

Upper air trough to bring rains

The latest weather updates and analysis of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that an upper air trough will likely affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from Tuesday until Saturday. Cloud advection and isolated rain with occasional thundershowers are expected over the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah and Muscat. The Civil Aviation Authority advises all to take precaution during rainfall and wadi flow and to check the visibility and sea state before sailing and follow the issued weather bulletins and reports. **DETAILS ON P3**



P10

MOHAMMED, RACHID AND SALEH TAKE TOP 3 SLOTS ON DAY TWO



P13

WORLD'S FIRST RENEWABLE WATER PROJECT PLANNED IN DUQM SEZ



P20

MODERN JAZZ CONCERT CHALLENGES AND REWARDS MUSCAT AFICIONADOS





SAYYID THEYAZIN TO PRESIDE OVER ANNUAL HORSE RACE

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said will patronise on Thursday over the Royal Cavalry's annual horse race, which will be held in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi. The event is organised by the Royal Court Affairs, represented by the Royal Cavalry. The race will consist of five laps for thoroughbred Arabian horses. It will culminate in the fifth lap in which riders will compete to win the coveted His Majesty the Sultan's Cup. Equestrian skills will be exhibited in between the laps, to the accompaniment of popular musical tunes.

— ONA



A SPECTACULAR **FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL**

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present a festival of traditional and heritage music entitled "Folk Music Festival". The festival will take place on January 26 and 27 at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. The Folk Music Festival is becoming an annual event which offers audiences a musical journey around the world with special guest countries invited to attend. The festival celebrates the traditional folk music of each country, acknowledging the intrinsic value of preserving and sharing musical heritage, and, promotes artistic collaboration between nations.

Bisat oil field concession area No 60 opens on Thursday



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), will preside over OQ's Bisat oil field inauguration on Thursday. Bisat oil field is one of the most important projects of OQ's upstream sector. The field, which is located in concession area No 60 at Abu Tubul, utilises cutting-edge technologies and digital solutions to enhance the long-term sustainability of the resources and operations and maximise the revenues and the return on investment.

The in-country value for the Bisat oil field project reached RO 157 million. In addition, the total amount spent on local SMEs and contractors stood at RO 34 million of the overall cost of the project.

Products manufactured in the Sultanate of Oman accounted for RO 60 million of the total procurement of the project. The project has also created direct and indirect opportunities for Omani youth, resulting in a high overall Omanisation rate of 85 per cent of the group's employees working in concession area No 60. **SEE ALSO P13**

INSIDE



INDIA MAY CUT IMPORT DUTY ON GOLD

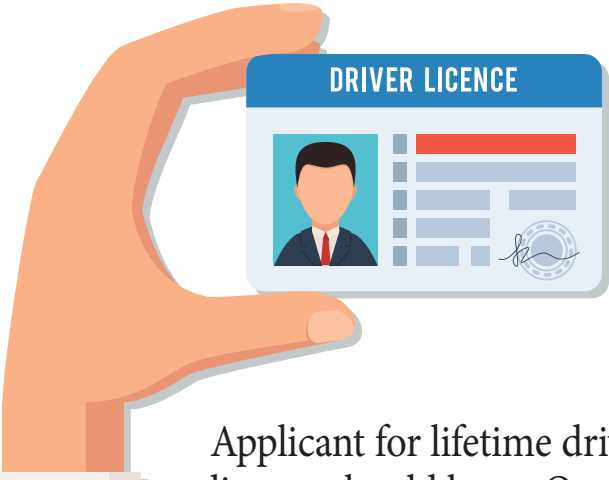
P6



A VICTIM OF POLARISATION AND EXTREMISM

P9

A driving licence for lifetime



Applicant for lifetime driving licence should be an Omani and should have a driving licence at least for 15 years

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

Individuals with clean driving track record can get lifetime driving licence. The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Monday mooted the idea of lifetime driving licence with certain conditions.

The applicant for lifetime driving licence should be an Omani who had never worked as a vehicle driver. He should have a driving licence at least for 15 years and has to be free of any disability-related issues.

The applicant's traffic report has to be free of any first-category

traffic violations over the past three years at the time of application, and he should not combine the permanent private licence with any other driving licence of other categories.

The fee for getting a lifetime driving licence is RO 100.

The Royal Oman Police, represented by the General Traffic Department, announced the move on social networking sites on Monday.

Renewal of a driving licence in the Sultanate of Oman is one of the necessary things for those who drive vehicles.

TURN TO P2

Oman, India enjoy historical economic relations

NEW DELHI: Dr Ausaf Sayeed, Secretary at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs valued the role of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in upgrading the level of bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. He described the trade relations between the two countries as "ancient" and dating back to

hundreds of years.

He told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the areas of cooperation between the two countries covered food security, supply chains, healthcare, medicine, energy security and renewable energy including green hydrogen, green ammonia, micro chips, semiconductors and technology.

He said that the number of Indian companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 6,000.

The official added that the volume of trade exchange between the two sides grew during the last two years to nearly 10 per cent compared to the previous years, thanks to the bilateral relations that focused on trade. — ONA

Trans-fats continue to jeopardise health of billions, says WHO

GENEVA: Efforts to eliminate industrially-produced fat have a long way to go with five billion people exposed to toxic fat added to many food products, the UN health agency said on Monday.

The World Health Organization called in 2018 for harmful trans fatty acids to be wiped out by 2023. They are thought to be responsible for around 500,000 premature deaths from coronary heart disease each year.

Although 43 countries with combined populations of 2.8 billion people have now implemented best-practice policies, most of the world remains unprotected, it said.

WHO acknowledged in an



annual progress report that the goal was still out of sight.

"Trans fat has no known benefit, and huge health risks that incur huge costs for health systems," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. "By contrast, eliminating trans fat is cost effective and has enormous benefits for

health," he said.

"Put simply, trans fat is a toxic chemical that kills, and should have no place in food. It's time to get rid of it once and for all."

The WHO said that nine of the 16 countries with the highest estimated proportion of coronary heart disease deaths caused by trans fat intake were not implementing best-practice policies. They include Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and South Korea.

Francesco Branca, the WHO's nutrition and food safety director, said that trans fat elimination policies were in place in 60 countries. — AFP



INVITATION TO TENDER

SOHAR ALUMINIUM

Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No. : RFP 23/10222647

Tender Title : Provision of Construction of Sohar Hospital Training Center

Scope : Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC invites a qualified service provider experienced in the construction field to construct a training centre for Sohar Hospital. The service provider should have the ability to build the project with the required specification and within the agreed project time period.

Tender No. : RFP 23/002

Tender Title : Provision of Metal Management Services at SA Metal Yard

Scope : Sohar Aluminium Co. LLC (SA) manufactures and produces liquid and solid metals and requires metal management system service. The Contractor who will be identified for this work shall be able to provide a comprehensive Metal Management System for the safe receipt, storage, packing, transport and delivery of the SA's finished metal products (metal), including all related administrative, Equipment's and documentation requirements from Sohar Aluminium Metal Yard (SAMY) to Container Terminal at Sohar Port.

Tender No. : RFP 23/001

Tender Title : Provision of Emergency Aluminium Bus Bar Welding Services

Scope : Vendor to provide onsite highly skilled & Certified Aluminium (MIG welders working 24x7x365 (4 welders for 12 hours shift x 2 shift x 365 days) on-site to carry out emergency repairs on Aluminium bus bars. The Vendor shall ensure enough relievers to cover their weekly off, annual leave, sick leave and emergency leaves etc., as per labour law guidelines. Emergency requirements are not on continuous basis; hence, the welders will be allocated suitable alternative work as required by the department.

Document Issue Date : 31 January 2023

Last Date For Applying : 30 January 2023

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>

MoSD plans social club for Palestinian community soon



MUSCAT: Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, (MoSD), received Dr Tayseer Jaradat, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Sultanate of Oman, and members of a Palestinian delegation comprising offspring of Palestinian martyrs and children of Palestinians jailed in prisons of Israeli occupation forces.

During the meeting, the minister underscored the significance of the visit which, she said, embodies the depth of fraternal relations and the strong bonds

Social Development Ministry receives offspring of Palestinian martyrs

between Oman and Palestine.

The meeting was an opportunity to exchange expertise and study various aspects of social areas, including the childhood sector, Dr Laila added.

The Palestinian ambassador commended Oman's permanent stance in supporting the State of Palestine. He valued the Social Development Ministry's gesture to announce the social club of the Palestinian community in Oman.

The meeting was attended by Assayida Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidy, Director General of Family Development at the ministry, as well as other officials and employees operating in the childhood welfare field. — ONA

Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tender for 2023:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
03/2023	Fortigate Firewalls Renewal with Local Support For One Year	02 Feb 2023	16 Feb 2023	25 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E-Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. The Vendors must provide **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value valid for (90) days on website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24402200 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

PASI

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www.pasi.gov.om | TaminatOman | Contact us 800 77 600

283.9k national employees working in private sector

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH
MUSCAT, JAN 23

According to data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of insured Omanis in the private sector has risen by 6.4 per cent to 283,900 workers by the end of 2023 as more than 17,000 nationals joined the sector in 2022.

The statistics show that approximately 18,000 national employees in the private sector earn a monthly salary above RO 2,000 while 88,000 employees earn between RO 325 and RO 400. About 50,000 nationals earn between RO 400 and RO 500 per month and 35,000 national employees earn between RO 500 and RO 600.

Earlier, the Ministry of Labour said that the private sector has become attractive to the youth of late with less than 3 per cent migrating to the public sector from the private sector.

Last year, the ministry managed to provide more than 35,000 jobs in both sectors for nationals. The ministry underscored the importance of attracting investments and focusing on diversification in all economic sectors specially the

service sectors that are capable of generating job opportunities.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour has made great strides in job nationalisation in the private sector including administrative and financial jobs and other positions at the departments and sections of the registration, admission and students deanships and all counselling and social guidance jobs at private colleges and universities. Jobs at administrative and financial jobs and some educational segments have also been nationalised in addition to health and occupational safety and health supervisors at private schools.

A total of 190 jobs were made available for nurses in addition to

43 jobs for dentists and 110 jobs for pharmacists.

Some jobs are currently under Omanisation in postal and telecommunication services in coordination with telecom companies and subcontractors.

Also, the ministry is coordinating with banks and private companies to provide financing for entrepreneurs to start up businesses that would contribute to development in the governorates and speed up the activation of business incubators to boost emerging businesses.

The NCSI data show that the majority of national employees in the private sector are in the construction sector with 52,000, wholesale and retail trade sector (42,000), manufacturing (34,000).

A driving licence for lifetime

FROM PAGE 1

Resolution No 32/2018 specified that the validity of a vehicle licence shall be one year from the date of registration or renewal, and it may be for a period of two years for government vehicles, vehicles of diplomatic and consular bodies and organisations accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, unless it is decided to inspect them annually in accordance with the

provision of Article 39.

In order to obtain a permanent driver's licence for life, it is necessary to adhere to the conditions set by the General Traffic Department.

In the event of violations by the permanent driving licence holder, there is provision to withdraw the special light driving licence if any of the aforementioned controls are found to be absent.

It is necessary to recognise and

adhere to legal controls related to traffic. It is necessary to know that the basic principle in driving a vehicle of any kind is that it is a kind of contract between the authority responsible for granting this licence, which is the General Traffic Department, and the individual (the licence applicant) for the purpose of using the vehicle on the public road, which is a public benefit provided by the state to serve members of the society.

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



Forum to explore jobs for people with special needs

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The First Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Forum will explore the possibility of better employability for the specially-abled people in the country. An initiative called ‘DHH Employment and Training’ will look into employment aspect of the people with special needs.

The DHH Forum will be held under the auspices of Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour at the Hormuz Grand

Hotel on Wednesday.

Organised under a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Zubair Corporation, Tanmia, Octal by Vertex Business Solutions and Al Massa for Marketing and CSR Project Management, the initiative aims to promote education, employment and empowerment of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals in the country.

“We are pleased to be launching the nation’s first of its kind initiative for the DHH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) in partnership with

The DHH Forum meets tomorrow under the auspices of Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour

Vertex Business Solutions,” said Muna al Shukaili, CEO, Al Massa Group. “Through the initiative it is our humble endeavour to bring about more awareness and discuss opportunities related to the general welfare of DHH individuals by

providing expertise related to challenges faced by them; and encouraging the private sector to provide access to education, training, jobs, resources and services.”

The Sultanate of Oman has the second largest number of hearing impaired population in the Gulf Cooperation Council region after Saudi Arabia and the country has nearly 16,000 hearing-impaired, according to a test survey. This doesn’t include the cases in the far away villages, as the survey didn’t include those areas, according to

Oman Association for the Hearing Impaired.

The Association, established under Ministry of Social Development Decision No (177/2013), aims to cater to the needs of the people with hearing disabilities and support them in all aspects of their lives. The national prevalence of bilateral hearing impairment was 55.3 per 1000 Omani population.

According to a community-based nationwide survey for hearing loss conducted by Dr Mazin al Khaboori and Rajiv Khandekar,

the prevalence of bilateral hearing impairment was 55/1000 and the gender difference were 325 of 1000 males and 17 of 1000 females respectively, in the age brackets of 60-10-years.

Establishing primary ear care, introducing hearing screening for neonates and schoolchildren, promoting safe preventive practices for ear care, strengthening secondary-level ear care services and introducing comprehensive rehabilitative initiatives for the hearing-disabled are recommended to reduce the hearing loss rates.



Upper air trough to affect Oman skies today

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The latest weather updates and analysis of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre indicate that an upper air trough will likely affect the Sultanate of Oman starting from today, January 24 until January 28, Saturday.

Clouds advection and isolated rain with occasional thundershowers are expected over the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah

and Muscat. Clouds cover is expected to gradually extend to the governorates of North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar. The peak of the effect is expected during the upcoming Wednesday and Thursday. The highest expected amounts of rainfall will cover the northern governorates.

Accumulation of isolated rainfall is expected to range from 10 to 60 mm and according to Oman Met Office this could cause wadis to flow. There are chances for frost over the peaks of the mountains. Fresh downdraft winds are

expected to gain a speed of 15 to 40 Lt.

Sea state is forecast to be moderate along the coastal areas with maximum wave height ranging between 2 to 3 metres. Rapid decrease in temperature is expected over most of the governorates especially over the mountain peaks.

The Civil Aviation Authority advises all to take precaution during rainfall and wadies flow and to check the visibility and sea state before sailing and follow the issued weather bulletins and reports.

Oman to host Arab Forum for Scholarly Research on Jan 30

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will host the tasks of the 9th session of Arab Forum for Scholarly Research and Sustainable Development, which will be held on January 30-31.

The forum will be organised by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

As many as 150 researchers from Oman and other Arab countries will take part in the two-day forum titled “Arab



female researchers’ role in sustainable development”.

