader who is trying to follow the story makes it even more confusing.

We all remember that coronavirus infection, when it was detected towards the end of 2019, was not predicted to have the potential to so enormously spread and affect people's lives across the world. The World Health Organization initially claimed that the situation was "under control", but the outbreak gradually got out of control and turned into a pandemic affecting the whole global system.

Look at the new variant Omicron and the fear and panic followed after its emergence. It was fear everywhere

as the panic button was pressed about its contagion on the first day itself. Fear led to confusion as experts and public health officials went on revising their opinions, advice and recommendations. Unlike before the outbreak of the pandemic when we used to wake up to motivational lines and pleasant pictures in our phones in the morning, what we get now are messages of scary numbers and wild predictions about coronavirus.

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared an 'infodemic' that was confusing people. Later in the same month, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asked people to push back against the infodemic challenges, "as fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is equally as dangerous".

An appropriate level of alarm, without fanning the flames of hysteria is required. But "this is a time for facts, not fear. This is a time for rationality, not rumours. This is a time for solidarity, not stigma".

RUMOURS

And coming to this age of social media, misinformation spreads faster than the virus itself. Many are even addicted to forwarding messages to gain cheap popularity, and too lazy to spend a few minutes to check the authenticity of what they are sharing.

Even as the whole world came under the grip of fear, social media continued to add more chaos with gossip and misinformation. Several people believed sinister rumours about what happens in hospitals for patients who have symptoms of Covid-19.

This has led people in some countries to regard hospitals as a source of infection and avoided treatment. Many were even fearful of being stigmatised by their communities if they tested positive for the disease!

Unfortunately, despite warnings from officials, these rumours continue to circulate. With the emergence of the Omicron, rumours have again started re-emerging on social media and in the community. Uncorroborated claims of imminent lockdowns, travel bans etc have started making the rounds.

I do not rule out the fact that some false information comes from legitimate sources as well, making it harder to separate fact from fiction!



TET TIME IN VIETNAM

A street vendor pushes her bicycle past a shop selling decorations in the old quarter of Hanoi on Tuesday ahead of the Lunar New Year or Tet holiday.

- AFP

Boris Johnson is revealing who he really is



Moya Lothian-McLean is the politics editor at gal-dem magazine and a freelance journalist

Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, bruised by scandal and faced with an alarming rise in coronavirus cases, is refusing to change course. "We have a chance," he bullishly proclaimed recently, "to ride out this Omicron wave without shutting down our country once again."

Public health experts may disagree. Yet Johnson is at least being consistent — not only with his conduct throughout the pandemic, where lockdowns were a last resort and restrictions were to be shelved as soon as possible, but also with the political platform that elevated him to the highest office. After all, this is the man who rose to power — bringing about Brexit in the process — on the promise to restore "freedom" and "take back control."

Undeterred by the pandemic, Johnson has been quietly pursuing that agenda. But instead of reforming the country's creaking democracy and shoring up Britons' rights, he and his lieutenants are doing the opposite: seizing control for themselves and stripping away the freedoms of others. A raft of bills likely to pass this year will set Britain, self-professed beacon of democracy, on the road to autocracy. Once in place, the legislation will be very hard to shift. For Johnson, it amounts to a concerted power grab.

It's also an answer. A political chameleon, Johnson's true ideological bent — liberal? one-nation Tory? English nationalist? — has long been a subject of speculation. Now he has, beyond any doubt, revealed who he really is: a brattish authoritarian who puts his personal whims above anything else. And whatever his future, Britain will be remade in his image.

Amid the chaos wrought by the pandemic, Brexit tumult and increasing questions about the stability of Johnson's individual position, the full scale of the impending assault on civil liberties has — understandably — not yet come into focus for much of the British public. The list of legislation is long and deliberately overwhelming. But pieced together, the picture is bleakly repressive.

First, there's the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, a draconian and broad piece of legislation that effectively bans protest in England and Wales. The police would be equipped to shut down demonstrations that create "serious disruption." Those who break this condition, which could be done just by making noise, would face prison sentences or hefty fines. Combined with other measures, such as outlawing traditional direct-action tactics like "locking on," the bill could eventually

make it almost impossible to attend a demonstration without committing an offense.

Yet it goes beyond protest, putting minority groups in the cross hairs. New trespass provisions, which make "residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle" a criminal offense, would essentially erase nomadic Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities from public life. And the expansion of police powers would not only allow officers widespread access to private education and health care records, but also pave the way for suspicionless stop and search. Ethnic minority communities, disproportionately singled out for police attention, are likely to bear the brunt of such overreach.

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON OF BRITAIN 'WILL FOREVER BE THE LIBERTINE WHOSE PURSUIT OF PERSONAL FREEDOM AND 'CONTROL' SAW HIS COUNTRYMEN ROBBED OF THEIRS'

Similarly punitive is the Nationality and Borders Bill. Stiffening Britain's already hawkish immigration policy, it seeks to criminalise asylum seekers who take unsanctioned routes: Refugees who arrive by boat, for example, could face up to four years in prison, regardless of the validity of their claim for safe haven. And if claimants escape traditional jail, they would be kept in concentration camp-style housing and offshore processing centres, sites long denounced by human rights activists.

Not even British citizens are safe from the dragnet. A provision slipped into the bill in November by its architect, the home secretary, Priti Patel, would endow the government with the power to remove British citizenship from dual nationals without notice. Those singled out might not even have recourse to the law: Proposed reform of the Human Rights Act would make it easier for the government to deport foreign nationals and deny them claims of mistreatment.

Such draconian measures, in time, are sure to be contested. But the government has a plan for that: draining the life blood from democracy. There's the Elections Bill, which — alongside potentially

disenfranchising millions through the introduction of mandatory voter ID — aims to furnish the government with new powers over the independent elections regulator, sealing up the political process. Unless substantially amended, the bill's consequences could be constitutionally far-reaching.

The urge to centralise power also underlies the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, which would enable Johnson and his ministers to overrule judicial review findings that challenge their agenda. The Online Safety Bill, ostensibly designed to regulate Big Tech, is yet to be introduced to Parliament. But many free-speech advocates fear that it could be used to silence critics on social media, censoring those reporting details Johnson's government would rather keep from public view. No more pesky judges or overly inquisitive journalists interfering with government business.

It's a truism that nations sleepwalk into tyranny, and England — the most politically powerful of the nations comprising Britain — is no exception. For decades it has possessed all the necessary ingredients: ever more spiteful nationalism, press fealty sold to the highest bidder and a fervent, misplaced belief that authoritarianism could never set up shop here, because we simply wouldn't let it.

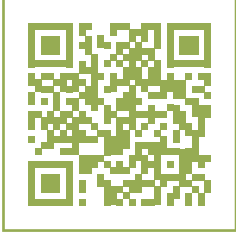
In this event, though, concerted opposition to Johnson's plans has not materialised. Establishment politics have been no match for the determination of Johnson and his allies: A hefty and largely supportive Conservative majority means that even when the Labour Party has decided to oppose legislation, its votes have barely counted. And despite valiant efforts by a coalition of grass-roots groups and the initial groundswell of the "Kill the Bill" protests, a mass movement opposing these bills has failed to come together. Instead, a miasma of grim inevitability has settled in.

That's dangerous, not least because this authoritarian assault is so comprehensive that once settled as law, it will prove very tricky to unpick. Like many leaders who seek to transcend the constraints of democracy, Mr Johnson may not foresee a future where he isn't the one calling the shots. But the miserable shadow his power grab will cast over Britain is likely to last far longer than the tenure of the would-be "world king" himself.

His place in the history books, however, is secured. He will forever be the libertine whose pursuit of personal freedom and "control" saw his countrymen robbed of theirs. — *The New York Times Services*

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Team Dumontier Racing's Romain Dumontier in action during Dakar Rally Stage 9 around Wadi Ad Dawasir, Saudi Arabia. – Reuters

Al Attiyah closes in on Dakar crown

WADI AD DAWASIR, Saudi Arabia: South African Giniel de Villiers won the Dakar Rally ninth stage on Tuesday as Nasser al Attiyah moved closer to clinching his fourth title.