The forum will be opened

by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in the presence of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, and Dr Mohammed bin Ouled Amar, Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

— ONA

RNO CARRIES OUT NAVAL EXERCISE, SEA LION



Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) carried out naval exercise, Lion of the Sea, in Al Batinah and Al Wusta governorates. The ships and crews sailed from Said bin Sultan Naval Base, heading to the naval operations designated to carry out the exercise. During this exercise, many naval military applications took place between the participating ships and crews according to the plan drawn. It is worth noting that the implementation of the exercise comes within the framework of the annual training plans pursued by the RNO and to maintain its readiness levels and its personnel in various maritime disciplines, in line with the national tasks entrusted to it. — ONA

ROHM to present spectacular folk music festival on Jan 26, 27

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present a festival of traditional and heritage music entitled ‘Folk Music Festival’. The Festival will take place on January 26 and 27 at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts.

The Folk Music Festival is becoming an annual event

which offers audiences a musical journey around the world with special guest countries invited to attend.

The Festival celebrates the traditional folk music of each country, acknowledging the intrinsic value of preserving and sharing musical heritage and, promotes artistic collaboration

between nations.

Audiences can enjoy the amazing spectacle of flamboyant costumes, elaborate dances, singing and accompanying musicians. The Festival is suitable for audiences of all ages. The festival will be held at the Maidan Al Bahri in the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts. — ONA

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REVIVING | There is excitement in the air at the Cocomelon booth. The special treats to the visitors at the carnival are the parade of carnival characters, their acrobatics and fireworks

ALADDIN, ALICE'S ADVENTURES



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Muscat Nights carnival at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre's garden area gives the visitors an eerie feeling. The carnival exercise began with the opening of the Muscat Nights on January 19 and continues until February 4. Children enjoyed video games, ice skating, rides and many other games, while adults were seen watching the stage shows and hanging out around food courts. Tariq al Tarqan, Muhammad, Dima and Tala celebrated their

childhood memories with a concert at the carnival on the first day itself. The activities at all Muscat Nights venues are open throughout the weekdays, while the weekends have some additional shows and events. Aladdin and Alice in Wonderland's stage show at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) begins at 5.40 pm, followed by its second show at 7.40 pm, and finally at 9.40 pm. The VR stations are furnished with bean bags, and children hang out on their own while parents keep an eye out.



ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS



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

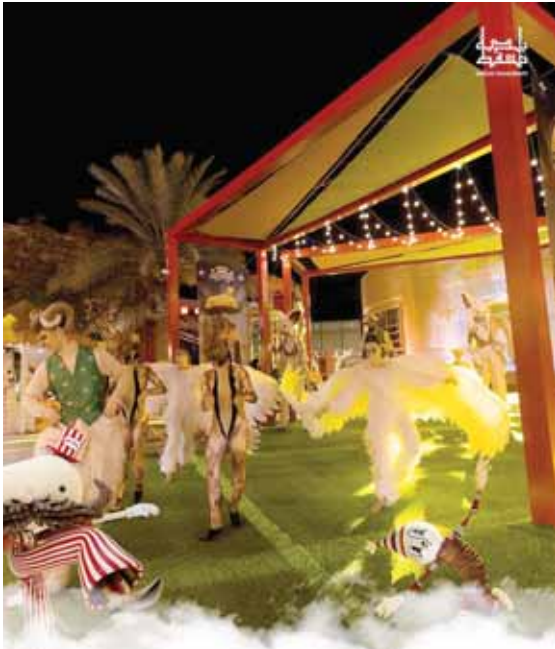
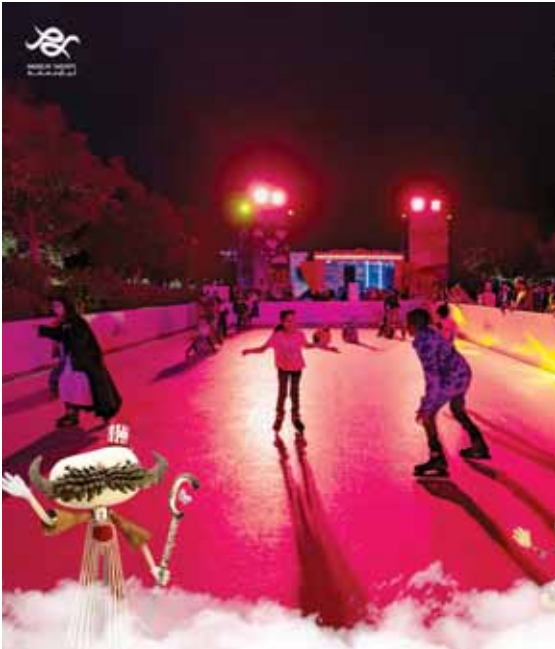
Tender No	Description	Tender Price (R.O)	Grade	Last Date of Buying	Last Date of Submission
Tanweer - 01/2023	Supply Extension of LV Works To Feed Power Supply to Industrial Plot of Khalifa Amer Khamees Alharbi at Duqm in Al Duqum Wilayat - AL Wusta Governorate	50/=	"C" and Above	02/02/2023	19/02/2023
Tanweer - 02/2023	Supply Extension of HV/LV Works to Feed Power Supply to Industrial Plot of International Seafood Company at Duqm in Al Duqum Wilayat (SEZAD) - AL Wusta Governorate				
Tanweer - 03/2023	Interlinking of Distribution Substations (No.27 with No.89 and No.86) by Installing a new 11KV U/G Feeder in Hij Area at Wilayat Mahout- Al-Wusta Governorate			31/01/2023	14/02/2023
Tanweer - 04/2023	Extension Work to Feed Power Supply with Substation (500 KVA) Ground Mounted Transformer + LV Cable to Feed Power to Area of Mr. Muhsin Hamid Mohammed Al Uraimi at Al Nahdah in Wilayat Masirah - Al Sharqiya South Government				

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tender:** Interested and Specialized Companies and Establishments registered with Tender Board (valid certificate), Tanweer and Distribution Code Review Panel (DCRP) may obtain the Tender documents from Procurement & Contracts Department, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The fees for the tenders shall be deposited on Tanweer account 0423010783090041 – Bank Muscat and for more information please contact via email address i.e. tender.purchase@tanweer.nama.om, or call us on phone number: 24250824. SME's Ryida card holders are exempted form tender fee.
- Bank Guarantee:** The Tenderer should enclose original bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (Tanweer). SME's Ryida card holders are exempted form tender bid bond.
- Offers Submission:**
 - Original bids along Cover letter shall be placed by bidders inside the red waxed Tender's envelopes as communicated to bidders by Tanweer. Such documents must be serialized according to the numbers of the tender items.
 - Tender bids shall be provided separately on a CD Rooms, along with original cover letters in each envelop. Bids and cover letters shall bear the bidder's official seal and must be signed in either blue or red ink, but not black. A true soft copy of the bids shall be provided on a CD in an inner envelope marked "Copy". Bids who do not comply with these requirements will be overlooked.
 - Bidders shall write the following details on the cover of CD:
 - Tender name and number.
 - Tenders to be Addressed to the **Chairman of Minor Tender Committee**, Tanweer.
 - Prequalification / Technical Proposal / Commercial Proposal / Bid Bond.
- Submission Location:** The Completed bids in CD should be deposited in the Tender Box at Tanweer Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 12:00 PM on the last date of submission.
- Tender Price (R.O):** 5% VAT is inclusive.
- Rural Areas Electricity Company without mentioning the reason is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender and not bond to refund tender purchase fees if you are not qualified to participate the tender.

For more information please call: 80077787

There is excitement in the air at the Cocomelon booth. Once children arrive at the carnival, they just move from one activity to the other. The carnival also features opportunities for entrepreneurs. Twiga coffee shop @twiga.om is a project by two young entrepreneurs, and their successful business encouraged them to be at the Muscat Nights' carnival. "This is a great opportunity because we can grow as we introduce our products to more people. We are based in Al Khodh, but here we are meeting people from all over the country. We specialise in coffee and chocolate milk. Business is good. We deal with coffee beans from El Salvador, and here we are able to introduce it to the guests," said Nimr al Balushi, who came up with the idea two years ago when he was in Italy. International food chains, as well as local brands, are actively participating at the Muscat Nights being held at OCEC. Other attractions are the mirror photo booth to the delight of children, the amazing video mapping show and the slider. The special treats to the visitors are the parade of carnival characters, their acrobatics and fireworks. There is an entrance fee of RO 3 for adults and RO 2 for children. The visitors have no time limit, and the entry ticket covers all the rides and shows.



Tanweer
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State Council at Arab Parliament in Cairo

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Sunday in the third session of the third legislative term of the Arab Parliament, which was held under the chairmanship of Adel bin Abdul Rahman al Assoumi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament, at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo.

The delegation of the State Council at the Arab Parliament included Dr Hassan bin Ali al Madhani, member of the State Council, and member of the Foreign Affairs, Politics and National Security Committee of the Arab Parliament, and Shaikh Ali bin Nasser al



Mahrouqi, member of the State Council.

The session was initiated by the Parliament Speaker who affirmed the Arab Parliament's firm and permanent support for the Palestinian cause, and by reviewing the reports of the Parliament's committees.

The request of the



Parliamentary Network of the Non-Aligned Movement to obtain observer status in the Arab Parliament was also discussed along with the Arab Parliament's sponsorship of an annual award to support Arabic language. — ONA

ASDS chief receives Saudi military delegation

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Monday a delegation from the Command and Staff College of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The delegation is headed by Maj Gen Mohammed Jadu Al Ruwaili, Commander of the Command and Staff College and Head of the National Defence University of the KSA.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mashaikhi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College, several ASDS senior officers and the Military Attaché of the Saudi Embassy at Muscat.

The delegation of the Saudi Command and Staff College,



also visited the National Defence College (NDC). Upon the guests' arrival at the NDC, they were greeted by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the NDC.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed a spectrum of topics of mutual interest. The visiting delegation toured the college's facilities, as well as its various departments and halls.

Later the delegation also visited Oman's Joint Command and Staff College (CSC).

Upon the guests' arrival, they were greeted by Air Commodore, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Mashaikhi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College. The guests went on tour of the CSC and they were briefed about the college and its general curriculum. — ONA

Activities of Al Ashkharah Winter Forum begins today



JAALAN BANI BU ALI: Activities of the 'Al Ashkharah Winter Forum 2023' in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah begins today in the public theatre of the Municipality Park.

The five-day forum concludes on Saturday, January 28.

The forum aims to highlight the role of Omani youth in voluntary work and promoting Omani heritage, as well as supporting productive families in the wilayat.

The forum will also highlight

various children's programmes and general cultural competitions, and stimulating winter tourism movement, due to the tourism potential of Al Ashkharah.

Mohammed bin Sultan al Bateeni, general supervisor of the forum, explained that the forum includes many programmes and various social, artistic and recreational activities, including exhibits for productive families and craftsmen, a tent of heritage and poetry, stories of the past, a field for riding horses and

camels, as well as an open exhibition of photos from the Niyabat Al Ashkharah.

The forum also contains folklore, children's competitions and games, plays, and an artistic evening performed by a group of Omani poets and artists.

It is worth noting that this forum is organised by the Al Ashkharah Volunteer Team in cooperation with the Municipality of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and the Omani Women's Association, Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. — ONA

ISC Oman to host ghazal concert on Jan 28

MUSCAT: The Indian Social Club Oman in association with Embassy of India, Muscat is organising a ghazal concert by well-known playback singer Manjari on January 28 at the Oman Auditorium at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz Carlton Hotel from 7 pm.

The concert is part of India's Republic Day celebrations in Muscat, Oman. The event is being presented by Purshottam Kanji Exchange.

Manjari is a well-established ghazal singer and has performed at many concerts all over world. She is recipient of the Sahir and Adeeb International Award for her contribution to Urdu language and ghazals in 2016. She has worked with Salim Sulaiman for the project 'Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

Also sung for the movie 'Kadke Kamal Ke'. Ghazal lovers and music enthusiasts who are interested in attending the concert can register themselves at the Indian Social Club reception in Darsait, on telephone number 24701347.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (5/2023)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Obtaining Bidding Docs.	Deadline for Inquires Submission	Deadline for Submission
1	AB/01/2023	Car Park Construction and Management Project in the Plot Number (409) at Al Arin at Mutrah	75/- OMR	14/03/2023	05/03/2023	26/03/2023

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality have to be valid as per note number one below, to be able to get the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (**MM.PC@mm.gov.om**), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name,office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commerical registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request reciveid after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted**.

Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (**www.mm.gov.om**). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (**erm@mm.gov.om**).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (**MM.PC@mm.gov.om**).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Ministry of Social Development



An orange line metro train (OLMT) stands parked at a station after train services got suspended due to a countrywide power outage in Lahore on Monday. – AFP

Pakistan power outage continues into night

ISLAMABAD: A massive power breakdown across Pakistan continued after night fell on Monday, affecting most of the country's 220 million residents, including in the mega cities of Karachi and Lahore.

Pakistan's national power system is a complex and delicate web where problems can quickly cascade. The breakdown was caused by a fault in the national grid at around 7:30 am (02:30 GMT), plunging much of the country into darkness.

"We hope that the electricity will be restored throughout the country by tonight," Energy Minister Khurram Dastagir Khan said in a video statement.

The cut was caused by a variation in frequency on the national grid as power generation units were turned on early in the morning.

The units had been temporarily switched off at night to save fuel, Khan earlier told the media.

Localised power cuts

are common in Pakistan and hospitals, factories and government institutions are often kept running by private generators. The machines are, however, beyond the means of most citizens and small businesses.

In parts of northern Pakistan, temperatures were due to drop below freezing on Monday night with supplies of natural gas — the most common heating method — also unreliable due to load-shedding. The economy is already hobbled by rampant inflation, a falling rupee, and severely low forex reserves, with the power cut piling extra pressure on small businesses.

In the garrison city of Rawalpindi, homeware trader Muhammad Iftikhar Sheikh, 71, said he was unable to demonstrate electronic products to browsing customers. "The customers never buy without testing first," he said. "All of us are sitting idle."

Schools mostly continued

either in the dark or using battery-powered lighting.

A shop owner in the southern port city Karachi, where temperatures were higher, said he feared his entire dairy stock would spoil without refrigeration.

Thirty-nine-year-old printer Khurram Khan said orders were piling up because of the blackout.

Unreliable power is "a permanent curse which our governments have failed to overcome", Khan complained.

Repair work was underway, with limited power restored in some parts of the country, including the capital Islamabad.

Karachi, with a population of more than 15 million, and Lahore, with a population of more than 10 million, both remained largely without power as darkness fell.

A similar breakdown in January 2021 affected the entire country, after a fault occurred in southern Pakistan, tripping the national transmission system.

— Agencies

Japan PM says tackling birth rate crisis 'cannot wait' any more

TOKYO: Japanese Prime minister Fumio Kishida pledged on Monday to take urgent steps to tackle the country's declining birth rate, saying it was "now or never" for one of the world's oldest societies.

Japan has in recent years been trying to encourage its people to have more children with promises of cash bonuses and better benefits, but it remains one of the most expensive places in the world to raise a child, according to surveys.

Births plunged to a new record low last year, according to official estimates, dropping below 800,000 for the first time — a watershed moment that came eight years earlier than the government had expected.

That most likely precipitated a further population decline in a country where the median age is 49, the highest in the world behind only the tiny city-state of Monaco.



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida prepares to deliver his policy speech during the first day of an ordinary session at the lower house of parliament in Tokyo, Japan, on Monday. – Reuters

"Our nation is on the cusp of whether it can maintain its societal functions," Kishida said in a policy speech at the opening

of this year's parliamentary session.

"It is now or never when it comes to policies regarding births and child-rearing - it is an issue that simply cannot wait any longer," he added.

Kishida said he would submit plans to double the budget for child-related policies by June, and that a new Children and Families government agency to oversee the issue would be set up in April.

Japan is the third-most-expensive country globally to raise a child, according to YuWa Population Research, behind only China and South Korea, countries also seeing shrinking populations in worrying signs for the global economy.

Other countries are also coming to grips with ageing and shrinking populations. Last week, China reported that its population dropped in 2022 for the first time in 60 years. — AFP

India may cut gold import duty to sideline smugglers

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI: India is expected to slash the import duty on gold to undercut smugglers who have been offering hefty discounts as illicit imports boom after Covid-19, denting the market share of banks and refiners, government and industry officials said.

A cut in the import duty by the world's second-biggest consumer could lift retail sales by making gold cheaper ahead of peak demand season and support global prices.

It could also revive operations of domestic gold refineries, who have seen their business wither over the past two months as they are unable to compete with grey-market operators.

"The government is aware of problems created by the higher duty structure and they will be fixed soon," said one government official, who declined to be identified, in response to a question about the possibility of a cut in the import duty.

Grey market operators, who smuggle gold in from overseas and sell it for cash to avoid duties, got a boost in July when the government raised the basic import duty on gold to 12.5 per cent from 7.5 per cent to bring down the trade deficit and



A worker shows gold biscuits at a precious metals refinery in Mumbai, India. – Reuters file photo

support the rupee.

The effective duty is now 18.45 per cent, which includes the 12.5 per cent import duty, 2.5 per cent agriculture infrastructure development cess and other taxes.

Another official said the government was considering bringing the effective rate down to below 12 per cent, adding: "We will take a final call soon."

The finance ministry declined to comment while the trade ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. An official at the Ministry of Commerce said it was in favour of cutting the import duty on gold and had asked the finance ministry to do so.

"Smuggling is going up," said the commerce ministry official, adding that the duty could be cut in an upcoming budget.

The July increase in the duty on gold was a welcome boost for the smugglers, who were largely sidelined in 2020 and 2021 because of travel restrictions imposed to contain Covid-19.

The grey market operators are now offering a more than \$40 per ounce discount on official domestic prices, which no bank or refiner can match, said James Jose, managing director of refiner CGR Metalloys.

"Substantial reduction in the duty is the only solution to stop smuggling," Jose said. — Reuters

Israeli restrictions hurting West Bank

TEL AVIV: Human Rights Watch charged on Monday that new Israeli rules for foreigners entering the West Bank risked turning the occupied territory into "another Gaza," cutting residents off from the outside world.

The regulations, which have faced waves of condemnation from the European Union and United States, have also been clouded by uncertainty.

Israeli has said the rules, which came into force in October, are aimed at clarifying the procedures surrounding West Bank entry and are being implemented on a two-year trial

basis. They were also revised last year amid widespread criticism. Despite those revisions, HRW said the measures "threaten to isolate Palestinians from loved ones and global civil society."

"By making it harder for people to spend time in the West Bank, Israel is taking yet another step toward turning the West Bank into another Gaza, where two million Palestinians have lived virtually sealed off from the outside world for over 15 years," HRW's Eric Goldstein said.

Gaza has been under a strict Israeli blockade since 2007, the year Hamas took power in the coastal territory.

Israel has occupied the West Bank since 1967. Some of the most controversial new West Bank access measures relate to foreigners seeking to join their Palestinian spouse.

There are also new curbs on foreigners seeking to spend time in the West Bank, including to volunteer, study or teach.

For academics, for example, Israel now retains the right "to review the academic qualifications of lecturers or researchers at Palestinian universities," and determine whether their qualifications merit an extended stay, HRW said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KABUL

Afghanistan aims to vaccinate 5.3 million

Afghanistan launched a large-scale polio vaccination campaign on Monday aimed at protecting 5.3 million children under the age of 5.

The Taliban-run Health Ministry said the campaign will cover 16 of the country's 34 provinces and last a period of three days.

Last year, two cases of the wild type of polio virus were detected in Afghanistan, according to ministry spokesman Sharaf Zaman. Vaccination campaigns



in Afghanistan and Pakistan often encounter difficulties due to conspiracy theories that the polio vaccination causes infertility or that the vaccinators are being used as spies.

KARACHI

Pakistan court acquits cops over killings

A Pakistan court on Monday cleared more than a dozen police officers of the 2018 killing of a Karachi shopkeeper, his family lawyer said, a shooting which caused national outcry over police abuse. Rights groups have long accused Pakistan's police of orchestrating so-called encounter killings, staging shoot-outs with suspects in order to pursue extrajudicial executions.

In January 2018, Rao Anwar — a senior superintendent with a string of allegations against



him — led a raid on a suspected Taliban hideout in of Karachi. Four men were killed, whose families rejected claims of militant links and said they were working in retail.

BEIJING

Northernmost Chinese city freezes at -53 degrees

The mercury fell to minus 53 degrees Celsius in the northern Chinese city of Mohe posting a new record, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The temperature in China's northernmost city, which lies on the border with Russia, broke the previous record of minus 52.3 set in 1969. The city has seen three days in a row with temperatures below minus 50. Extreme cold has hit Heilongjiang province, in which Mohe lies, with several regions on the Greater Hinggan



Range posting the coldest temperatures ever recorded. Mohe itself sees snow and ice for eight months of the year and records an annual average temperature of minus 3.



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In brief

■ PARIS



FRANCE STANDS BY PENSION REFORM PLANS

France's government is sticking to its controversial pension reform plans to raise the general retirement age from 62 to 64, despite mass protests in the past week.

Not raising the retirement age would mean saying goodbye to a financially balanced pension system, which would be irresponsible towards future generations, Labour Minister Olivier Dussopt said in Paris on Monday.

However, the rest of the reforms could still be changed in the course of the parliamentary consultation in February, the minister said. The text of the law was presented at a Cabinet meeting on Monday.

■ OUAGADOUGOU



BURKINA FASO ENDS FRENCH MILITARY ACCORD

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

The West African country is facing an insurgency by groups linked to Al Qaeda and IS which have taken over large swathes of land and displaced millions of people in the wider Sahel region, just south of the Sahara.

The national television station reported on Saturday that the government had suspended a 2018 military accord with Paris on January 18, giving France one month to pull its troops out.

■ PRETORIA



SOUTH AFRICA DEFENDS PLANNED MILITARY DRILLS

South Africa's foreign minister on Monday deflected criticism of joint military drills planned with Russia and China, saying that hosting such exercises with "friends" was the "natural course of relations."

Naledi Pandor made her comments during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was visiting South Africa 11 months after Russia's war on Ukraine.

Some opposition parties and South Africa's small Ukrainian community have said that hosting Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov is insensitive. South Africa says it is impartial on the Ukraine conflict.

In tit-for-tat Nato's Baltic States and Russia expel ambassadors

VILNIUS: Nato and EU members Estonia and Latvia told their Russian ambassadors to leave after Moscow said it was downgrading diplomatic relations with Estonia, accusing it of "total Russophobia."

Estonia, Latvia and their Baltic neighbour Lithuania have been among a group of Nato allies arguing strongly for Germany to provide its Leopard battle tanks to boost Ukraine in fighting off Russia's war.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said it had told the Estonian envoy he must leave next month, and both countries would be represented in each other's capitals by an interim charge d'affaires instead of an ambassador.

Estonia responded in kind, telling the Russian envoy to leave by February 7, Foreign Affairs Minister Urmas Reinsalu said.

"We will continue to support Ukraine as Russia is planning large-scale attacks, and we call on other like-minded countries to increase their assistance to Ukraine," Reinsalu said in a statement.

Latvia, in solidarity with Estonia, told its Moscow envoy to leave by February 27, according



A person walks past the "Children of Donbass" open-air photo exhibition outside the Estonian Consulate in Moscow on Monday. — Reuters

to a tweet by Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics. Both countries said they are downgrading their diplomatic ties with Russia to charge d'affaires level.

Lithuania threw out its Russian envoy in April and downgraded diplomatic representation, after

Ukraine accused Russian forces of killing civilians in the town of Bucha.

Moscow said Monday's move was in response to an Estonian decision to reduce the size of the Russian embassy in Tallinn. "In recent years, the Estonian

leadership has purposefully destroyed the entire range of relations with Russia. Total Russophobia, the cultivation of hostility towards our country have been elevated by Tallinn to the rank of state policy," it said.

— Reuters

■ PROTESTING DEMOLITIONS



A Palestinian girl reacts next to an international activist during a protest in the Bedouin village of Al-Khan Al-Ahmar, which Israel plans to demolish, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Monday. — Reuters

British PM orders probe into ally's tax affairs

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Monday he had asked his independent ethics adviser to look into a tax case involving the chairman of his governing Conservative Party because there were "questions that need answering".

Just hours after allies of Conservative chairman Nadhim Zahawi said he would not stand down over a dispute about his tax affairs, Sunak said he wanted the ethics adviser to make sure Zahawi had complied with the rules guiding ministers.

"Integrity and accountability is really important to me, including in this case. There are questions that need answering and that is why I have asked our independent adviser to get to the bottom of



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak attends a media broadcast interview during his visit to Berrywood Hospital in Northampton, Britain, on Monday. — Reuters

everything," he said in a statement. "I am pleased Nadhim Zahawi has agreed that approach and has agreed to fully cooperate with that investigation."

"I am confident I acted properly throughout," he said in a statement, adding he would not discuss the issue further as the process moved forward.

In the three months since Sunak was appointed prime minister, his government has been buffeted by questions over the probity of some of his lawmakers after he promised to lead the country with "integrity, professionalism and accountability".

Earlier, an ally of Zahawi said: "He will not be standing down" after he had given details on how he settled a dispute with Britain's

tax authorities. They ruled that he had been "careless" with his declarations but had not, he said, deliberately made an error to pay less tax.

The opposition Labour Party said Sunak, who became Britain's third prime minister in as many months after his two predecessors were brought down first by scandal and then economic chaos, was too weak to sack Zahawi.

"His position is totally untenable, and it shouldn't be a case of we are sitting around waiting for him to resign, the prime minister should be sacking him," Lucy Powell, a senior Labour lawmaker, told BBC News.

"Every day that passes just shows the weakness of the prime minister that he's actually unable

Mass shooter's motive elusive as dead mourned

MONTEREY PARK:

Investigators scrambled on Monday to discover why a 72-year-old gunman opened fire in a California dance hall popular with older patrons and killed 10 people before fatally turning a gun on himself hours later.

Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said the reasons behind the Lunar New Year massacre carried out by Huu Can Tran on Saturday night remained elusive.

Officials worked into Monday trying to identify the 10 people he killed on Saturday night at the Star Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park, about 11 km east of downtown Los Angeles. Another 10 people were wounded and seven remained hospitalised late on Sunday.

Tran's rampage could have been far worse. About 20 minutes after the shooting in Monterey Park, he entered another dance club in the neighbouring city of Alhambra. There, two patrons wrestled a weapon away from the septuagenarian before he could get a shot off. Tran then fled. "I can tell you that the suspect walked in there, probably with the intent to kill more people, and two brave community members decided they were going to jump into action and disarm him," Luna told reporters in a Sunday evening briefing.

About 12 hours later, police officers in the city of Torrance, 20 miles southwest of Monterey Park, approached a white cargo van Tran was driving. As officers neared the van, they heard a single gun shot from inside when Tran killed himself.

Luna did not identify any of the victims but said the five men and five women appeared to be in their 50s, 60s and beyond. The sheriff said the pistol Tran used was likely illegal in California, where state laws ban any magazine holding more than 10 rounds.

"We want to know, we want to know how something this awful can happen," Luna told reporters. — Reuters

Bringing tech accessibility features to classrooms



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

Usually, in education, accessibility features are solely seen for students with disabilities, but the truth is that a wide variety of children can benefit from them.

Through the lens of universal learning design, accessibility features can benefit all learners as they minimise barriers and promote learning.

For example, text-to-speech tools benefit students with reading challenges and those learning a second language, proofreading their work, correcting errors, and auditory learners who can focus better while listening.

Using accessibility features offers a multimodal learning opportunity for all learners.

Here are some of the accessibility features that can be used in any classroom.

iPad Accessibility Features:

Spoken Content: The iPad's text-to-speech feature can read aloud

a section of the text or the entire screen. Children can also be taught to change the speech rate and the text's appearance.

Under this setting, words and sentences can be highlighted in different colours to make reading easier. This feature also includes typing feedback, where the iPad can read text aloud while it is typed.

- Assistive Touch: This feature makes navigating and controlling the iPad easier and customises the actions according to need. It helps students add an action for the screenshot, making it easier to take screenshots on the device.

- Safari Reader: This feature eliminates distracting content from web pages (such as ads, menu bars, and banners). Students can customise the webpage's appearance, including the font size, background colour and font.

- Magnifier: Allows students to magnify objects in their environment, such as magnifying a

LIKE WITH ANY OTHER TECHNOLOGY WITH ACCESSIBILITY, THE MOST CRUCIAL PART IS TO HAVE STUDENTS PRACTICE THE FEATURES TO BECOME FLUENT

page, an artifact in the classroom, or any object in nature that they like to examine up close.

- Dictation: It is the iPad's speech-to-text feature. With this feature, the iPad converts speech into text.

- Translate: The iPad has a built-in translation that does work across apps. The app allows students to highlight text on a webpage and translate it into another language. The Translate app for iPadOS 14 and higher allows students to translate text, voice, conversations, or texts on objects in their environment.
- Live Captions: It is a new

feature in iPadOS 16 that allows captioning spoken content. Once enabled during a lesson, Live Captions can help students easily follow what the teachers say or help while listening to a podcast.

Google Accessibility Features:

- Voice Typing can convert speech into text in Google Docs and Google Slides.

- Google Translate can change Google Docs from one language to another.

- Students can use Captions to create captions when presenting using Google Slides.

- Google also offers full-page zoom for people with low vision.

- Keyboard shortcuts also can help students work faster.

Microsoft Accessibility Features:

- Dictation can be used in Word and PowerPoint to convert speech into text.

- Captions and subtitles can be used in a different language when giving presentations in PowerPoint.

- Immersive Reader has a wide range of options such as text read aloud, highlighting sentences on the screen, pronunciations, colour coding words option, picture dictionary and translation help. Also, display, font, font size, spacing and background colour can be changed. The feature is built in Office 365 and has a Chrome extension to read web pages.

Like with any other technology with Accessibility, the most crucial part is to have students practice the features to become fluent. The more the students practice, the more willing they will be to engage with the technology and harness it to their benefit.