The 51-year-old Qatari had seen Sebastien Loeb nibble away at his extensive lead over the past couple of days. But with Friday's finish in Jeddah looming France's serial world rally champion has a 39min 05sec deficit to make up on Al Attiyah.

Saudi driver Yazeed al Rajhi is almost an hour adrift after this

287 kilometre stage around Wadi Ad Dawasir.

After a hassle-free day behind the wheel of his Toyota, third-placed Al Attiyah said: "It's not easy but we are happy to be coming close to the finish."

"We have a good lead," added the Dakar veteran whose previous wins came in 2011 for Volkswagen, 2015 for Mini and three years ago for his current team.

Loeb's only hope now of emerging victorious appears to rest on mechanical misfortune

befalling Al Attiyah and Matthieu Baumel, his trusty French co-driver since 2015. De Villiers nipped home nine seconds clear on the day from his fellow South African Henk Lategan to take his total of stage wins in the Dakar to 18.

The 49-year-old 2009 champion said it was a mystery to him how he and his car traditionally gets better as the event progresses.

"I must say, the first week was not ideal," he said.

"It was very stressful and mentally very, very tiring.

"Definitely something I would not like to go through again, but that's behind us now. "I don't know why we often win at the end.

"It would be nice to win at the beginning as well, but we seem to do well the longer the rally goes on, so maybe the rally needs to be three weeks!"

ONE MISTAKE

In the bike category, Austrian Matthias Walkner deposed British 2017 champion Sam Sunderland as overall leader after a stage won

by Jose Cornejo Florimo.

With only three days to go, Red Bull KTM rider Walkner moved 2min 12sec clear of Sunderland in what is shaping up to be a tense run-in for the two-wheeled title.

Less than five minutes splits the top four riders.

"One mistake can change everything" noted Walkner.

"It's going to be a really, really close fight," he added.

"I've worked for this, to be on the top... If it's enough for a podium or a victory, then I'm super pumped and happy and

if not, well, I cannot change it."

Defending bike champion Kevin Benavides took second, Walkner fourth with Sunderland in 14th, over eight minutes behind Florimo.

"It was quite difficult to open the stage, especially in the dunes because the sunlight was quite bad and you couldn't really see where the drops were," said Sunderland.

"The days are counting down and it's coming towards the finish. In the end, I can only do my best and give it my all. We'll see how we end up." — AFP

Al Suwaiq stun Seeb; Al Rustaq edge Al Musannah

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Al Suwaiq eked out three crucial points as they defeated Seeb 3-0 at Seeb Stadium on Tuesday in the 10th week of the 2021/2022 Omantel League.

Former national team player Ahmed Mubarak 'Kanu', Essam al Subhi and Omar al Fazari netted the winning goals for Al Suwaiq. The victory helped the Al Batinah team to climb up the table with 12 points, while Seeb stayed at 21 points.

Seeb were affected with top players moving to aboard clubs including Al Mundher al Alawi to Bahrain's Al Khalidiya team while

Salalah al Yahyai went to Qatar's club. Al Suwaiq have another match play in the round as their match against Muscat club was postponed last week.

AI HADABI NETS WINNER

Khalid al Hadabi's goal powered Al Rustaq to victory against Al Musannah, who suffered their second successive defeat. At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, the only goal in the match for Al Rustaq was netted by Al Hadabi and helped Al Rustaq to earn their second win in a row after the previous win last week against Al Suwaiq.

Al Rustaq have now 17 points and are inch closer to the top-



At the Sohar Sports Complex, Sohar bounced back from their 6-0 loss against Salalah giants Dhofar in the previous round with a top show against Muscat

four teams. Their neighbours and Southern Batinah team Al Musannah remained at 16 points. Al Musannah, coached by Hassan al Saadi, suffered their second defeat from Al Rustaq after the defeat in the HM cup.

At the Sohar Sports Complex,

Sohar bounced back from their 6-0 loss against Salalah giants Dhofar in the previous round with a top show against Muscat. The Northern Batinah team beat Muscat club 3-1 and all the goals came in the second half.

Ahero Romanroof made the intentions clear with a 51st minute goal for the hosts. Abdo Lai increased the margin to two goals in the 60th minute while Saud al Maqbali confirmed the triumph with third goal five minutes later. The consolation goal for the guests came through Basim al Owaisi.

In another fixture, Al Nahda edged Nizwa 1-0 at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. Fahad al Hajri scored the winner for the hosts.

In brief

NEW DELHI



TATA REPLACES VIVO AS IPL LEAD SPONSOR

Tata Group is the Indian Premier League's new lead sponsor, an official confirmed on Tuesday — a deal that replaces a smartphone maker embroiled in an anti-China backlash prompted by a deadly border clash.

IPL Chairman Brijesh Patel said that Tata — one of India's biggest and oldest industrial groups — will sponsor cricket's most lucrative tournament through to 2023.

In doing so it will complete the remaining two-year deal of China's Vivo, which had returned to sponsor the cash-rich league in 2021 after a one-year pause.

— AFP

CAPE TOWN



SA ALL-ROUNDER MORRIS CALLS TIME ON CAREER

Bowling all-rounder Chris Morris announced his retirement from cricket on Tuesday, calling time on a career which saw him represent South Africa 69 times across all formats. The 34-year-old made his debut for South Africa in 2012 and went on to play four Tests, 42 One-Day Internationals and 23 Twenty20 internationals, taking 94 international wickets and scoring 773 runs.

He last played for South Africa in the 2019 ODI World Cup, in which he was their highest wicket-taker with 13.

"Thanks to all who have played a part in my journey whether it be big or small ... it's been a fun ride," Morris said on Instagram. — Reuters

HOBART



BILLINGS '100PC READY' FOR TEST DEBUT

Wicketkeeper-batsman Sam Billings said he is "100 per cent ready" to make his test debut if he gets the nod for the final Ashes Test against Australia in Hobart after being brought into the England squad as cover for the injured Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow.

Billings, 30, was recently in action for the Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League Twenty20 competition, and is due to play in England's T20I series against West Indies after the Ashes series concludes.

Australia have already retained the urn after winning the first three Ashes Tests. The fifth and final match will be played at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart between January 14-18.

The fourth Test in Sydney was drawn. — AFP

TAYLOR-MADE FAREWELL

KIWIS WRAP UP SECOND TEST BY INNINGS AND 117 RUNS



CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand: New Zealand wrapped up the second Test against Bangladesh by an innings and 117 runs in Christchurch on Tuesday to draw the series, with veteran batsman Ross Taylor taking the final wicket in a fairytale finish to his Test career.

Bangladesh, forced to follow on 385 runs behind, were dismissed in their second innings for 278 after Liton Das had cracked a gallant 102 off 111 deliveries.

But the day belonged to 37-year-old Taylor, New Zealand's elder statesman playing his 112th and final Test, who had a rare bowl with his part-time offspin at the end and needed just three balls to take the last wicket of Ebadot Hossain, caught by Tom Latham for four.

FITTING FAREWELL

It was a fitting farewell for Taylor, who bowled out of red-ball cricket with a New Zealand record 7,683 runs, putting him 37th in the all-time list of the sport's most prolific run-getters.

"I wanted to finish with a win and the guys definitely gave that to me," Taylor said.

"The way we came out and bowled and put them under pressure after putting up a very good total put us in good stead. It was an emotional game for me, my family and friends and it was good to get the win."

Captain Tom Latham summed up New Zealand's victory as "close to the perfect performance."

"After losing the toss and getting put in, to get a significant score on the board and then for the bowlers to do their thing on a wicket that was flattening out was outstanding."