Equipping students with technology tools makes learning efficient and faster. It empowers students and enables personalised learning.

New New Zealand's prime minister slams 'abhorrent' treatment of Ardern

DANIEL GILHOOLY

New Zealand's incoming prime minister Chris Hipkins criticised the "abhorrent" treatment endured by Jacinda Ardern and vowed to shield his own family, three days after her shock resignation.

Hours after being unanimously endorsed by Labour Party MPs as the party's leader and the nation's next prime minister, Hipkins attacked the personal abuse suffered by Ardern during her more than five years in the top job.

Ardern sparked a national debate about the pressures she faced when she revealed last week that she was stepping down just nine months before October 14 general elections, saying she no longer had "enough in the tank".

Politicians and other public figures have lined up to criticise the "vitriol" Ardern was subjected to as prime minister, notably on social media, although she did not mention it herself.

"The way Jacinda has been treated, particularly by some segments of our society — and they are a small minority — has been utterly abhorrent," Hipkins said.

"It does not represent who we are as a country," said the 44-year-old education and police minister. Men have a responsibility to call out such treatment and say "it's not OK", he said.

The future prime minister, best known for leading a national crackdown on Covid-19 for nearly two years, said he understood that putting himself forward as leader meant he was "public property".

"But my family aren't," he told reporters.

Hipkins said he wanted his six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter to grow up with a "typical Kiwi kid life", adding that his amicable separation from his wife was his own business.

"I have seen the enormous scrutiny and pressure placed on Jacinda and her family and so my response will be to keep my family completely out of the spotlight," he said.

Ardern said she had been exhausted after leading New Zealand through the Covid-19 pandemic, its deadliest terror attack and a volcanic eruption

"I am human. We give as much as we can for as long as we can and then it's time," the 42-year-old leader said. Hipkins said he would be sworn in as the nation's 41st prime minister by the governor general on Wednesday after Ardern formally steps down. — **AFP**

Germany's reluctance on tanks stems from its history and its politics



Steven Erlanger

The writer is the chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe for *NYT*



Erika Solomon

The writer is *NYT's* Berlin correspondent

Germany has self-consciously devoted itself to promoting "peace" and integrating into a European and trans-Atlantic security order where consensus has been the byword.

Russia's war in Ukraine is now forcing Germany to rethink decades-old ideas about its place in Europe, its relationship to Russia and the use of military force.

Germany built its postwar economy on cheap Russian energy and supposedly apolitical trade with Central and Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China, believing that trade produces change, somehow moderating authoritarian regimes.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has challenged all of that. It has been as much a psychological shock to Germany as a political one, undercutting many of its assumptions about Russia; its president, Vladimir Putin; and the role of Germany in a Europe suddenly at war.

Nowhere is the disorientation more apparent than in Germany's reluctance, for now, to send Ukraine its excellent main battle tank, the Leopard 2, or to allow other countries to do so.

The stance has risked isolating Germany and exasperating its allies. Most important, the Ukrainians say, Germany's hesitance threatens to hamper their ability to hold off or turn around an anticipated Russian offensive this spring.

Although Germans overwhelmingly support Ukraine in its fight, the hesitation on sending tanks reflects the deep ambivalence in a nation with a catastrophic history of aggression during World War II and that remains profoundly divided about being a military leader and risking a direct confrontation with Russia.

Opinion polls show that half of Germans do not want to send tanks.

"German reluctance here can be summed up in one word, and that's 'history,'" said Steven Sokol, president of the American Council on Germany.



The Reichstag, where the German Parliament convenes, in Berlin.

RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE IS NOW FORCING GERMANY TO RETHINK DECADES-OLD IDEAS ABOUT ITS PLACE IN EUROPE, ITS RELATIONSHIP TO RUSSIA AND THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE

"Germans want to be seen as a partner, not an aggressor, and they have a particular sensitivity to delivering arms in regions where German arms were historically used to kill millions of people," he said, citing Russia, Poland and Ukraine. "People do not want German weapons on the front lines being used to kill people in those regions."

But Germans risk misinterpreting the lessons of their history, said Timothy Garton Ash, a historian of

Germany and Europe at St Antony's College at Oxford.

"The German position is profoundly confused, with the old thinking dead and the new not yet born," he said.

Indeed, despite German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's declaration early last year of a 'Zeitenwende,' or historical turning point, for Germany, his government and his country have struggled to follow through in building up its military.

Although the Ukraine war has prompted a serious debate in democratic Germany, it is hardly finished, Garton Ash said.

The result has been what Scholz's critics see as his overly tentative leadership at this moment of crisis.

The confusion has been especially pronounced within Scholz's centre-left Social Democratic Party, which heads the current government, said Boris Ruge, a vice chair of the Munich Security Conference.

But politics are at play, too. Both the Social Democrats and the Greens, the largest members of the governing coalition, have strong pacifist wings that party leaders, such as Scholz, cannot ignore. — *The New York Times*

Opinions are free but can be costly

We are all filled with opinions. Whether we excel in anything or not there is one aspect and that is owning an opinion. We either like it or we don't at the same time we have numerous reasons to do so.

Sometimes the decisions are based on our family orientation, cultural settings and our social conditioning. It can be very interesting if we take time to analyse why we take certain steps and wonder what drove us to that conclusion.

We are often more open minded when we are younger, but somehow as we get older we settle in for a road better or most travelled. Maybe it is because we don't want to take too many risks by then. Recently came across a researcher of emotional intelligence and leadership.

Dr Virat Chirania, has a doctorate in emotional intelligence and is an engineer. It was when he was going to be appointed as a Chief Executive Officer when he came across a meditation course and went on to learn meditation and become a teacher at an organisation. He teaches youth and working professionals.

Gone are the days when we thought everything has to do with IQ because today emotional intelligence is taking an upper hand.

According to Dr Virat he was a typical left brained engineer working in an IT job in the United States when he chanced upon the meditation class. And the whole journey changed. The more he meditated the more he was taken to ancient scriptures and the importance of emotional intelligence and the ancient knowledge explaining about emotional intelligence leading him to do his PhD in EI. He explained that increased emotional intelligence increased leadership ability.

While leadership qualities are on their own a vast topic, having the flexibility to change your career path takes confidence and knowing your mind. That's when a friend said if one has been successful in attaining financial independence then it is a smooth transition to a new path.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

WE ARE OFTEN MORE OPEN MINDED WHEN WE ARE YOUNGER, BUT SOMEHOW AS WE GET OLDER WE SETTLE IN FOR A ROAD BETTER OR MOST TRAVELLED

So why is that many are still stuck in a profession that is far away from their true call?

When we are young we are so often asked what do we want to be when we grow up and parents smile proudly and are amazed at some of the answers. They could vary from wanting to be a police man to pilot or a doctor to teacher. When we look at it closely we realise they are the professions we are closely associated with.

We observe teachers and cannot wait to come back home to enact the role at home. While young we never have enough toy kitchen sets, but grow up and see the real utensils and the heart races while thinking of what to cook. It is not because we may not be inspired but the fear is more of getting it wrong and being judged. We are so afraid of being wrong that we would rather not even take the first step to attempt trying.

The fact is the biggest failure is not trying due to the fear of failing. Yet all of us have some some elements of fear.

It could be fear of future, exams, career or even retirement. Life is all about planning and preparation it seems. And most often it is important not to look back. One has to move forward as if there is no other option but keep going ahead. Our comfort zone lures us back and our insecurity prompt us about our shortcomings. As the experts say it only takes about 20 minutes to over come hunger, it only takes a while to overcome the hurdles whether choosing a new subject, career or lifestyle.

After all if there is anything constant it is change.

Besides the world has billions of minds and no one has ran out of ideas may it be musical composition, art, designs, scientific breakthroughs, inventions or business ideas. We are still churning them out even thousands of years later.

The ones who are aware of the consciousness say, "I am not the doer."

Where there is fear there is no space for creativity or be a recipient and it is even more sadder to note that this fear is most of the time baseless. So it all goes back to thoughts and opinions.

A VIEW FROM THE TOP



Aerial view shows the top of Al Hamra tower through heavy fog obscuring the rest of the skyline of Kuwait City on Monday. – AFP

A victim of polarisation and extremism

It was shocking for everyone in and outside New Zealand. At a time when things were apparently going relatively on the right track for her, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Arden's sudden decision to throw in the towel was very shocking for all the stakeholders.

She did not mention any reason for her decision and she simply said that she no longer (had) enough in the tank to do it justice.

"I'm leaving, because with such a privileged role comes responsibility – the responsibility to know when you are the right person to lead and also when you are not.

I know what this job takes. And I know that I no longer have enough in the tank to do it justice. It's that simple," she said.

For a person who, just a few months back, was aggressively preparing for the elections to grab a second term, such an abrupt U-turn has raised many pricking questions about the real reason behind her decision.

Yes, she was facing intense pressure from the right-wingers and the opposition over some of her decisions and her approval rating was also waning in recent months, but the situation was not so abysmal to compel her to think of quitting in this way.

Intense speculations are making round that the mounting threats from



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

FOR A PERSON WHO, JUST A FEW MONTHS BACK, WAS AGGRESSIVELY PREPARING FOR THE ELECTIONS TO GRAB A SECOND TERM, SUCH AN ABRUPT U-TURN HAS RAISED MANY PRICKING QUESTIONS

some hardliners have pushed her to take up this decision.

At the time of her resignation speech last Thursday, she, despite appearing a little nervous and disoriented, refuted the media speculations that she has resigned amid threats of violence against her: "I don't want to leave the impression that the adversity you face in politics is the reason that people exit.

Yes, it does have an impact. We are humans after all, but that was not the basis of my decision."

But, just a day later, there was a new tinge in her tone on the same topic and she admitted that she slept soundly after her shock resignation "for the first time in a long time", reinforcing the speculations that abuse and threats against the prime minister contributed to her exit.

There is no denying that constant vilification, abuse and personal attacks are the key contributing factors to that burnout.

For the last two years, Jacinda and her family have been subjected to some of the worst personalisation and vilification. She faced an unprecedented level of hatred and vitriol – mostly on social media.

As per the official reports, in 2022, threats against Jacinda had

almost tripled over three years.

Although police could not exactly trace the motives for every individual threat, the police data indicated that anti-vaccination sentiment was the leading factor behind these threats, while her fervent advocacy for legislation to regulate firearms after the March 15 mass shooting in Christchurch was another factor.

Last year, weeks-long anti-vaccine-mandate occupation of parliament's lawns descended into a violent riot in early 2022, with protesters calling for Jacinda Arden's execution.

The protests, coupled with growing threats and abuse against her and other ruling MPs, impelled New Zealand's traditionally open and accessible parliament to increase security measures.

Over the past year, many people have been arrested, formally warned or faced criminal charges for threatening to assassinate Jacinda.

In one case, a man was found guilty of an attempt to sabotage the country's power grid connections. There have been many instances during her public appearances when small groups disrupted her by using abusive words and slogans.

She managed two massive



Jacinda Arden's sudden decision to throw in the towel was very shocking.

crises during her tenure with grit and perseverance.

Her skillful handling of those crises, including the Covid-19 and the 2019 Christchurch mosque massacre of 51 Muslims by a gunman, won her acclaim and accolades globally.

Initially, her management of Covid-19 spurred her Labour Party to register a landslide victory in 2020, but as extremely stringent lockdowns kept New Zealanders at home and its borders closed, her popularity started to corrode away.

Since then, she has been enduring a series of often-vile abuse by the anti-vax movement and other populist-inspired right-wing protest groups in New Zealand. Her resignation has corroborated the impact of this

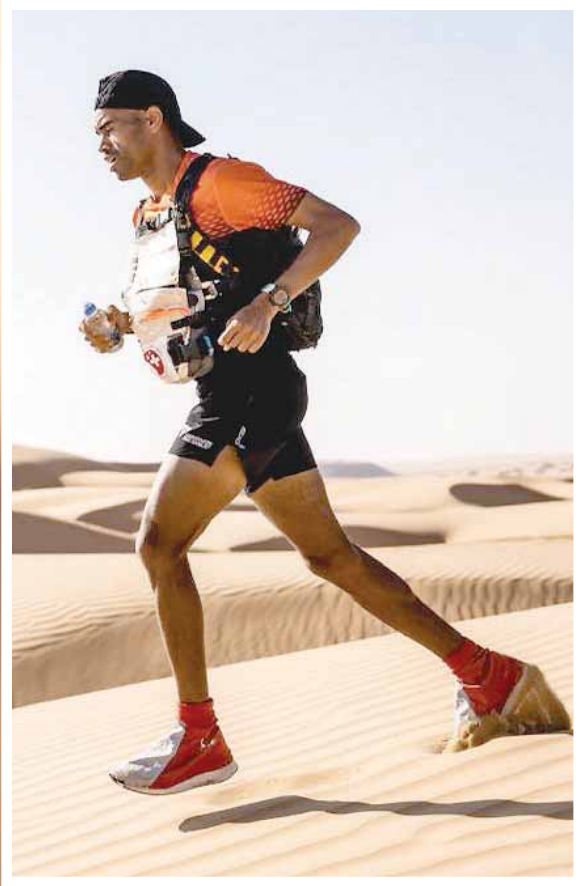
pressure. For a prime minister, who was quite confident about leading her party into another election just a while ago, such a dramatic retreat – under duress - is very disturbing. The growing trend of extremism in politics across the globe is taking its toll on some of the finest politicians, as we have seen in the case of Jacinda.

Although she has not admitted in clear words, the fact is that the extreme polarisation and misuse of social media pushed her to the point of surrender. Her journey from stardust to empty tank is a symptom of the pathological metastasis of extremism and polarisation that has seeped into politics through clickbaits and social media warriors.

sport

MOHAMMED, RACHID AND SALEH TAKE TOP 3 SLOTS ON DAY TWO

AZIZA AL AMRANY, SOMMER AND AZIZA RAJI IN WOMEN'S TOP 3



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 23

Day two of the eighth edition of the annual Oman Desert Marathon (ODM) kicked off on Sunday in the Wilayat of Bidiya from Tawi Rashid. The route was a distance of 55 km, and the top three performers for the day were Moroccan brothers Mohammed and Rachid El Morabity, with finishing times of 5:11:57 and 5:12:26 respectively, and Oman's Saleh al Saidi who finished 5:43:42.

On the women's side, Morocco's Aziza al Amrany came in first with a finishing time of 7:07:35, followed by Switzerland's Corina Sommer at 7:18:10 and Moroccan Aziza Raji at 7:22:38.

The overall standing after day two on the men's side is Mohammed El Morabity leading the table, followed by Rachid El Morabity, and Saleh al Saidi. The women's side is led by Aziza al Amrany, followed by Corina Sommer and Aziza Raji.

The third stage on Monday is a 42 km night run, which will start between 2 pm and 4 pm.

The race started with 42 runners on day one, and it continued on day two with 39 runners, after three had quit (due to injuries and back problems), and it's going into day three with 37 runners, after a further two backed out.

Still in the race is 70-year-old surgeon who spent 17 hours making it through Sunday's route.



Real Madrid's Toni Kroos celebrates scoring their second goal with Karim Benzema. – Reuters

Madrid triumph in Bilbao, Barca scrape past Getafe

BILBAO, Spain: Karim Benzema and Toni Kroos's goals kept Real Madrid on Barcelona's tail in La Liga with a 2-0 win against Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

After the Catalans had beaten Getafe 1-0, champions Madrid won a tight clash at the San Mames to remain three points behind their rivals.

Benzema broke the deadlock with a superb volley in the first half while Kroos fizzed home the second late on to kill off Athletic's hopes.

After losing the Spanish Super Cup to Barcelona last weekend, anxiety had increased in the capital, but a stirring Copa del Rey comeback against Villarreal on Thursday settled nerves. This victory in Bilbao will reassure Los Blancos fans further, ahead of their derby clash in the cup with Atletico Madrid next week.

"It's clear that the team is defending well again, (we were) compact, solid," Real coach Carlo Ancelotti told DAZN. "With us ahead in the game we needed to defend and we did it well. We did not give things away and in the end we won."

Madrid had let in eight goals in their previous four games across all competitions, but despite the injury absences of David Alaba and Aurelien Tchouameni, they were far more sturdy in the Basque Country.

Anticipating a physical clash with the Basques, Ancelotti benched midfield stalwarts Luka Modric and Kroos, opting to line up with Eduardo Camavinga and Fede Valverde as part of his central trio. Dani Ceballos, Nacho Fernandez and Marco Asensio also started after their fine performances against Villarreal.

Athletic started well but Benzema volleyed Madrid ahead from Asensio's header back in his direction. It was Benzema's 228th La Liga goal, pulling him level with the iconic Raul Gonzalez as Madrid's second top scorer in the competition — with Cristiano Ronaldo leading the way on 311.

"What Karim does is incredible, he helps us a lot with his goals, it's good that's he's on fire for us," Nacho told DAZN.

The hosts fought hard for a leveller but were finished off by Kroos, who steered home from the edge of the box to wrap up Madrid's victory in the 90th minute. Athletic sit eighth, five points below the Champions League qualification spots.

'SLUGGISH'

Pedri Gonzalez's goal made the difference for Barcelona in their single goal win over Getafe.

Without suspended striker Robert Lewandowski, Barcelona created few noteworthy chances, but did just enough to

emerge with the three points to drive on their bid for a first league title since 2019. "We didn't play well, we were sluggish, we didn't attack well," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez told Movistar. "We did defend well, but it's always hard to attack a defensive line sitting so deep, but we weren't polished in our play, we didn't have a great game by any means and we have to improve. But we do take an important win, three points at home, and another clean sheet which is important too."

Xavi's side have won six games in a row across all competitions and fans chanted the coach's name in the final stages despite a sub-par display.

The coach selected Ansu Fati up front in place of Lewandowski but the young Spain international struggled to get into the game. Barca's first real chance came in the 35th minute and was converted by Pedri from close range, turning home Raphinha's cross after a great interception by Andreas Christensen set the Brazilian free.

Former Madrid striker Mayoral should have equalised for the visitors but was denied by Marc-Andre ter Stegen when through on goal, after a poorly judged Pedri back-pass.

Barcelona's German stopper is back to his best this season after a long dip in form and that is reflected in their sparkling defensive record.

The Catalans have kept 13 clean sheets in 17 La Liga matches, conceding just six goals in the top flight.

The result leaves Getafe 16th, along with Celta Vigo and 18th place Real Valladolid on 17 points.

Earlier Villarreal, fifth, beat mid-table Girona 1-0 thanks to Dani Parejo's 100th minute penalty. — AFP

“We didn’t play well, we were sluggish, we didn’t attack well. We did defend well, but it’s always hard to attack a defensive line sitting so deep, but we weren’t polished in our play, we didn’t have a great game by any means and we have to improve. But we do take an important win, three points at home

XAVI HERNANDEZ

Barcelona coach

THRILLING WIN KEEPS ARSENAL WELL ON TOP

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 23

With an exciting finish to their 3-2 win over Manchester United, from a 90th minute winning goal, Arsenal retained their lead of the Premier League with 50 points from just 19 matches. No Arsenal team in history has reached that many points in fewer games.

Gunners manager, Mikel Arteta said: "Extraordinary. It doesn't get much better than that. We deserve the points we have. We have played well enough to win most matches. But we have things we can still get better at. The performance was just incredible. To win it in that way makes it even better. We showed a lot of emotional control. It was a beautiful moment at the end and we got going with our people (fans) behind us."

Asked if his players have the belief to finish top, Arteta said: "I hope they do. They are good enough to play against these teams and have done it. We know our reality, we know how much we still have to improve. We know what's taken us to the position we are in today and have to reinforce that every day."

He added: "This league is so demanding that opponents are going to make life very difficult. They (players) feel our way of playing is going to reward them. There is pure belief in what we do. It was really a special moment (the winning goal) as we pushed and pushed and it wasn't



Arsenal's Eddie Nketiah celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

coming. It came in the end but it was electric and really emotional and passionate and I loved it."

United took the lead in the 17th minute when Arsenal lost possession and Marcus Rashford evaded Thomas Partey before hammering a low right-foot swerving shot inside the near post from 20 yards. But the lead lasted just seven minutes as the Gunners equalised. It came from a corner for which and Eddie Nketiah went ahead of Aaron Wan-Bissaka to head home from the six-yard box.

Arsenal kept creating better chances and deservedly went into the lead eight minutes after the break. Bukayo Saka received a long pass and moved inside Christian Eriksen to unleash a left-footed shot from 25 yards.

It was, however, a short-lived joy for the Gunners as it took just six minutes for United to equalise. Aaron Ramsdale, having saved well from Rashford, dropped a corner and Lisandro Martinez managed to head into the net with Gabriel attempting to head clear off the line.

Arsenal were having the better of the play and created more chances. With four minutes left De Gea made a brilliant save from Nketiah who then, in the last minute of normal time, deftly flicked into the net a deflected pass from Martin Odegaard to the roar of Arsenal fans.

United manager, Erik Ten Hag said: "I am annoyed and I told the players, 'If you want to win trophies, you have to change your mentality, because it is not possible that you are in a top game, making three big mistakes where you concede."



Everton manager Frank Lampard looks dejected after the match.

Everton sack manager Lampard

LONDON: Relegation-threatened Everton have sacked manager Frank Lampard after less than a year in charge at the Goodison Park club, British media reported on Monday. The former Chelsea boss was appointed to replace Rafael Benitez in January 2022 but leaves with the side 19th in the table, level on points with bottom club Southampton.

In a sign of the turmoil enveloping Everton, club directors were earlier this month ordered to stay away from Goodison Park due to perceived security risks.

Everton fell to a damaging 2-0 defeat at fellow-strugglers West Ham on Saturday -- a ninth loss in their past 12 Premier League matches.

Club owner Farhad Moshiri, who was at the game in London, was asked after the game whether it was time for Lampard to be sacked.

"I can't comment. It's not my decision," he told Sky Sports.

Speaking about his own future, Lampard said: "Those things are not my choice. It is my job to work, focus and keep my head down."

"I know there's things going on at the club but it's never been a consequence for me whether a chairman or board member is at the game."

The Merseyside team had been struggling under the former England international, having last won a league game in October when they beat Crystal Palace 3-0 at home.

Lampard was appointed by Everton in January 2022 after he managed Chelsea from 2019-2021 and Derby County in the second tier in 2018-19.

Qurum Thunders, Ruwi Rangers and Amerat Royals post wins

MUSCAT: Qurum Thunders beat Ghubrah Giants, Ruwi Rangers beat Azaiba XI and Amerat Royals beat Bousher Busters in the Oman D20 at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds.

QURUM WIN BY 6 WICKETS

Batting first, Ghubrah Giants put up a total of 155 runs losing 3 wickets courtesy of their openers Prabhakaran Kannan (43 off 23b; 5x4,3x6) and Saishiv Narayan (32 off 28b;4x4,1x6) and Kalaiarasan



Mujibur Ali
Ruwi Rangers

(29 off 14b;4x6). Sandeep Goud and Samay Shrivastav picked up one wicket each in the economic spells for Qurum Thunders.

In reply, Kashyap Prajapati's



Kashyap Prajapati
Qurum Thunders

(73 off 57b; 5x4,3x6) whirlwind innings along with Sandeep Goud knock of 46 (23b; 3x4,3x6) took Qurum over the line for the second place in the Oman D20.



Vinayak Shukla
Amerat Royals

RUWI RANGERS PREVAIL

Batting first, Azaiba XI could not get off to a start they wanted and succumbed to the bowling of Ruwi Rangers with Wasim Ali (3-12) being the chief architect and restricting Azaiba XI to a mere 116 in 20 overs. Ruwi Rangers in response chased the total down with Mujibur Ali (61 off 56b; 3x4,4x6) taking them to the coast. The win also maintained their dominance, winning all 7 games in the league.

AMERAT ROYALS WIN

Batting first, Bousher Busters started well looking to post a big total. Busters' Hammad Mirza (58 off 39b;3x4,3x6) and Shubo Pal (40 off 39b) helped them to reach 154 in 20 overs. Faisal Shah (2-23) and Vinay Khandelwal (2-29) were the pick of the bowlers for the Royals.

In reply, Amerat Royals chased down the target in the last over courtesy Vinayak Shukla (63 off 44b;5x4,4x6) and Karan Sonavale's (40 off 31b) innings. Amerat Royals are third in the points table.

Oman national team to reassemble on March 15

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 23

The players of the Oman national football team will begin their participation with their clubs in the Omantel League which will resume on Tuesday, after the stop for the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup.

The national team will reassemble on March 15 to prepare for the West Asian Championship, which will be held in the UAE.

The Red Warriors will also gear up for the matches against Afghanistan and Qatar in the double qualifiers for the Asian Cup and the World Cups.

Head coach Branko Ivankovic will choose the players from his follow-up to the league matches, and there will be a second camp

for the team from February 23 to 25. The Oman coach aims through these gatherings to get to know closely the levels of the players before announcing the final list for the training camp on March 15.

WEST ASIAN TOURNEY

The West Asian Football Federation announced the participation teams in the 10th West Asian Federation Championship for men, to be held in the UAE from March 20 to April 2, 2023.

The West Asian Federation invited the Thailand national team to participate in the tournament as a guest team along with 11 teams which are: hosts the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Sultanate of



Oman, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria.

The men's championship

was launched in 2000 with the establishment of the first edition in Jordan. The cup

commemorates the late Jordan King Hussein bin Talal, which remained throughout the

editions of the tournament. Iranian team won the opening title.

The second edition of the tournament took place in 2002 in Syria, and the Iraqi team won the title. Iran hosted the third edition and were the champions in 2004, before retaining the title of the fourth editions in Jordan 2007, and the fifth in Iran in 2008.

After that, Jordan hosted the sixth edition in 2010, when Kuwait won the title, and then hosted the seventh edition in 2012, in which Syria claimed the title.

The eighth edition was held in Qatar in 2014 and won by the hosts, and finally in Iraq 2019, where the Bahraini team won the title.

Ruthless Djokovic, Sabalenka sweep into quarters



MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic surged into the Australian Open quarterfinals with his “best match of this year” on Monday, while Aryna Sabalenka was an equally ruthless winner.

After a series of shocks at Melbourne Park, normal order was more or less restored on day eight, except for fourth seed Caroline Garcia bowing out under the weight of expectation.

Djokovic demolished Alex de Minaur for the loss of just five games to sweep into the last eight and step up his bid for a 10th Melbourne crown, and record-tying 22nd major title in all.

He will meet fifth seed Andrey Rublev for a semifinal berth after the Russian toppled Danish teenager Holger Rune in a thrilling five-set clash also at Rod Laver Arena.

The Serb's 6-2, 6-1, 6-2 triumph over 22nd-seeded home hope De Minaur was an ominous statement of intent. Significantly, his troublesome left hamstring appeared much improved. Asked afterwards how he had been so emphatic, Djokovic told the crowd: “Because I wanted to. “I cannot say I’m sorry you did not watch a longer match. I really wanted to win in straight sets.”

The 35-year-old called it his “best match of this year so far”



Poland's Magda Linette celebrates winning her fourth round match against France's Caroline Garcia. – Reuters

AUSTRALIAN OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FOURTH ROUND):

Andrey Rublev (RUS x5) bt Holger Rune (DEN x9) 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (11/9); Novak Djokovic (SRB x4) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x22) 6-2, 6-1, 6-2; Ben Shelton (USA) bt JJ Wolf (USA) 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-2; Tommy Paul (USA) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP x24) 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, 7-5

WOMEN (FOURTH ROUND):

Karolina Pliskova (CZE x30) bt Zhang Shuai (CHN x23) 6-0, 6-4; Magda Linette (POL) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA x4) 7-6 (7/3), 6-4; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x5) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI x12) 7-5, 6-2; Donna Vekic (CRO) bt Linda Fruhvirtova (CZE) 6-2, 1-6, 6-3

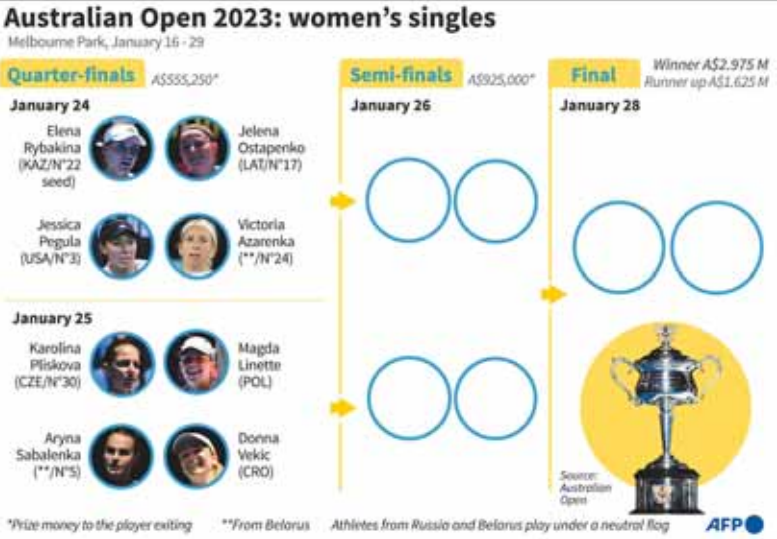
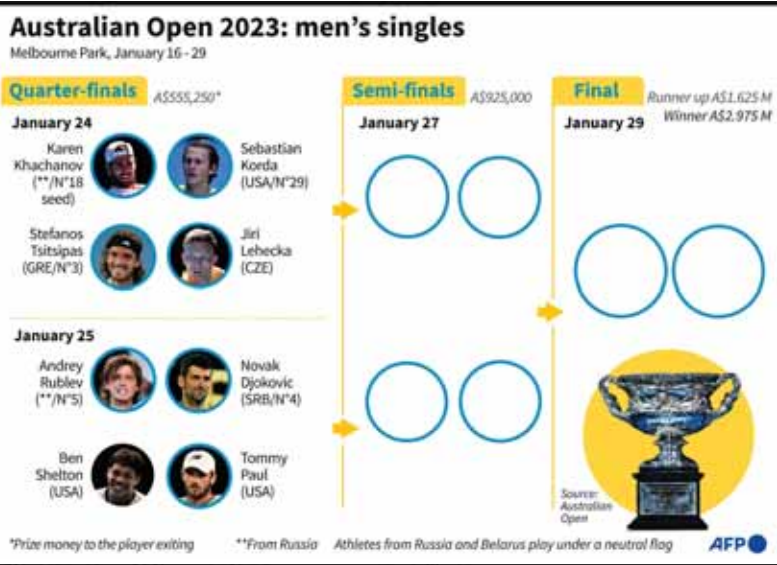
and of his hamstring said: “I did not feel anything today, so today was great.”