The Bangladesh top order put up gritty resistance in reaching 123 for three, while Liton shared a century partnership for the sixth wicket with Nurul Hasan.

But there was no fight in the tail as New Zealand, the reigning world Test champions, completed a much-needed win after being comprehensively beaten by eight wickets in the first Test.

'BIG ACHIEVEMENT'

Rather than be disappointed in the result, Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque said winning one Test and sharing the two-match series was "a very big achievement for us".

"So we have to take this challenge and continue our momentum," he added.

Bangladesh were sunk in their second innings by the bounce of Neil Wagner, who took three for 77, while Kyle Jamieson finished with four for 82.

But the foundations for New Zealand's victory were laid by captain Latham with his epic 252 setting up a mammoth first innings 521 for six declared.

The Bangladesh bowlers failed to capitalise on the green wicket after winning the toss and asking New Zealand to bat.

When Bangladesh batted, the hosts' pace bowlers showed how to use the conditions, skittling the tourists for 126 with Trent Boult taking five for 43 and Tim Southee three for 28.

When Bangladesh were sent in again, New Zealand produced the third weapon in their bowling armoury, short-ball specialist Wagner. — AFP



Kohli hits 79, India bowled out for 223

CAPE TOWN: India captain Virat Kohli returned to form with a well-constructed 79 but the touring side were bowled out for 223 after tea on the first day of the decisive third and final Test against South Africa at Newlands on Tuesday.

Kohli played almost a lone hand, though he did receive support from number three Cheteshwar Pujara, who scored 43 as the visitors won the toss and elected to bat under overcast skies. South Africa bowled tight lines and lengths and will be pleased by their efforts, seamer Kagiso Rabada the pick of the bowlers with 4-73.

Left-arm seamer Marco Jansen continued his fine form with 3-55 on a helpful wicket in Cape Town as both sides seek victory to win the series that is locked at 1-1. Earlier, the Indian skipper was perhaps fortunate to survive 10 minutes before tea when South Africa claimed a catch by wicketkeeper Kyle Verreynne off seamer Duanne Olivier.

It was given not out, but on review there was a small flutter as the ball passed the bat on the technology used to determine if the batsman had got an edge. It was deemed not enough evidence to overturn the decision though. Kohli returned to the side after missing the second Test with back spasms, but his form has been under some scrutiny after averaging only 26.08 in 14 Tests since the start of 2020, well below his career mark of 50.34.

India won the toss and elected to bat in overcast conditions, the 15th time in their last 16 Tests that South Africa have lost the flip of the coin. — Reuters

BRIEF SCORES: India, first innings, 223 (C Pujara 43, V Kohli 79; K Rabada 4-73, M Jansen 3-55).

OOC announces list of candidates for elections

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The election committee overseeing the Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) elections has announced the initial list of candidates for the 2020-2024 term of the board of directors of the OOC, at a meeting held at the OOC premises on Tuesday.

The initial list comprised 15 candidates including Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair who submitted his nomination papers for the position of chairman.

Incumbent OOC Chairman Sayyid Khalid al Busaidy has not filed his nomination.

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said will run for vice-chairman post.

The OOC board elections will be held on February 28.

Seven candidates representing sports associations affiliated to international sports associations are vying for the membership of the OOC board of directors namely: Saif bin Sabaa al Rashidi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association (OCA), Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalif, Chairman of Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA), Engineer Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association (OBA), Dr Marwan



Khalid al Zubair

bin Jumaa al Jumma, Chairman of Oman Hockey Association (OHA), Dr Said bin Ahmed al Shehri, Chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA), Engineer Ibrahim bin Abdullah



Sayyid Azzan al Said

al Maqbali, Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) and Mohsen bin Hamad al Masrouri, Vice-chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA).

The candidates for the

membership of the OOC include Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishri, member of the International Swimming Federation, Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Chairman of Oman School Sports Association.

Sports personalities Qais bin Saud al Zakwani and Dr Fareed bin Khamis al Zadjali along with women sports administrators Saada bint Salim al Ismailiyah, Lujaina bint Mohsim al Zaabiyah are other names in the frame.

At its meeting held on December 27, 2021, the OOC general assembly set February 28 as the date of elections of the OOC board of directors.

Djokovic trains as AO dream hangs in balance

MELBOURNE: Tennis superstar Novak Djokovic trained at the Australian Open venue on Tuesday for his attempt to win a record 21st Grand Slam but his dream hung in the balance as the government pondered cancelling his visa, again.

The world number one had scored a surprise courtroom victory the day before, overturning the Australian government's decision to cancel his visa on Covid-19 vaccination grounds. But the immigration minister said he may annul Djokovic's visa once more. The unvaccinated 34-year-old Serbian ace says he is now determined to stay in Melbourne and compete in the Australian Open, which starts in six days.

"I flew here to play at one of the most important events we have in front of the amazing fans", Djokovic said on Instagram.

Wearing a T-shirt and shorts, he limbered up in a gym on Tuesday accompanied by coach Goran Ivanisevic before heading to centre court, AFP journalists saw.

Television cameras filmed him from helicopters as he played.

'BIGGEST VICTORY'

The government had surrendered after conceding that Djokovic's airport interview was "unreasonable" because the player had not been given the promised

Australia vs Djokovic

Reigning Australian Open champion wins case against deportation



World tennis No. 1
Novak Djokovic

Arrived 11 pm on Jan 5

Melbourne-Tullamarine International Airport

Park Hotel

Melbourne Park
Venue of 2022 Australian Open Jan 17-30



AUSTRALIA
CANBERRA
Melbourne

5 km

Djokovic had been staying at the facility officially known as an "alternative place of detention",

A government lawyer warned that Australia may yet use ministerial powers to order Djokovic's removal from the country

Denied entry on Jan 5 for failing to provide evidence of double-vaccination or an exemption recognised by border control

Wins victory in court on Jan 10, with a judge ordering his immediate release

AFP

time to respond. It was "the biggest victory in his career, bigger than all his Grand Slams", his mother Dijana said in Belgrade.

"Truth and justice came to the light. I would like to thank the justice system of Australia", said his brother Djordje.

Much of Australia's media said doubts had emerged over the accuracy of Djokovic's travel declaration, reportedly filled out before he flew in from Spain.

A copy of his declaration showed a tick in the box to confirm he had not and would not

travel in the 14 days before landing in Australia on January 5.

But the player had reportedly been in Serbia before Spain.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said he was "considering whether to cancel Mr Djokovic's visa" by using his ministerial powers.

The ATP, which runs the men's tennis tour, said the affair leading up to the court case had been "damaging on all fronts, including for Novak's well-being and preparation for the Australian Open". — AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic practices on Rod Laver Arena ahead of the 2022 Australian Open at Melbourne Park. — Reuters

Tearful Sabalenka's serve melts down



WORLD NO 93 REBECCA STUNS WORLD NO 2 IN ADELAIDE

ADELAIDE, Australia: World number two Aryna Sabalenka's Australian Open preparations were in tatters on Tuesday when she self-destructed for the second week in a row and was almost unable to serve at an Adelaide warm-up event.

A week after her delivery deserted her at the first of two Adelaide lead-in tournaments, Sabalenka suffered the same fate as she was stunned in three sets by world number 93 Rebecca Peterson 5-7, 6-1, 7-5.

Sabalenka dished up 21 double faults and was reduced to serving underarm in the second and third sets in a desperate effort to get the ball into play.

She took so much pace off her first serves that at one stage they were barely clearing the net.

The 23-year-old Belarusian became distressed in the third set and, after being asked by the umpire whether she was all right, broke down in tears during her next service game.

Her only consolation was that she was still hitting her groundstrokes with power and placement, but it was no surprise when she bowed out at the first hurdle.

"That was definitely the weirdest match I've ever played", Swedish qualifier Peterson said. "It was tough staying focused. I know she was struggling a lot."

"I just had to stay in my own world — it was really difficult."