Rublev admitted he was “lucky” after saving two match points against Rune, in energy-sapping heat.

He described beating the

19-year-old as “not like a rollercoaster, it’s like they put a gun to your head. A rollercoaster is easier.”

In a men’s draw decimated by shocks, including the second-round exit of reigning champion Rafael Nadal,



there will be a last-eight clash between two unseeded Americans. The 20-year-old Ben Shelton, on his first trip outside the United States, emerged from another five-setter against friend and fellow American JJ Wolf.

Shelton is only the fourth man in the past 20 years to reach the Melbourne quarterfinals on debut. “I really focused in the fifth set, just being energetic, trusting my fitness and just hustling, being courageous and

I thought I did a really good job of competing at the highest level in the fifth set,” said the 89th-ranked Shelton. He plays Tommy Paul, who defeated 24th seed Roberto Bautista Agut.

LINETTE STUNS GARCIA

In the women’s draw, Garcia became the latest top-10 seed to fall, with a shock defeat to Magda Linette, ranked 45 in the world.

This is the first Grand Slam since the Open era began in 1968 to lose the top two seeds in both the men’s and women’s draws before the last eight.

Unseeded Pole Linette stunned Garcia 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 and the French player admitted that expectations and nerves got the better of her.

Linette said she “couldn’t believe it” as she reached her first Grand Slam quarterfinal at the age of 30.

She faces Karolina Pliskova after the former world number one romped past China’s Zhang Shuai 6-0, 6-4.

The Belarusian Sabalenka defeated dangerous 12th seed Belinda Bencic 7-5, 6-2 to set up a last-eight clash against unseeded Donna Vekic, who beat 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova in three sets.

This is the first quarterfinal at the Australian Open for hard-hitting Sabalenka. — AFP

Ronaldo starts with win in Saudi Pro League

RIYADH: Anderson Talisca earned Al Nassr a 1-0 home win over Al Ettifaq on Sunday, but the fans that turned up to Mrsool Park in droves to see Cristiano Ronaldo in action were left disappointed after he was unable to mark his Saudi Pro league debut with a goal.

Ronaldo signed a 2-1/2 year deal with Al Nassr last month, reported to be worth over 200 million euros (\$216.28 million).

Expectations for his debut were sky-high after his brace against Paris St Germain in a friendly on Thursday, but despite showcasing plenty of endeavour against Al Ettifaq, the 37-year-old was unable to add to his tally

of more than 800 senior goals overall for club and country.

Named the captain ahead of the match, Ronaldo was full of running and had a couple of bright moments, but mostly cut a lonely figure up front as his new team mates appeared to be on a different wavelength and rarely picked him out.

The Portugal international had a shot from the edge of the penalty area blocked early on in the first half, before being denied a penalty shout upon being wrestled to the ground by an Ettifaq defender in the 19th minute. Brazilian forward Talisca put Al Nassr ahead in the 31st minute, when he rose



Al Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo in action with Al Ettifaq's Saeed al Mowalad. – Reuters

to meet Abdulmajeed al Sulaiheem's cross and plant a header past Al Ettifaq goalkeeper Paulo Victor.

BEST MOMENT

Ronaldo’s best moment after the break came in a supportive role, as he played a cross into the feet of Pity Martinez, whose first-time shot was tipped over the bar by Victor.

Victor was kept on his toes, as Al Sulaiheem and Talisca forced him into saves with well-struck efforts from long range, but Al Nassr were unable to find another goal.

Ronaldo’s desire to kick off his stint at Al Nassr with a goal became more and more evident as the second half wore on, culminating with an

unsuccessful attempt at a bicycle kick. “In the world of football there is one Cristiano Ronaldo and we are happy to have him with us. Ronaldo’s personality helped him to adapt with the team,” goalscorer Talisca told Saudi Sports Channel. Al Nassr’s win moved them back into first place in the league standings on 33 points from 14 matches, after they were briefly overtaken by Al Hilal earlier on Sunday. Al Ettifaq are in 10th place.

“If you want to win the title, we need to win such games and fight. Our goal was to return to the top and we succeeded in that, and I congratulate the players on achieving our goal,” Talisca added.

— Reuters

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RO 150m water transmission project inaugurated in Ibri



BUSINESS REPORTER
IBRI, JAN 23

With the goals of ensuring water supply and preserving groundwater resources, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) — a member of Nama Group, inaugurated yesterday the water transmission pipeline project linking Suhar with Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, presided over the inauguration of the project, which was built at a cost of around RO 150 million.

In his opening speech, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO OWWSC, pointed the importance of this vital project which aims to ensure water security for Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The current and future water needs of all the wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate was taken into account during the designing of the project and to achieve water security in light of the expansion of

networks and the growth of water demand, including commercial and industrial needs. The wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate were mainly dependent on groundwater to meet their drinking water needs and other developmental activities.

“The Suhar — Al Buraimi — Ibri route is the most feasible in terms of construction and operation, technically and economically, so that this route will be used to meet the future water needs of Al Buraimi Governorate as well, by linking the two water transmission systems together in several locations within the project of water interconnection between North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah governorates,” al Zakwani said.

Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah Governorate, said that the water supply project for Al Dhahirah Governorate is one of the most important strategic projects.

TURN TO PAGE 15

National Employment Programme launches self-employment platform

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 23

The National Employment Programme launched a self-employment platform yesterday in collaboration with AWJ Innovation and Occidental Oman. The platform, Dot Next Gig (.Nxt Gig), will allow self-employed individuals to connect with potential clients and aid in facilitating transactions.

“Freelancing is one of the fastest growing employment paths in various countries of the world, as the Sultanate of Oman pays special attention to developing the self-employment system as one of the career paths that is attracting the interest of young people, as is the case in many countries of the world,” shared Azhar al Kindi, Executive Director of the National Employment Programme.

“Self-employment is one of the initiatives launched by the National Employment Programme in partnership with the concerned authorities with the aim of providing integrated and interrelated facilities for self-employed individuals in the Sultanate of Oman,” he added.

According to Al Kindi, freelancers



will be able to create official accounts and conduct transactions from a business to business standpoint, a matter that will better help facilitate and legitimise transactions. In addition, he shared some of the programme’s upcoming incentives for freelancers which will include wage subsidies during the first year, social protection benefits, and a Riyadh card.

“We are working with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board and the Oman Investment Authority

to allocate 10 per cent of tenders and contracts to freelancers. And we are also negotiating with banks to facilitate the matter of personal financing for self-employed individuals.”

“As a result, it was necessary to create a database of self-employed individuals. The ‘dot-next-gig’ platform serves as an enabling and supporting platform for the self-employment system.”

Chief Executive Officer of AWJ Innovation, Dr Yousef al Balushi,

FREELANCING IS ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING EMPLOYMENT PATHS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD, AS THE SULTANATE OF OMAN PAYS SPECIAL ATTENTION TO DEVELOPING THE SELF-EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM AS ONE OF THE CAREER PATHS THAT HAS BECOME ATTRACTING THE INTEREST OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

shared “the independent work economy is recording remarkable development all over the world, especially in countries that have an advanced digital infrastructure, and the launch of the ‘NextGig’ platform and related services is in line with the global trend towards the independent work economy, and the local trend to diversify business patterns in the Sultanate of Oman.”

“The platform aims to support and encourage the culture of independent work and temporary and part-time jobs in the Sultanate of Oman, and to enhance the role of the independent work economy in diversifying the community economy and improving the income of individuals,” he added.

OQ’s Bisat oilfield to be inaugurated on Thursday

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), will preside over the inauguration of OQ’s Bisat oilfield in Block 60 on Thursday, January 26, 2023.

The Bisat oilfield is one of the most important projects of OQ’s upstream sector. The field, which is located in Block 60 at Abu Tubul,



utilises cutting-edge technologies and digital solutions to enhance the long-term sustainability of the resources and operations and maximise the revenues and the return on investment.

The in-country value for the Bisat oil field project reached RO 157 million.

In addition, the total amount spent on local SMEs and contractors

stood at RO 34 million of the overall cost of the project.

Products manufactured in Oman accounted for RO 60 million of the total procurement of the project.

The project has also created direct and indirect opportunities for Omani youth, resulting in a high overall Omanisation rate of 85 per cent of the group’s employees working in Block 60. — ONA

World’s first renewable water project planned in Duqm SEZ

WATER FARM: Renaissance Services Oman partners with SOURCE to produce the world's first renewable water, made from sunlight and air, to serve its workforce and guests

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 23

As part of its commitment to best-in-class technologies and reducing its environmental impact, Renaissance Services will partner with SOURCE Global — a public benefit corporation (PBC) — to generate sustainably sourced drinking water for Renaissance

Village Duqm (RSVD) in Oman’s Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), with plans to expand to additional sites.

Renaissance is Oman’s leading accommodation, services solutions, and integrated facility management company, with a growing presence in the UAE and Qatar.

Adjacent to RSVD, the company will install SOURCE Hydropanels, a patented technology that uses only the sun to harvest water from an entirely new and endlessly replenished resource — pure water vapour in the air — creating the first ‘water farm’ in Oman.

The project will create a sustainable source of clean, safe,



and high-quality drinking water made locally in Oman and served in reusable glass bottles for the workforce staying in the world-class, 18,800+ bed RSVD, which

is Oman’s largest International Labour Organization-compliant accommodation facility.

“Water is life. We are delighted to partner with Source Global to

implement this important green initiative here in Oman, and in particular, at Duqm.

This is a future-focused, smart, sustainable solution that is aligned with the vision of SEZAD and OPAZ (Public Authority for Special Economic zones and Free zones) as a smart, green city,” said Stephen R Thomas, CEO, Renaissance.

“Adopting SOURCE Hydropanels allows us to further push our sustainability agenda. We are contributing to reducing single-use plastic, preserving groundwater, and reducing CO2 emissions by using a sustainable and renewable approach to drinking water.”

“Our Hydropanel technology

is 100 per cent off-grid and offers industry leaders like Renaissance Services the opportunity to hydrate their workforce in a renewable, premium and sustainable way. We can produce high-quality drinking water even in dry and remote places and virtually anywhere on earth,” said Robert Bartrop, CRO, SOURCE Global.

“We’re proud to work with Renaissance Services in support of their commitment to a greener future.”

SOURCE Global’s mission is to make drinking water an unlimited resource. Headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona, the company operates in 52 countries on six continents.

PDO set to co-host 2023 Oman Sustainability Week

MUSCAT: Committed to spearheading a stable and inclusive energy transition, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has demonstrated its environmental stewardship by pioneering innumerable sustainability initiatives.

The latest in its line of endeavours is its participation as the co-host of the upcoming Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) to be held from March 12 to 16, 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC).

The national-level event is hosted under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and PDO will be co-hosting the event for the second year in a row. Commenting on PDO's participation at the event,



External Affairs and Value Creation Director at PDO Eng Abdulmir al Ajmi said: "With sustainability being the bedrock of transformation globally, PDO has kept pace with Oman Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development



Goals, remaining steadfast in its commitment to deliver meaningful Social Investment (SI) programmes aimed at creating sustainable benefits for the Omani society.

"At PDO, we acknowledge the critical role we play in meeting the energy needs of the nation that is fundamental to leading quality lives, but at the same time, we also

stay mindful of our responsibilities towards the environment.

While our focus on adhering to international best practices has remained undeterred, we have also set new benchmarks of excellence regarding implementing sustainable means of operations. By continuously incorporating innovative technologies in processes, forming meaningful partnerships, and actively supporting key sustainability programmes, PDO seeks to contribute to the Sultanate of Oman's vision of transitioning to a green, circular economy."

He added saying, "OSW poses as an excellent networking platform to drive collaboration, cooperation, and knowledge exchange between industry

leaders, sustainability experts, and stakeholders from various organisations. PDO seeks to support such impactful interactions which it believes is critical to further enhancing Oman's potential to become a leading green energy hub."

Apart from being a meeting ground for key players in the sector, OSW will also showcase the latest technologies and innovations in the segment.

Providing both business enhancement opportunities as well as the chance to increase awareness in the realm of sustainability, OSW includes leadership conferences, an extensive exhibition, awards, technical workshops, and site visits.

Alshawamikh signs pact to utilise water technologies in oil sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 23

Well-known Omani oilfield services company Alshawamikh Oil Services signed an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with IDWT Group (International Desalination and Water Treatment Group and their partners represented by the Austrian company DEW (Devise Energy & Water) and Devise Engineering, a Greek company, specialising in advanced water treatment and recycling solutions.

The agreement aimed to exchange cooperation in providing the latest technologies and methods related to water sustainability for uses related to oil sector operations. It was signed by Dr Aflah al Hadhrami, CEO of Alshawamikh Oil Services, and Omar El Maraghy, CEO of IDWT.

Dr Aflah said: "The signing of this agreement enhances the company's strategy and plans to enter into vital projects



within the Energy sector. This partnership is a result of the company's aspirations to engage in projects related to the use of modern technologies and techniques related to water treatment in the oil sector.. He added that IDWT has extensive experience in desalination and wastewater treatment solutions, and is active in the water industry providing reliable solutions to a variety

of water-related issues, noting that IDWT has implemented 23 projects in the Sultanate of Oman over the past 15 years.

Alshawamikh Oil Services is one of the super local community contractors within the energy market in the Sultanate of Oman, including the sustainable energy field, and is seeking to fulfil Oman's ambition in the energy sector, regarding the Oman Vision 2040.

Kia's compact Sonet SUV with season of winning benefits

MUSCAT: Kia enthusiasts can now look forward to owning the Kia Sonet compact SUV and get a chance to be a winner with Kia! On offer is a chance to win a brand new Kia Niro Hybrid Electric Vehicle and comprehensive service up to 50,000 km, 1 year insurance and cash gift. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)

The Sonet is gaining popularity as a perfect companion to navigate busy city roads as well as unwind on drives by the countryside. Kia Sonet is equipped with a powerful 1.5L engine that is paired to a CVT transmission.