American teenage sensation Coco Gauff blasted her way to the second round with an impressive 6-1, 6-2 win over Czech player Katerina Siniakova.

The 17-year-old Gauff took just over an hour to dispose of Siniakova and set up a second round clash with fellow teenager Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine.

Fourth-seeded Slovenian Tamara Zidansek progressed when she saw off British qualifier Heather Watson 2-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/4).

Seventh seed Jill Teichmann fell to US qualifier Lauren Davis 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

Australian wildcard Maddison Inglis beat Montenegro's Danka Kovinic 6-4, 1-6, 6-2, while other winners were American Madison Brengle, who downed Russia's Anastasia Potapova 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 and Czech player Tereza Martincova, a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 winner over Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska.

In the men's draw, fifth-seeded South African Lloyd Harris was ousted by South Korean Kwon Soon-woo 5-7, 7-5, 6-4, while Australian wildcard Thanasi Kokkinakis continued his recent good form with a 6-4, 6-0 win over Frenchman Benoit Paire.

— AFP

business

MUSCAT
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CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$79.97
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Light Crude \$79.37



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Omani oil production to rise 9.8% in 2022

POSITIVE OUTLOOK: “We are forecasting oil and gas exports will grow by 10.5 per cent in 2022 to reach \$18.2bn, the highest level since 2014 before oil prices crashed.”

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

The Sultanate of Oman’s crude oil production is projected to rise 9.8 per cent to 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2022, helping further narrow the country’s current account deficit to 0.2 per cent of GDP for the year, Fitch Solutions said in a new report.

“Bright prospects for oil prices and Omani production will be the main driver of a continued widening of the surplus in the trade in goods balance in 2022,” Fitch Solutions Group (FSG), an affiliate of Fitch



Ratings, stated.

The output increase comes as the Opec+ alliance, of which the Sultanate of Oman is a signatory, begins a rollback of production

quotas adopted at the start of 2020 to shore up collapsing international oil prices.

Oil production averaged 957K bpd in 2021, and is projected to rise to an average of 1,055K bpd in 2022, per the latest General Budget for the year.

Natural gas production, on the other hand, is anticipated to increase 4 per cent to 39.7 billion cubic metres, buoyed by new volumes from BP Oman’s Block 61 gas fields and the Mabrouk projects.

Commenting on the improved outlook for the Sultanate of Oman’s hydrocarbon sector, Fitch Solutions stated: “We are (...) expecting oil prices to remain elevated in 2022 with our Brent crude forecast at \$72.0 per barrel (/bbl) for the year, slightly up from \$71.0/bbl in 2021 and well above the 2020 average of \$43.21/bbl. Against this backdrop, we are forecasting oil and gas exports will grow by 10.5 per cent in 2022 to reach \$18.2bn, the highest level since 2014 before oil prices crashed.”

CMA sets up Supreme Sharia Supervisory Board



MUSCAT: Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), issued Decision No 171/2021 establishing the Supreme Sharia Supervisory Board (SSSB) at the Capital Market Authority and issued its Articles of Association pursuant to Article 5 of the Takaful Insurance Law promulgated by Royal Decree 11/2016.

HM ACCESSION DAY

بنك العز الإسلامي
alizz islamic bank

OUR LEADER.
OUR PRIDE.
OUR INSPIRATION.

The Chairman, Board of Directors and all the staff of Alizz Islamic Bank extend their heartiest congratulations and best wishes to **His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik** on the anniversary of his accession to the throne.

AlShawamikh holds blood donation drive



MUSCAT: In response to human duty and to enhance the commitment of its employees towards the importance of blood donation, AlShawamikh Oil Services Company organised on Monday a blood donation campaign at its headquarters in Muscat, with the participation of several other companies, in cooperation with the Blood Bank at the Ministry of Health.

Dr Aflah bin Saeed al Hadrami, CEO of AlShawamikh Oil Services Company, praised the company's employees and other companies for taking the initiative to donate blood. He said that this indicates the extent of human sacrifices for the sake of others.

"This value remains one of the most important values that reflect the depth of humanity in donating the most precious thing we have" he explained. He pointed out that this campaign highlights the need to commit to donating blood throughout the year to preserve adequate supplies of blood at Blood Bank and achieve self-sufficiency in the various blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman.

He stated that a single drop of blood may be a new opportunity to save a person's life, especially since some groups in our society do not find a match in some circumstances.

"So, one donation process may be a reason to keep a person alive", according to Al Hadrami, who expressed his hope that this campaign will be the company's first for other similar campaigns to come continuously.

"It is noteworthy to note that AlShawamikh Oil Services Company is a partner of blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman, based on its belief in the great role of donors who do the sacrifice to save patients in need of blood whether from citizens or residents.

Alizz Islamic Bank honoured for its humanitarian efforts

MUSCAT: In recognition of its strong commitment to sustainable social responsibility and its pioneering role in supporting people with disabilities in the Sultanate, Alizz Islamic Bank was honoured by the Ministry of Social Development at an event held to mark the occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The event was held under the patronage of HH Dr Mona bint Fahad al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University. The award was received by Muna al Khusaibi, Deputy Senior Manager of the Marketing and Corporate Communications Department, at Alizz Islamic Bank.

Enunciating about the honour, Murtadha bin Jawad al Lawati, Assistant General Manager and Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications Department at Alizz Islamic Bank said: "We in Alizz Islamic Bank, give priority to investing in our communities, as we always seek to provide a better life for the people we serve across the Sultanate.

In this regard, investment in sustainable initiatives is critical to the prosperity of society, and the bank makes sure to give strong support to the national organisations that takes efforts effective to build strong and flexible communities. Moreover,



the bank continues to contribute to the growth of non-profit social organisations. The employees have dedicated more than 1,000 hours of their time for volunteer work and fundraising to support local community organisations. The bank has been supporting these efforts through employees' community programmes."

He added: "The secret of a happy life is not to achieve individual success. There is nothing more beautiful than helping others to achieve success. When we live for ourselves only, life seems too short and shallow, but when we live for others, life becomes longer and deeply meaningful. Alizz Islamic Bank is committed to being at the forefront of banks that launch sustainable initiatives in the community as it firmly believes in the importance of community investment, and accordingly, it is keen to engage the community as a partner in all its business."

Alizz Islamic Bank seeks excellence in providing humanitarian initiatives that best serve the society. These efforts seeking to care for people

with disabilities and orphans in the Sultanate are driven by the government's interest, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, in ensuring that such individuals obtain all rights, on equal footing with all other citizens of the Sultanate, including their right to be rehabilitated in different rehabilitation institutions, so that they can be easily integrated into the society to play their role in its prosperity alongside all Omanis.

Previously Alizz Islamic Bank and the Ministry of Social Development launched the website www.crowdfunding.alizzislamic.com as a crowdfunding project aiming to raise RO 2m to build the Centre of Excellence for Children with Disabilities.

The crowdfunding website will allow all sectors and segments of the society to participate and contribute to building the Centre and help orphans living in and out of the Sultanate and following simple and flexible steps.

It is worth noting that the donation process observes standards of absolute transparency by revealing the exact number of total donations. When one accesses the website, he/she can notice the digital meter's movement, indicating how the target is achieved and how much of it is remaining.

NLG appoints new COO



MUSCAT: As part of company's business excellence and growth strategy, National Life & General Insurance Co SAOG (NLG) has appointed Dr Dhafr bin Awadh al Shanfari as the Chief Operating Officer. He has held leadership positions in various government organisations and was the CEO of Public Authority for Privatisation and Partnership before joining NLG. Dr Al Shanfari has an MBA Degree from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, USA and PhD from Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia and was also associated with SQU as Head of Management Department from the College of Economics and Political Science. "I am delighted to welcome Dr Dhafr Awadh al Shanfari to the NLG family and I am sure we are going to benefit immensely from his vast experience. With his academic excellence, his experience in various sectors, handling leadership roles across multiple functions, I eagerly look forward to him as a core contributor to the growth of the organisation," said S Venkatachalam, CEO of NLG.

National Bank of Oman extends remittance services to Bangladesh Embassy in Muscat

MUSCAT: Continuing to make banking ever more accessible and convenient, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced remittance services to the Embassy of Bangladesh in Muscat.

Taking advantage of the bank's secure and approved international transfer network, the new service will help the Bangladesh community to make affordable and fast transfers to friends and family in their native language.

With competitive exchange rates in several currencies, NBO customers can also instantly send funds of up to RO 7,500 from their account using the bank's digital remittance service available anywhere at any time



through the award-winning NBO Mobile App.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "At NBO we know how vital sending money home is to our expatriate customers, and so we are always trying to find ways to make it even easier. Adding to the growing number of affiliations with embassies, we are proud to partner with the Embassy of Bangladesh to provide our customers working and visiting there with greater access to our services. At the same time, we continue to strive to deliver seamless, convenient and flexible banking experiences that are accessible to all."

Ominvest uplifts leadership skills, empowers Omani talents

MUSCAT: Building on the company's progressive achievements in empowering human capital, Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest), one of the leading investment firms in the region, announced that eight of its employees have been selected to partake and represent the company in the National Leadership Programme to Upskill and Empower the Potential Omanis (etimad).

Ominvest's participation in the programme reaffirms the company's commitment to upskill its Omani team members and make them future ready

for competitive roles within the Group.

A team gathering was held at Ominvest's offices to congratulate the enrolled employees, encourage commitment and boost motivation to achieve the envisioned plan for their capacity and career development.

The meeting was attended by the Group CEO, members from the Executive Management team and etimad participants.

Commenting on the occasion, AbdulAziz al Balushi, Group CEO, Ominvest said, "We congratulate our colleagues who have enrolled in the reputable etimad programme. Excellence has always been a core value



at Ominvest and this initiative reflects our commitment to demonstrate this value in the way we empower our employees. I encourage the members joining the programme to exhibit full commitment in grasping knowledge and translating learnings into effective utilisation at work, hence elevating overall performance and productivity".

He added "As part of Ominvest's

strategic plan for 2021-2025 to Act Smart and Grow Bigger, we will focus on developing our internal talents and support their growth in several ways towards achieving our objectives."

Across the years, Ominvest has become an employer of choice to many ambitious Omanis wishing to join a progressive organisation that offers top-notch expertise and professionalism. Today 82 per cent of the Ominvest Group's total workforce are Omanis and 70 per cent of its leadership roles are held by Omanis. etimad is an initiative initially stemmed from the Labour Market and Employment Lab at what was previously the National Programme for Enhancing

Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh).

The programme is now adopted by the Ministry of Labour and aims to train and qualify thousands of Omanis in the private sector in different batches.

It includes specialised curriculums, which were designed in partnership with global and international leadership development institutions, i.e. MIT, Tuck, Harvard, and Columbia Business School. The revised programme consists of 5 main modules, e-learning, workshops, one-on-one coaching, and an action learning project, which will be executed within 10 months for the current batch.

Sharakah's Istidama programme concludes

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Sharakah (Fund for Development of Youth Projects) and HSBC Oman concluded their Istidama Programme for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) development on Tuesday. The closing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The ceremony was also attended by Melika Betley, CEO of HSBC Oman, Hani Zubair, Chairman Sharakah, and other dignitaries and representatives from HSBC, Sharakah, Destination Sustainability and the beneficiaries of the programme.

The main objective of the Istidama programme is to equip SMEs with the knowledge, skills,

and know-how they need, to improve their business practices and evaluate their performance and sustainability plans.

"Istidama, a programme supported by HSBC and managed by Sharakah, is proving to be a valuable joint initiative for the overall improvement of SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman. The successful completion of this second edition validates the programme and encourages us to continue our collaboration in accordance with the nation's 2040 vision for SMEs. I wish the beneficiaries and the programme the best of luck in the coming years," commented Hani Zubair, Chairman, Sharakah.

A total of 185 applications were received, and 10 SMEs from different sectors and governorates were selected after a comprehensive empirical evaluation of their business.



Omani oil production to rise 9.8% in 2022

FROM PAGE 13

As a result of the growth in hydrocarbon output, coupled with the uptick in oil prices, the Sultanate of Oman's current account deficit is projected to decline to 0.2 per cent of GDP in 2022, down from the estimated 0.8 per cent shortfall in 2021.

The corresponding figure for 2020 was a steep 12.6 per cent of GDP. With hydrocarbon exports accounting for around two-thirds of total exports, the size of Omani exports is projected to rise 7.9 per cent to \$43.2 billion in 2022, according to the market research think-tank.

"Elevated oil and gas revenues and relatively subdued import demand in 2022 will boost the Sultanate of Oman's goods trade surplus to multi-year highs.

"This surplus will largely offset continued deficits in the services trade, and primary and secondary income balances and keep the overall current account close to balance," Fitch Solutions further noted.

Imports, on the other hand, are anticipated to expand by 8.0 per cent to reach \$8.6bn in 2022, boosted by "relatively robust real GDP growth" projected at 5.0 per cent in 2022, said Fitch Solutions.

The overall outlook for the country's fiscals remains positive, it noted, adding: "We believe that the outlook for the current account means that reserves will continue to accumulate while the external debt load is likely to edge lower from current levels in the short to medium term."

OCCI, BGI ink pact for creation of Omani SME platform

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Business Gateways International LLC (BGI), which manages IT strategic platforms in the Sultanate of Oman, have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) aimed at providing joint support and promoting growth of Omani SMEs by taking advantage of the available opportunities related to In-Country Value on the Joint Supplier Registration System (JSRS) and supporting expansion of these businesses in global markets.

JSRS is an In-Country Value platform to certify suppliers and utilise their services. Initiated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the JSRS platform has been launched on www.businessgateways.com. JSRS connects the community of buyers, which include all oil and gas operating companies in the energy sector and large institutions and companies from other sectors — with thousands of certified suppliers on JSRS Certified Suppliers Network (CSN), to source and award procurement related opportunities with specific emphasis on SME obligation contracts and sub-contracts to



Omani SMEs.

JSRS CSN includes many Omani service providers, including SMEs, companies approved by Riyada, Local Community Contractors (LCCs) and large corporates in addition to international companies from more than 100 countries that benefit from the procurement opportunities offered by the JSRS Buyers Community.

Based on this MoC, BGI will implement a special OCCI SME platform for Omani SMEs registered with OCCI on

JSRS, integrate the OCCI SME Committee on JSRS and provide business-related support services exclusively to JSRS certified SMEs through the OCCI SME platform.

This MoC is the beginning of a number of new initiatives that will be mutually implemented by OCCI and BGI with a common goal, which is to help SMEs communicate with each other and develop their businesses and services and provide information about OCCI current activities to those who are registered on the OCCI SME platform.

OCCI recommends that all Omani SMEs register in JSRS and obtain the JSRS Supplier Certification in order to benefit from the upcoming services that will be offered on OCCI SME Platform.

You can register in JSRS through BGI website: www.businessgateways.com. OCCI and BGI will soon launch awareness campaigns in all Omani governorates for all OCCI companies and introduce advantages of JSRS OCCI SME platform.

Omantel launches region's first unmanned convenience store

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Omantel officially launched its path-breaking Innovation Labs on January 10, 2022. Along with the Labs, the company also inaugurated its 5G experience centre, the Omantel Innovation Oasis, and E-Dukaan, Middle East's first unmanned convenience store.

The launch event was presided over by His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, and witnessed the presence of representatives from various ministries and local start-up support entities and partners.

E-Dukaan at the Omantel headquarters is powered by artificial intelligence and IoT. It brings queue-free, cashless, grab-and-go shopping experience and is an example of how important sectors of the economy can function seamlessly and efficiently using IoT.