Offering comfortable space to passengers with its 5-seater capacity, this SUV goes the distance giving an impressive average of 17.5 kmpl. The Sonet is equipped with a well laid-out, intuitive infotainment and cluster



interface, the Sonet was built taking into consideration the end user's experience. The Sonet is available with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay feature, Audio Remote Control, Bluetooth, USB charger.

Harboring functional qualities in every inch of its ergonomic space. The Sonet makes a fine impression with its range of eye-catching features including body colour outside mirror, 2-tonne bumper, power outside mirror, body colour door handles, side repeater lamps in outside mirror, 16" alloy wheels, chrome

radiator grille, rear fog lamps, LED front fog lamps, roof rack, LED headlamps, LED daytime running lamps and more.

Customers looking to own a Kia can visit any showroom and experience a Kia. The campaign will end on January 26, 2023 (Conditions apply).

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Khedmah, Honeywell sign agreement

MUSCAT: Furthering its position as a leaning company working with the water and energy sector,, Oman Investment and Finance Company (OIFC) Khedmah signs an agreement with Honeywell.



This agreement supports Khedmah's continuous effort to offer innovative solutions to its customers, individuals and corporates, in order to reduce their carbon footprint, and contribute towards a more sustainable future.

The agreement was signed on January 9, 2023 at the Sheraton Oman Hotel, with the presence of Said bin Ahmed Safrar, OIFC's Chief Executive Officer, and Umar Khan, General Manager for Energy, Sustainability and Smart Cities of Honeywell Building Technologies, Middle East, Turkey and Africa, paired with senior management teams from both parties.

Said bin Ahmed Safrar commented, "This fruitful collaboration aligns with the royal directives to stay current with global advancements in clean energy and sustainable practices, and supports the company's commitment and efforts to promote sustainability within the lives and future plans of our clients."

Suhail Bahwan Automobiles introduces all-new 2023 Nissan X-Trail in Oman

MUSCAT: As part of its strategy to solidify its SUV leadership in Oman, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) launched the all-new 2023 Nissan X-Trail in Muscat recently.

Developed as a premium urban crossover, the all-new 2023 Nissan X-Trail furthers the brand's commitment to introduce innovative mobility solutions, and offers customers class-leading versatility, elevated exterior and interior designs, advanced safety, and improved levels of capability.

Reflecting the Nissan SUV's role to defy ordinary, the key themes echoed across the event were eXpand, eXpress, eXplore, and eXhale, pushing guests to eXist beyond the everyday. A segment-leader on several fronts, the all-new model features the latest Nissan Intelligent Mobility technologies, including ProPILOT Assist for the very first time on the X-Trail line-up, and offers heightened connectivity with up to a collective 35.4-inches



of cabin screens.

For over twenty years, the X-Trail has been an integral part of Nissan SUV line-up in the region and has continually catered to the needs of families and adventure enthusiasts across Oman.

Brought about by a deep understanding of its customers, the all-new 2023 Nissan X-Trail, which is one of the most technologically advanced SUVs to date, addresses customer desires in the rapidly growing

mid-size SUV segment and is in line with the global Nissan NEXT transformation plan.

A senior official of SBA said: "Oman launch of the all-New 2023 Nissan X-Trail marks a major milestone for us at SBA, as we solidify our commitment to the region and continue to deliver innovation that excites."

The latest addition to Nissan's impressive SUV lineup, the all-new 2023 Nissan X-Trail features a striking exterior design, with

distinctive Nissan elements including a signature V-motion grille and floating roof design.

Accentuating the X-Trail's appeal to families are its bigger-opening rear door apertures, that open up to 85 degrees for easier rear access and egress. The interior receive a premium upgrade, underlined by Nappa leather-accented seating with 3D diamond quilting available on the top-of-the-range SL grade.

The 2023 Nissan X-Trail is powered by an all-new 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine that, compared to its predecessor, raises power output by 12 hp to 181 hp, and boosts torque by 11Nm to 244Nm, for more effortless acceleration and confident overtaking.

The all-new Nissan X-Trail 2023, which is the fourth SUV model to sport the brand's latest design language and insignia, following the Patrol, Pathfinder, and KICKS, is available for booking at SBA.



Fuel products join the rally in gold and copper



OLE S HANSEN

The author is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank

The Bloomberg Commodity Index traded higher for a second week, driven by continued gains across industrial metals, crude oil, and fuel products.

The gains which were been driven by optimism over the growth outlook in China were partly being offset by sharp losses in natural gas and wheat, as mild weather and ample supply continues to keep these two key commodities under pressure.

Meanwhile, the precious metal sector was mixed, with gold continuing higher supported by US bond yields and the dollar trading near cycle lows.

Silver and platinum struggled to keep up, both recording losses – taking silver back to near unchanged on the month.

The general positive risk sentiment across commodities has been supported by a 1.6 per cent drop in the Bloomberg Dollar index and a 0.4 per cent slump in US ten-year yields as US inflation continues to ease, thereby supporting a further downshift in the Fed's rate hike trajectory towards one-and-done – meaning a single 0.25 per cent rate hike remains before the Fed pauses.

In addition, Russia's attempt to stifle a sovereign nation and the western world's push back against Putin's aggression remains a sad and unresolved situation that continues to cause havoc across global supply chains of key commodities, not least the energy sector where an already established embargo on crude sales will be expanded

on February 5 to include fuel products – a development that may end up having a bigger impact on Russian supply than seen so far.

However, the main driver impacting the commodity sector is the prospect of China's reopening, in turn driving expectations for a pick-up in demand for commodities from the world's biggest consumer of raw materials.

With activity in China unlikely to pick up in earnest until after the Lunar New Year holiday, the prospect of a lull in activity could be the trigger for a pause in the current rally – especially across industrial metals where copper has started the year with an 11 per cent gain – before gathering fresh momentum and strength towards the end of the current quarter.

Crude oil prices were heading for a second weekly advance, thereby fully offsetting the weakness that hit the market during the first days of January.

Prices are supported by continued optimism on Chinese demand and increasingly by strength in the product market.

Gasoline and diesel are both trading at a two-month high ahead of the embargo on Russian products from February 5, and following a late December wintry blast in the US which continues to impact refinery activity.

Reports that China's Covid caseload has peaked further boosted optimism that demand will start to recover more sustainably following the Lunar New Year holiday. Global demand expectations also received a boost as US jobless claims data supported the view that the labour market is still tight, thereby reducing the risk of a recession in the world's biggest energy consuming economy. A jump in US crude exports and the first week without injections from Strategic Petroleum Reserves nevertheless saw inventories jump 8.4m barrels as refinery demand struggled to recover following the late December wintry blast and outages.

Khasab Port waives berthing fees in drive to support cruise tourism

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 23

Visiting yachts and leisure boats can berth for free at Port of Khasab in Musandam Governorate as part of a campaign by local maritime authorities, as well as the Omani government, to position Khasab as a year-round cruise destination.

The initiative is being jointly supported by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Governorate of Musandam.

Oman International Container Terminal (OICT), which manages Port of Khasab, has described the berthing fee waiver as a “first-of-its-kind offer” aimed at attracting niche cruise holiday traffic from across the region to the Sultanate of Oman.

“The initiative is aimed at achieving a breakthrough to make Port of Khasab a year-round cruise destination, by welcoming yachts and tourism to Musandam Governorate 365 days a year, and not just during the traditional cruise season in winters from October-March,” said an official



representative of OICT.

In remarks to the *Observer*, the official noted that the offer applies to visiting yachts and leisure crafts from any country for the duration of this year. The goal, the executive explained, is to encourage leisure boat-owners to explore Khasab in its entirety, encompassing not only its stunning fjords and rich underwater life, but also rugged landscapes onshore and the governorate's diverse culture.

Opportunities for snorkeling and dolphin-spotting also abound in Khasab's coastal waters.

Since the resumption of cruise ships to the Sultanate of Oman – after the pandemic-induced hiatus – Port of Khasab has been receiving its fair share of port visits, according to the executive.

“The cruise season in Khasab started from the beginning of October 2022 and since then we have received numerous and varied cruise liners and we expect to see more cruise and yachts visiting Musandam Governorate through Khasab Port,” the official said, adding that the port is looking forward to serving cruise

ships arriving on at least two-night stay-overs, as opposed the current trend of day-trips without night layovers.

At least one new cruise call was witnessed earlier this month, following the launch of the free berthing promotion launched by the authorities, the executive stated.

Last March, OICT was assigned the mandate to manage, develop and operate Port of Khasab under a MoU signed with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Agreement signed to establish small enterprises specialised in marine fishing sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 23

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), the Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) and the Ministry of Labour signed yesterday a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish small enterprises specialised in marine fishing sector, provide financing for projects in this sector and empower their owners through training and mastering technical and technical skills.

The memorandum aims to raise the value of these enterprises by empowering them in the labour market and supporting them with the necessary tools to



achieve growth and sustainability for their business, find investment opportunities and localise the supply chain by supporting small and medium enterprises, and enhancing local added value.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

will facilitate the beneficiaries' obtaining fishing licences and supervise training programmes to ensure the optimal implementation of system integration in partnership with the parties supporting this initiative.

The advanced boats programme

comes within the framework of the Ministry's efforts to develop the Omani fishing fleet and enable it to contribute to the optimal and sustainable utilisation of living aquatic resources on the one hand, and to maintain the quality of fish products on the other hand, and to raise revenues and implement security and safety requirements on board these advanced boats.

The MoU was signed by Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development and Eng Nabil bin Salim al Bimani, CEO of Fisheries Development Oman.

Abraj Energy IPO to bolster MSX

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 23

Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), has welcomed the decision of Abraj Energy Services and its parent company, OQ Group, to list the former's shares on the Omani bourse via an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

Speaking during a media briefing on the Abraj IPO on Sunday, he said the IPO will help boost the local stock market, as well as attract new listings and investors to the Sultanate of Oman.

“Our goal is to find investment alternatives for investors, and this investment is very suitable for subscription, as it earmarks 15 per cent of the public offering for individuals, and it may be raised to 35 per cent if required



in the future. Abraj Energy is also the first oil company to be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, whose performance also mirrors the performance of the Omani economy,” he stated.

On Sunday, local drilling and oilfield services company Abraj Energy Services SAOG (under transformation) announced its intention to proceed with an IPO of up to 49 per cent of the total share capital and list its

shares on the MSX with effect from March 2023.

To be offered in two tranches, Phase I representing the Institutional Tranche Offering covers a maximum of 85 per cent of the total offering size and is directed to qualified investors in Oman and international investors outside the United States. The offering for the retail tranche (Phase II) represents no less than 15 per cent of the total

offering volume, and is directed to individual investors.

The CEO of MSX stressed that the bourse's aspires to serve as a barometer of the Omani economy's performance by coming up with an index that integrates all the economic sectors, whether logistics, tourism, and others.

Commenting on the suspension of withholding tax on dividends and interest, as decreed by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik recently, he said the move will benefit non-resident foreign investors.

Moreover, securities listed on the MSX will become attractive to investors, particularly because the share prices of most listed companies are still trading at less than their fair value, in the view of many analysts and financial market experts, he noted.

RO 150m water transmission project inaugurated in Ibri

FROM PAGE 13

This project will achieve sustainable development in the governorate and will meet all current and future water needs and requirements in all development fields to serve population expansion.

“The project aims to enhance water security in Al Dhahirah Governorate and preserve the groundwater (Al-Masarat wells) as a strategic reserve, explaining that the OWWSC will gradually connect the water network to residential schemes that were not previously served by water service provider, expanding the internal network to include most of the villages in the province's wilayats,” Al Rawas said.

“The Al Dhahirah Governorate's water security strategy include the exploitation of water such as wastewater and the possibility of expanding the

construction of storage dams in various wilayats, in addition to planting local trees that withstand high temperatures and water scarcity, finding ways and using modern technologies to rationalise water consumption,” he added.

The project includes a water transmission line from the desalination plant in the Wilayat of Suhar, North Al Batinah Governorate to Al Dhahirah Governorate, with a total length of about 230 kms, in addition to the construction of 15 tanks with a storage capacity of 451,000 m3 in each of the Suhar, Ibri and Dhank, in addition to the construction of 4 pumping stations with a maximum capacity of 144,000 m3 per day and a pipeline with a path parallel to the path of the current water carrier line from Suhar to Al Buraimi Governorate.

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Modern jazz concert challenges and rewards Muscat aficionados

Multi award-winning saxophonist and composer, Kenny Garrett graced the ROHMA stage on Thursday and Friday evenings, supported by some incredible musicians in the rhythm section. ... **P20**

Tomato soup climate protests are no big deal: German artist

The tomato soup-throwing art gallery protests of climate activists pose no threat to oil paintings and are a valid form of expression, according to German artist Daniel Richter.

"Oil paintings are virtually indestructible, like car paint," he told *Spiegel* magazine in an interview,

adding that he would have no problem with it happening to his work.

Claims to the contrary are merely propaganda by conservators, who have to say that to make their job look more important. You can wipe tomato soup off one of my paintings and that's it."

Richter's comments follow a



string of incidents in different countries in which Just Stop Oil activists threw tomato soup at famous paintings, including Vincent Van Gogh's "Sunflowers." In most cases the works were protected by glass.

Richter, who came to fame in the 1990s when he moved into art from music in Hamburg's squatter punk scene, also expressed his sympathy for climate activists and squatters.

Civil disobedience, he said, is

almost obligatory: "It is proof that you live in a democracy and not in any other system."

A documentary about Richter's life by director Pepe Danquart will be released in cinemas in Germany on February 2.

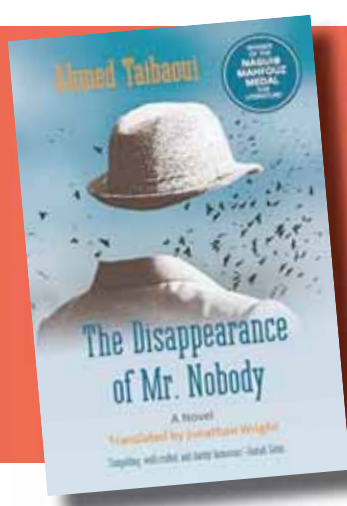


READ

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MR NOBODY

BY AHMED TAIBAOU

When the man dies, the carer disappears into thin air. A police detective is assigned to investigate the circumstances of the old man's demise and to track down the caretaker, only to find that the unnamed man cannot be identified—that there is no trace of Mr. Nobody.



TRADITIONS

A woman holds burning incense sticks as she prays at the Guiyuan Buddhist temple in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province on January 23, 2023 — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A worker builds a snowman at a park after a light snow fall during the night in Beijing on January 23, 2023

— AFP



PART
02

**Nasser bin
Abdulla al Riyami**
Translated by
Ali bin Rashid al Abri

During five long and detailed meetings with Shaikh Sulaiman bin Said al Kharusi, who was the Deputy Commissioner of Police of Zanzibar, at that time Zanzibar was attacked by outsiders, it was clear that he still had strong, vivid and detailed recollections of the whole sinister event. His unequivocal and lucid expressions and his impartial and distinct narration of the events will put the reader firmly in the picture and in the heart of the event. However, the purpose of this publication, the narration had to be summarised. Letting out a long sigh, Al Kharusi said: "The tragedy that befell us would not have missed us, and what has missed us would not have befallen us, it is Allah's will. Despite this calamity that was followed by division and diaspora, Allah has now bestowed upon us His blessings and bounties that we enjoy today in our ancestors' homeland Oman. Fate is inescapable and patience for life's vicissitudes is obligatory. Allah has rewarded us for our patience and that is the divine justice."