Shoppers can walk out with their items, without having to get their purchases scanned for prices at the counter or having to deal with physical money or bank cards. AI sensors automatically detect items in the shopping basket and bill the customer directly from his virtual wallet through an App. The store has no billing counters or cashiers.

The Omantel Innovation Labs have been launched to leverage Omantel's expertise, partnerships, reach and access



to technology to contribute to Oman Vision 2040 and promote innovation and entrepreneurship in new and emerging technologies namely 5G, Internet of Things, Cybersecurity, Customer Experience technology and Big Data.

Omantel Innovation Labs initiative is based on three broad goals — Ecosystem, Innovation and Investment. It aims to create an ecosystem of partners that can catalyse the rapid growth of technology start-ups; develop a platform that can identify and support relevant innovations in the Sultanate of Oman to maintain Omantel's prominent position as the leader in technology and identify and invest in a portfolio of start-ups that are strategically aligned with Omantel's strategic growth plan.

Participating start-ups benefit from a 1,100 sqm space that inspires and promotes knowledge-sharing and co-working within themselves and

with Omantel teams.

The space has nine well-equipped meeting rooms, a community square, a hardware lab, co-working space and individual offices.

The space will not just host the tech start-ups, but also be the venue for multiple ecosystem activities that engage and link them with corporate partners, academia, investors and government entities.

The Omantel Innovation Oasis is a showcase of uses of 5G technology and other frontier technologies. It complements the Omantel Innovation Labs as a place where incubated tech start-ups can potentially showcase their innovations in the future.

HH Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said commented, "I congratulate Omantel on these path-breaking launches. They are yet another step towards realising the Sultanate of Oman's digital future and economic diversification objectives and align with Oman Vision 2040

objectives. Seeing these start-ups harness frontier technologies under Omantel Innovation Labs and contribute towards national growth while being examples of entrepreneurial spirit gives us immense pride. I have complete faith and confidence in the sharp young Omani minds. They have the talent, and Omantel is playing the enabler by guiding and shaping their ideas into successful, profitable ventures."

He further said, "The parallel launch of Omantel Innovation Oasis and E-Dukaan underscore their symbiosis and synergy with Omantel Innovation Labs. While the Labs incubate, the Oasis showcases the potential of frontier digital technologies while the smart store is a real-world application of innovation. I once again congratulate Omantel as well as the start-ups."

Talal bin Said al Mamari, CEO, Omantel, said, "We are excited and proud of these launches. The Omantel Innovation Labs are a platform that will channelise the company's resources in a way that they are invested in the growth of tech entrepreneurial domain.

"We are aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The Labs are a vital component in our journey towards a digital future. They will put expertise in the right and deserving start-ups that are looking to push the boundaries of economic growth through self-reliance, riding on technology."

CMA sets up Supreme Sharia Supervisory Board

FROM PAGE 13

SSSB was established to enhance the legislative and regulatory processes for companies operating in the Takaful insurance business based on best international practices.

The SSSB will put in place the general policies regulating such types of companies and advising the CMA on the Sharia aspects related to Takaful insurance and contribute to developing the legislations related to the Sharia beside advice on the compatibility of the products, services and contracts of the Takaful insurance companies and deciding on issues of fiqh disputes among the members of Sharia supervisory committees in Takaful insurance companies.

According to the Articles of the SSSB, the board must be constituted by the CMA board of directors comprising five members including the chairman of SSSB and at least three members must have a bachelor's degree in Islamic Sharia or an equivalent degree, besides knowledge of Islamic transactions (Fiqh Al Muamalat) or Islamic banking or Islamic finance or capital market or insurance in addition to ten years' experience.

The establishment of the SSSB has been necessitated by the growth of the Takaful insurance market in the Sultanate of Oman.

Takaful insurance has reached a value of RO 64.8 million, representing 14 per cent of the total insurance portfolio. Currently, two companies specialise in providing Takaful insurance products out the 20 insurance companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

European banks’ league-table loss is investor win

Even in a record year, dealmakers at European investment banks still lost market share in their home region. Yet chief executives like Credit Suisse’s Thomas Gottstein and CS Venkatakrishnan at Barclays shouldn’t be too concerned. Going toe-to-toe with US behemoths like JPMorgan is costly and futile. Better to focus on a few important niches. Investment bankers earned a record \$20 billion in fees from arranging mergers, acquisitions and share offerings in Europe, the Middle East and Africa last year, Refinitiv data shows.

But a growing proportion went to the big American firms. JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup and Bank of America grabbed 31% of fees in EMEA in 2021, up from 26% in 2019, the last full year before the pandemic. Meanwhile, the six biggest Europeans — BNP Paribas, Barclays, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, HSBC and UBS — together took home just 12% of the pie, down from 13% in 2019. As recently as 2010, the Americans and Europeans were roughly level in EMEA.

American banks have a vast and highly profitable home business, giving them a broader suite of products and more capital to offer deal-hungry clients. Their global reach also appeals to internationally minded European CEOs. Goldman and Morgan also advised money changer Wise on its recent direct listing in London, having previously arranged similar New York debuts for Spotify Technology and Slack Technologies.

When it comes to offering advice on mergers, meanwhile, low-returning European banks struggle to match the salaries rainmakers can earn at US firms or boutiques. It follows that European banks should focus on strengths that fit their strategy. For UBS and Credit Suisse, that means deals involving wealthy controlling shareholders who may also be private-banking clients.

Deutsche, with its huge German balance sheet, earns most of its fees from arranging loans and bond issues. There’s little chance of European bank CEOs clawing their way back up the league table. Investors will thank them for embracing the trend, rather than fighting it. — Reuters

Investment bankers earned a record \$20 billion in fees from arranging mergers, acquisitions and share offerings in Europe, the Middle East and Africa last year



SOLAR WALK

Workers walk between solar cell panels over the water surface of Sirindhorn Dam in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. Riding on generous government incentives, Thailand’s energy firms are deepening a push into solar power to bolster their profits over the next few years and perk up lacklustre shares. — Reuters

Dealmaker hiring spree at 9-year high



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

WHILE LARGE INVESTMENT BANKS HAVE CUT SALES AND TRADING STAFF SINCE THE FINANCIAL CRISIS, THE NUMBER OF DEALMAKERS HAS REMAINED STABLE

The number of senior dealmakers working at the world’s top 12 investment banks is at its highest level in nearly a decade, as companies have rushed to hire and keep talent during the deal boom. There were 19,600 investment bankers across the 12 banks at the end of the third quarter of 2021, according to figures from data provider Coalition Greenwich. This is the highest number since 2012 and an increase of 300 since the end of 2020. While large investment banks have cut sales and trading staff since the financial crisis, the number of dealmakers has remained stable. On the trading floor, 12,200 jobs have been lost across equities and fixed income since 2012, according to Coalition Greenwich. Seven hundred were lost in 2020 — even as revenues surged to a 10-year high. By contrast, there were 19,200 investment bankers across the top companies in 2016 and that figure has edged up by 400. The boom in deal fees had brought in \$110bn in revenues for investment bankers between January and November 2021, according to data provider Dealogic. The surge has led to increasing numbers of bankers working 100 or more hours per week, while stretched teams have had to turn away work, according to executives.

Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Barclays, Citigroup, HSBC and JPMorgan were among the banks that had added investment bankers last year, but recruitment has become increasingly challenging. Salary increases of up to 50 per cent are being resisted by senior bankers, who fear overpaying for talent. The increase in mergers and acquisition activity in the European asset management sector has pushed deal numbers to a record high, with transaction value last year up to November almost double that recorded for the whole of 2020. Figures from Refinitiv, show there had been 362 M&A deals in the European fund management sector until end of November 2021 — well ahead of the 279 that were struck between January and December 2020, a year that was considered by many to be a bumper one for deal activity. The value of asset management deals in Europe last year up to November stood at \$12.3 bn, up sharply from the \$6.3 bn recorded for the whole of 2020, according to Refinitiv. In the UK, 158 deals had taken place between January and November last year — 50 more than the total for the whole of 2020. Head of M&A and capital raising at Refinitiv, Cornelia Andersson, said: “In the major fund management markets — the

US and the UK — consolidation has been a key trend for some time, with deals ranging from mega mergers to smaller acquisitions. This is now a well-established strategy to secure growth, expand the client base or tap into niche sector or asset class offerings. She added: “Europe has also seen a large increase in consolidation in 2021.” There have been 1,010 M&A transactions in the fund management sector globally last year in the first eleven months, worth a combined \$63.2 bn — up from 923 deals that took place worldwide in 2020, valued at \$49.3 bn, according to Refinitiv. Separate figures from PitchBook show Morgan Stanley’s acquisition of Eaton Vance, which completed in March 2021, was the biggest asset management M&A deal globally last year at \$8.7 bn. “With over 1,000 deals recorded globally in 2021, we are seeing record levels of takeover activity in the asset management space”, said Andersson. A financial services partner at PwC, Albertha Charles, said previous M&A deals had been heavily focused on asset managers building scale, but that is changing. “Scale is still important, but acquisition of skills and diversification of the revenue base has become much more important”, she said. (The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Is climate finance the next bubble?



ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN

The author, a senior fellow at Brown University, is a distinguished non-resident fellow at the Center for Global Development

In the last few years, and especially after the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, private investors have seen an opportunity to midwife developing countries’ bumpy transition to net-zero carbon-dioxide emissions. After all, if BlackRock CEO Larry Fink and the climate activist Greta Thunberg can find common cause, then the tantalising prospect held out by William Blake — “Great things are done when men and mountains meet” — comes into view. The heady optimism is reflected in the numbers. Asset managers think that tens of trillions of dollars, mostly in the form of green finance, could be available for environmental, social and governance (ESG) lending.

Former Bank of England governor Mark Carney claims to have mobilised \$130 trillion to help finance the net-zero transition. The \$100 billion per year in climate finance that rich countries promised to provide to the developing world at COP15 in 2009 — a pledge that remains unfulfilled — is starting to look like chump change by comparison. Developing economies’ response to the new push for net-zero emissions has rightly focused on rich countries’ fossil-fuel hypocrisy. As Vijaya Ramachandran of the Breakthrough Institute and Todd Moss of the Energy for Growth Hub have noted, advanced economies are asking developing countries to phase out coal and natural gas while continuing to rely on the latter energy source in

particular. The rich world’s failure to cough up the necessary finance just compounds the hypocrisy. But developing countries’ fears are misplaced. Perhaps they should worry not that there will be too little climate finance, but rather that there will be too much, especially from the private sector. It’s not hard to see why. An implicit bargain — finance in exchange for fossil-fuel reduction — underlies the current intellectual consensus on climate change: The rich provide the funding while the poor move to renewables. But whereas the onus a decade ago was on rich-country governments to mobilise the money, the expectation now is that the private sector will do so. This bargain is problematic for two reasons: Implicit political condescension and looming

economic risks. The condescension can be summed up starkly: “We, the rich, have messy politics, but the poor don’t.” For example, when protesters in France pushed back against increases in fuel taxes in 2018 and 2019, the discussion focused on the difficulty of climate action and the need to accept the rollback of those taxes as an understandable consequence of democratic politics. But such latitude ends where the Global South begins. There, finance is somehow a magic bullet that overcomes social and political obstacles to climate action. The Indian government’s recent retreat on its planned reforms of the agricultural sector, following a successful 15-month protest by farmers, shows how misguided

this view is. One concession that the farmers extracted from the government was to forestall any effort to reduce the large power subsidy they receive. The subsidy is devastatingly harmful in terms of CO2 emissions, soil quality, water availability, and atmospheric pollution. But reducing it will be fiendishly difficult, with or without external finance. More important are the bargain’s economic risks. Climate change affords investors an opportunity to do global social good without sacrificing profits. And ESG-related lending, which marries conscience and capital, has become a major financial fad. But mounting evidence suggests that this activity is displaying all the pathologies associated with financial manias and bubbles. © Project Syndicate 2022

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features



OMANI GUNPOWDER A UNIQUE LEGACY

Gunpowder has been used by Omani people in many tools to serve a plenty of aims. “Alwasla” is one of these significant tools. It is used by Omani people who live in mountainous areas in the Sultanate of Oman extending from the Wilayat of Qurayat to the Wilayat of Sur... **P20**

CELEBRITIES

READ



TALKING AS FAST AS I CAN

BY LAUREN GRAHAM

Lauren Graham hits pause for a moment and looks back on her life, sharing laugh-out-loud stories about growing up, starting out as an actress, and, years later, sitting in her trailer on the Parenthood set and asking herself, “Did you, um, make it?”

House, BMW unsold in Maradona auction

AN ONLINE AUCTION of some 90 items owned by the late football icon Diego Maradona has closed with a house and BMW unsold, but most other keepsakes spoken for, its organiser said on Tuesday.

The December 19 auction had been prolonged by several days after the most expensive pieces failed to attract buyers at first.

The initial, three-hour auction had brought in just \$26,000 with more than \$1.4

million worth of assets owned by the former Barcelona and Napoli star receiving no bids, according to AFP calculations.

By the end of the new deadline, the Buenos Aires house Maradona had gifted his parents, put up for a minimum \$900,000, still did not find a buyer, nor did a luxury 2017 model BMW priced at \$225,000.

Another BMW, a 2016 model, sold for \$165,000.

“For the rest, we have received bids” in the second



round, which will now be presented to a judge for approval, auctioneer Adrian Mercado of the Grupo Adrian Mercado Subastas house said.

These included televisions, gym equipment and a treadmill.

The auction had attracted bidders from several Latin American countries, Italy, France, Britain, Russia and Dubai. The largest single offer of \$2,150 on the first auction day was for a painting of the former World Cup winner by

artist Lu Sedova.

The second most expensive piece was a photograph of Maradona with late Cuban leader Fidel Castro, purchased for \$1,600 by a buyer in Dubai.

Other items sold included a Napoli team jacket, training pants and a box of Cuban cigars.

Mercado said he was optimistic of selling an apartment Maradona had owned in the seaside resort of Mar del Plata (\$65,000), for which he was awaiting a formal offer.

He also hoped the second BMW will receive a bid in the coming days.

This would leave only the 700 square-metre (7,500 square foot) Buenos Aires house, on a property with 500 square metres of park, where Maradona's parents had lived for 30 years. — **AFP**



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After Nearly 50 Years, a Beloved East Village Indian Boutique Is Closing

WALKING INTO DRESS Shoppe II is like walking into an emporium of colour and cloth. The shelves are overflowing with hand-embroidered fabrics and saris, the racks are tightly packed with kurtas and salwar suits and even the ceilings are covered in intricate tapestries. Below the main floor of the shop, there are two storage floors packed with piles of additional product. All of it needs to go by January 31.

After nearly 50 years of business, the treasured East Village store is shutting down. Following nearly two years of pandemic-related struggles, combined with a landlord dispute, the loss of her husband and her own health problems, Saroj Goyal, the owner, decided that closing the store was the best choice.

"Every moment is special here," said Goyal, 72, as she sat sipping hot tea on a December afternoon. Every so often, she paused the conversation to help a customer who had wandered in, sharing suggestions and telling them to check out the shop's Instagram.

Goyal and her husband, Purushottam Goyal, emigrated from Delhi, India, in the 1970s. It was his idea to open the business in 1977; the shop soon became a slice of South Asia in Manhattan.

For decades, the couple would travel to India to find one-of-a-kind objects to sell. "My husband walked from village to village to collect all these things. He had a very unique taste," Saroj Goyal said, picking up a hand-beaded textile.