Al Kharusi started this discussion in a spirit of total acceptance of fate and destiny, and then moved on to discuss what he termed "the post-events analysis." He pointed out that the rebels' strength alone would not have been enough to topple the legitimate government, had it not been for acts of treason by some British officials, on one hand, and the miscalculations of the newly-formed national government that lacked political maturity and security awareness, on the other. These two vital factors led to the state being defenceless which enabled the demagogical mobs to tighten their grip on the state only within a few hours.

Al Kharusi further clarifies that there were plenty of rumours abounding and much was heard on the grapevine. Just days prior to the Invasion, there were strong indications and intelligence information of impending riots in Zanzibar to be staged by the opposition, Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP). At the level of the police force, this intelligence information was conveyed to officials before the independence of 10.12.1963, and even before the last elections in which the Coalition of Nationalist Party (ZNP) and the Zanzibar and Pemba's People's party (ZPPP) won, in July 1963. Al Kharusi confirms that there is no doubt that the police officials were well aware that such riots might

Remembering a dawn that changed the fate of Zanzibar



The British Resident waving 'Goodbye Zanzibar' to officials.



Sayyid Mohamed and Sayyid Harub, brothers of HM. Sultan Jamshid, bidding farewell to the British Resident, Sir Jorge Mooring, December 1963.



HM the Sultan heading to the Legislative Council Hall.

mount to an attempt to overthrow the government if this coalition party was to rule the country. Based on such a prospect, the ex- Commissioner of Police Mr R H V Biles — whom Al Kharusi described as impartial in his decisions, but had to leave Zanzibar soon after the independence — asked him to meet with officials from the Nationalist Party to ask them whether they had solicited or been promised any military assistance from countries such as Egypt in case of riots breaking out following independence. He also asked him to make it clear to them that if the answer was no, then the new government might face critical state of security unrest which could develop into a security threat to the regime and to its very existence. Al Kharusi, therefore, met with Ministers from the Internal Self Government at Beit Al Ajaib (the House of Wonders). He expressed the Police Force's deep security concerns vis-à-vis the state of "simmering" that had pervaded Zanzibar during those trying times. The response that he received from one of the ministers was: "Do you think the government is a cup of tea that can be turned over easily?" This sarcastic remark has been often ascribed to Shaikh Ali Muhsin al Barwani, Minister of External Affairs and Trade, however, Al Kharusi confirms that it wasn't so on this particular occasion.

Some security enquiries later confirmed that there was a plan to overthrowing the legitimate government on the actual day of the independence celebrations. John Okello, the so-addressed as the leader of the 'revolution' — in his book, claimed that he opted to not spoil the festive mood, particularly in view of the high profile of the state guests from friendly and allied countries. History, however, reveals that Okello feared that some countries might intervene if the execution of the plot took place on that day as the ceremonies was headed by high profile personalities. The ceremony was also attended by prominent personalities from 70 countries, including the then President of the Egyptian People's Council, Anwar Al Sadat, as per *Al Ahram* newspaper, December 10, 1963.

After Mr Biles left the country, the Government appointed Jack Sullivan as the new commissioner of police. Kharusi blames Sullivan, among many other reasons, for the fall of independent Zanzibar as we shall see in the coming episode.

TO BE CONTINUED...



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AROUND THE WORLD

STUDY

For whales, study shows gigantism is in the genes



THE BLUE, FIN, BOWHEAD, gray, humpback, right and sperm whales are the largest animals alive today. In fact, the blue whale is the largest-known creature ever on Earth, topping even the biggest of the dinosaurs.

How did these magnificent marine mammals get so big? A new study explored the genetic underpinnings of gigantism in whales, identifying four genes that appear to have played crucial roles. These genes, the researchers said, helped in fostering great size but also in mitigating related disadvantageous consequences including higher cancer risk and lower reproductive output.

Cetaceans, the marine mammal group encompassing whales, dolphins and porpoises, evolved around 50 million years ago from vaguely wolf-like land-based ancestors that belonged to a mammalian assemblage called artiodactyls that includes today's cows, pigs, sheep and many others.

"Body size is a complex result of many genes, pathways, and physical and ecological processes," said geneticist Mariana Nery of Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP) in Brazil, co-author of the study published on Thursday in the journal *Scientific Reports*. "Our results are among the first to study gigantism in cetaceans from a molecular perspective."

The study focused on seven whale species exceeding 33 feet (10 metres) long. Six are baleen whales, which consume tiny prey using a mouth filter-feeding system involving baleen plates made of the same substance found in people's fingernails. The sperm whale is a toothed whale that hunts large prey like giant squid.

Blue whales can reach about 100 feet (30 metres) long, fin whales about 80 feet (24 metres), sperm and bowhead whales about 60 feet (18 metres), humpback and right whales about 50 feet (15 metres) and gray whales about 45 feet (13.5 metres).

After assessing nine genes including some associated with increased body size in other mammals, the researchers found that four — named GHSR, IGFBP7, NCAPG and PLAG1 — appear to have gained prominence during the evolution of large whales.

GHSR is a gene involved in releasing growth hormone through the pituitary gland, body weight, energy metabolism, appetite and fat accumulation. It also is associated with controlling cell proliferation and programmed cell death. Tumours essentially are formed by runaway cell growth.

IGFBP7 is a gene involved in promoting cell growth and division. There is evidence it acts as a cancer suppressor in prostate, breast, lung and colorectal tumours.

NCAPG, a gene associated with growth in people, horses, donkeys, cattle, pigs and chickens, is linked to increased body size, weight gain, cell proliferation and cell life cycles. — **Reuters**

FASHION

Indian haute couture master dreams the 'impossible' for Paris



As he stitches together the final threads of his latest Paris Fashion Week collection, acclaimed Indian fashion designer Rahul Mishra is taking inspiration from France — and a fellow master from another era.

"I want to achieve the impossible, I want to paint air," he told AFP, quoting the 19th-century impressionist painter Claude Monet.

Both men are known for their artistic urge to depict nature — Monet on canvas, and Mishra on his extravagant haute couture gowns, feted for their bursts of embroidered floral colour and petal-shaped ornamental flourishes.

Mishra's creations are a regular staple of the world's leading fashion magazines where they are modelled by film stars including Cate Blanchett and Michelle Yeoh.

Dozens of designers, tailors and crafters have been hard at work in his new workshop near India's capital New Delhi, putting the finishing touches on the "Cosmos" line he will debut on the Parisian catwalk on Monday.

Some sit on mats in front of embroidery looms sewing flower motifs onto delicate sheer fabric in a painstaking enterprise that stands testament to the force of Mishra's creative vision.

"I dream a lot, I am often lost in a new world, in a kind of fantasy," said the casually dressed 43-year-old, striding in Nike trainers between workbenches to introduce the work of his colleagues.

"I come back and share it with my team, I speak to them, talk to them... and then that

dream becomes a common dream, everybody starts believing in this idea."

Mishra's fantasies have materialised into hot property in the years since he won the International Woolmark Prize — one of the fashion world's top accolades — in 2014.

The French Fashion Federation included his work on the Paris ready-to-wear runway the same year, and in 2020 he became the first Indian to feature in its haute couture programme.

NATURAL PREOCCUPATIONS

Nature has been Mishra's most enduring source of inspiration, beginning at the age of 10 when he felt compelled to sketch the blooming flowers and natural scenery of his rural hometown.

With no mentor and a doctor father who pushed him to pursue a more steady career, Mishra almost abandoned his couture dreams before breaking off his university science studies.

He enrolled at the National Institute of Design, India's premier creative arts academy, before studying in Italy's fashion capital Milan.

His recent artistic triumphs show how little he has strayed from his roots.

A highlight of his "Tree of Life" collection last year is a sleeveless floral gown bursting with a cornucopia of 120 colours in the couturier's embodiment of spring.

"This must be the most colourful piece I have ever done," he said, adding that each floor-length dress represented 5,000 hours of labour.

Items from the collection sold for up to 12,500 euros

(\$13,500) once they went on sale.

"There are hardly 200 artists across India who are able to manage this kind of multi-colour work," he added. "It is more difficult to replicate the original piece than to create it."

CELEBRATE MISTAKES'

Mishra now has his sights set on building a global presence and in March, will launch a new ready-to-wear collection in Europe.

His first European boutique will open in London later this year thanks to a joint venture with Indian conglomerate Reliance, a key distributor of luxury brands which has exclusive tie-ups with Balenciaga and Armani.

But his ambitions ultimately rest on building a "fairly serious" alternative to fast fashion giants like Uniqlo and Zara, utilising India's seemingly bottomless pool of textile talent.

"Now is the right time," he said.

"My biggest goal is that one day we'll be able to provide employment for more than a million people around the world."

Like many artists, each one of Mishra's finished endeavours is a reflection of the torment and doubt that come with habitual agonising over minute details — an emotional struggle that is also a wellspring of creative inspiration.

"We celebrate mistakes, we celebrate when we fail," he said. "The beauty of trying something new, the excitement and the intent to do something new is always celebrated."

"I think more than the final fashion show... what excites me most is the process." — **AFP**

CINEMA

Iranian women take centre stage at Sundance film festival



MOVIES BY AND about Iranian women took centre stage at the Sundance film festival this weekend, as diaspora film-makers reflected on female-led protests and the deadly challenges of censorship and resistance in their ancestral home.

"Joonam," a documentary about a three-generation family of Iranian women now living in Vermont, and "The Persian Version," a colourful but candid dramedy which hops between Iran and New York over several decades, received world premieres on Saturday.

"Shayda," a drama directed by Noora Niasari about a Persian woman who flees her abusive husband in Australia, debuted earlier at the high-profile independent film festival in Utah.

Their inclusion in Sundance's line-up follows four months of mass demonstrations in Iran, triggered by anger over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after her arrest for violating the Islamic republic's strict dress rules.

At least 481 people have been killed in the crack-down and at least 109 others are facing execution in protest-related cases, in addition to the four already put to death, according to NGO Iran Human Rights. The protesters "are literally putting themselves on the line... I stand in support with them 100 per cent," said "Joonam" director Sierra Urlich.

"You can't speak freely in Iran, they're imprisoning film-makers and imprisoning artists," Urlich said. "I can speak freely outside of Iran — to an extent."

Iran has arrested a number of celebrities from the country's film industry in connection with the protest movement. Renowned director Jafar Panahi has been in prison six months following an earlier conviction for "propaganda against the system."

While US-born Urlich cannot visit Iran for security reasons, her film chronicles her efforts to connect with and better understand the country by learning Farsi and interviewing her mother and grandmother.

She learns about the murder of an ancestor, and the story of how her grandmother was married at 14 to a man she met before reaching puberty.

While her grandmother is happy to reflect, her mother worries it is "very dangerous" to delve into the family's past on camera, at one point warning her daughter that in Iran, "the film-maker will be the one hanged."

"Coming into Sundance, the film is on the world stage. I think Iranians are always weighing how truthful they will be, versus what they will say causing consequences for people that are back home," said Urlich.

"It wasn't until my grandmother shared the story of her grandfather's martyrdom that I really understood this wall of fear that had been built by this authoritarian regime, to so many people in Iran, outside of Iran."

"My mom was trying to protect me from that reality." — **AFP**

Modern jazz concert challenges and rewards Muscat aficionados



By Georgina Benison
Photos by Khalid al Busaidy, ROHM

The parameters of jazz are very broad, and the Kenny Garrett performance at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts this weekend may have surprised some, and put some classical jazz aficionados out of their comfort zone. The boundaries of that definition were stretched and explored to the limits of free jazz improvisation in both concerts, challenging and rewarding the Muscat public.

Multi award-winning saxophonist and composer, Kenny Garrett graced the ROHMA stage on Thursday and Friday evenings, supported by some incredible musicians in the rhythm section. The sheer vibrancy, talent and passion exuding from their music was powerful enough to win over Muscat audiences, leaving them dancing in the aisles and whooping for more after each two hour, non-stop set.

Garrett, appearing on stage in an eye-catching, shiny metallic suit, launched straight into the first number taken from his latest album, "Sounds from the Ancestors" in a fairly mainstream style. Immediately the piano solo from Keith Brown suggested what virtuosity was in store, with its modal style and stunning dexterity on the house's Grand. Kenny Garrett's first solo took off into a more contemporary vein, his iconic rocking up and down as he lost himself into free improvisation, making a compelling visual image for the listener.

He was backed by Ronald Bruner on drums whose fast, intrepid hard-bop influences of Art Blakey and Tony Allen were clearly evident throughout the show. It was a long, loose-structured opening number and challenging for some listeners, but the great rapport between the musicians made for a tight performance, including Melvis Santa's vocal lines being integrated into the texture of the sextet.

The second, more accessible number was funky, based around catchy singable riffs, an understated piano solo and driving rhythms from Bruner.

Contrasting again, the third

piece, the Afro-Cuban, "Sounds from the Ancestors", started with Kenny playing a slow organ melody which gave way to full bodied Gospel, almost South African in style, built on funky repetitive riffs. He encouraged the audience to clap along by way of participation, but didn't introduce the songs by name, so it was hard to follow their origins or inspirations.

The next number returned to a more mainstream, modal quality with some fast drum improvisation building up to a rhythmic frenzy and then suddenly melting into a lyrical riff over which the audience was encouraged to call and respond 'Badié', for an extended outro.

A pivotal moment and highlight of the concert was the sixth number, "Soldiers of the Fields", played by the Quartet. It featured upright bassist, Eric Wheeler, in a chance to show his dazzling technique with a fast and dexterous non-stop walking bass line. The Quartet was reduced to a Trio as pianist Keith Brown slipped off stage and finally a saxophone solo, cadenza-style, gave Kenny Garrett the opportunity to prove just how superb his technique is. His unquestionably faultless, unflinching cascade of inventiveness flowed on without breath or pause for an extended solo until finally relieved by the return of the rhythm section and another virtuoso piano solo. The rapturous applause he received reflected an awe inspired by such impressive control.

The audience was brought back to earth with the following hip-hop Blues, and encouraged to join in the vocal riffs as band members filed off stage one by one, Farewell Symphony-like, until just Garrett and Bruner were left to bask in the glory.

Prolonged suspense suggested to some that there would be no encore, but house lights dimmed and the band returned to the stage with a slow melodic riff carried by bass and piano, again using modal, quartal harmony in a short and accessible earworm. It morphed into a funky Finale with solo vocal interjections from Melvis Santa, at last her own chance to shine. This time the farewell symphony routine left Bruner alone on stage hurling his drum sticks away to follow his fellow musicians, leaving an empty stage with just echoes of a brilliant performance teasing in the air.