In September 2019, Purushottam Goyal died, a loss that still pains Saroj Goyal everyday. The store now holds several mementos of his life. "My husband made me laugh so much in this room. All day everyday, we were together for 50 years in this shop," Goyal said, tearing up.

There's a portrait of Purushottam Goyal hung high on the back wall and a book filled with hand-written tributes to him from customers on the checkout counter. "The world is a little less good with his passing," one person wrote. Another: "Your presence is missed physically, but your spirit is all around this place."

On top of grieving his loss, Saroj Goyal had to figure how to keep the store running; administrative matters had been her husband's domain.

— **NYT**



FASHION

That Vintage Dress on the Red Carpet? There's More to the Story



THE RED CARPET is a financial exchange — the most high-profile of red carpets, at least. If the E! Network has at least one microphone-wielding reporter on standby, there is serious money on the table.

But like many financial exchanges, its transactions are often opaque. Fashion brands pay undisclosed amounts of money for celebrities to be "ambassadors," to wear their gowns and tuxedos and nail polish and shapewear (though not all brands, and not all celebrities).

Which is why the steady and well-documented rise of vintage garments on major red carpets has been so notable. And can be expected to continue this awards season, even if there are still no plans to televise the Golden Globes on Sunday.

A highlight reel: Last fall, Olivia Rodrigo wore a 2001 strapless mermaid gown by Versace to the MTV Video Music Awards. Zendaya wore a reworked Roberto Cavalli dress from 2000 to the Ballon d'Or awards ceremony in Paris. For the Met Gala, Addison Rae chose a corseted red Gucci dress from 2003.

(BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM.)

Just before the pandemic, Kim Kardashian West wore a museum-quality Alexander McQueen dress, also from 2003, to Vanity



Fair's Oscar party. One year earlier, Cardi B emerged from a seashell-inspired Thierry Mugler gown at the Grammys, circa 1995, and Gwyneth Paltrow attended the Emmys in a black-and-white feathered gown by Valentino, circa 1963.

(END OPTIONAL TRIM.)

"More and more people are aware that what we see on the red carpet is paid for — a branding opportunity," said Cherie Balch, a vintage collector who owns the store Shrimpton Couture. In 2008, for example, a lawsuit revealed that actress Charlize Theron had been paid \$200,000 to wear Chopard jewels at the Academy Awards two years earlier.

"So when someone chooses to wear vintage," she said, "they're kind of saying: 'I'm an individual

here. I'm wearing this because I really love how it looks on me. I don't care that it's not sponsored by somebody.' That feels more authentic to a lot of people in a very branded world."

Vintage garments have long had a presence on the red carpet: Consider the 1950s Dior dress Reese Witherspoon wore to the Academy Awards in 2006, or Julia Roberts breaking the rules of Oscars fashion by wearing a 1992 Valentino to the 2001 ceremony.

But collectors, including Balch, say current demand has never been higher (even with major events being continually postponed or Zoomified in the pandemic). They are reaching new consumers, thanks in part to more celebrities and stylists crediting them on social media, and reshaping how they do business. — **NYT**

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

A person... and his ageing!

Within a century, billions of people had to know how to be old. And perhaps not so long ago, more elderly people and even more than ever before, were able to see their grandchildren grow up. However, the price they have to pay is, for example, a rise in heart disease, cancer, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis, arthritis and everything we associate with ageing and getting older.

In fact, we as human beings are supposed — if I say it right — in our modern age to stop trying to make us live longer and instead, we should focus only on extending health instead of extending life!

Here, health and longevity are often confused. After all, don't people live longer precisely because they are healthier? Instead, ageing brings new health challenges that are all too familiar to anyone who has taken care of an elderly relative or is getting older. This certainly takes us to another curve, which is that if people are living longer, maintaining their health in the long-term will require focusing on healthy habits that begin in childhood.

So perhaps we should be somewhat optimistic, because

somehow science has now absorbed the idea that we can slow down our biological aging process, of course not for the purpose of making us live longer, but for the purpose of prolonging a healthy life. However, yet I find myself here and emphasising — on the saying that We have been accustomed to it since childhood — that prevention is better than cure. Not to mention that eating a healthy and varied diet, getting plenty of sleep and exercising regularly are reliable ways to make your life stretch, no matter how much and more enjoyable.

At the end, this story may have a happy ending. If medical interventions to slow ageing lead to additional years of reasonable fitness, life may extend in an optimistic way, with most men and women living longer and in good health. Without a doubt, the most exciting work currently being done in medical science is about bringing later years to life, rather than just adding time at the end. Of course, the belief that death should be postponed for the longest possible period does not exist in nature or in our human life and it is all with the knowledge and command of God.



‘Omani gunpowder’ a unique legacy

By Arwa al Hashmi

Omanis have proved their ingenuity in hundreds of years through their work in different metiers. They have created a plenty of astonishing tools and handcrafts that reflects their craftsmanship through the years. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that Omanis are known for their good attachment to their traditions and customs. Amazingly they passed down their cultural legacies generation after generation keeping an eye on maintaining their authenticity as well as adapting them to their current time. Thus, developing their features without any harm on their originality. Those crafts have created a good chance for them to develop and flourish through the years; nevertheless, they were of a good use in good and bad times.

Omani gunpowder making is one of the famous crafts in Oman's mountainous areas from hundreds of years until today. Surprisingly Omanis have their own way in making the gunpowder from their nature and they also have their own ways of keeping it. Additionally, they used a special kind of coal to make the gunpowder extracted from Alshkhar tree (scientifically known as calotropis procera). They especially use its coal because it is much lighter and highly flammable.

Gunpowder has been used by Omani people in many tools to serve a plenty of aims. “Alwasla” is one of these significant tools. It is used by Omani people who

live in mountainous areas in the Sultanate of Oman extending from the Wilayat of Qurayat to the Wilayat of Sur. They inherited it hundreds of years ago and they are still using it in different special occasions. It is a piece of a gun called “Abu Asher” where Gunpowder is the only thing used in it without any live bullets. It emits a strong and loud sound similar to the sound of a cannon. Amazingly, “Alwasla” has a distinctive presence in special cultural events like Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha, national day as well as weddings. It is used by specific people who have a long experience in making Omani gunpowder.

It is heartening that there are still some people who are passionate in making the gunpowder and sometimes selling it. One of the gunpowder makers, Ahmed al Owaisi mentioned in an interview that they have been taught how to make gunpowder by their grandparents and they are still committed to it since then.

He also presented a flask where they put the gunpowder which is called “Alkela” or “Alsamaa” which they stick to a special type of belt they wear round their waist called “Mahzam”. It is worth noting that Omani people have been using “Alsamaa” in hunting back in the day.

What's more, Omani gunpowder is known to be kept in an exceptional flask called “Talahiq” which is usually made of silver, gold and wood. It is astonishing that they used the horns of goats and gazelles in making Talahiq. Altalahiq is used for a matchlock gun called “Abu Fatiylah”. It is designed perfectly to slide into the belt of Omani ancient warriors and accompany Abu Fatiylah gun. It is known for its unique domed shape that is decorated admirably with rows and motifs. It sometimes has wonderful conical spikes around the edge of its body. Altalahiq's decorated upper part can be opened to refill it with gunpowder again.

It is a proudest thing that

there is still a wide interest in Omani crafts that go back to hundreds of years. Nevertheless, it is amazing that the Government of the Sultanate of Oman is keeping an eye on these masterpieces and giving them a special diligence by highlighting their role in our countries' history and representing them in some wonderful social occasions like festival, exhibits and alike. It also sheds light on them by presenting them in museums inside and outside. Thus, attracts the tourists to visit our marvellous country to know more about it. Omani gunpowder is a worth highlighting subject that is not widely known yet very interesting. It has a considerable place at some specific parts of Oman where the Omani uses it to express his strength, ingenuity, fearlessness and power. To sum it up, nothing would be more precious than a citizen willing to devote his time and effort for the development of his country.

