

The Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers announced the start of registration for a forum codenamed ‘Together Forward’. The forum will see the launch of ‘Idea Makers’ initiative, which seeks to encourage innovation and creative thinking in developing themes of national identity and communication between the government and society. Those interested to register are advised to view the terms and conditions through the forum’s website, via the link <https://togetherfwd.om>.



P10

OMAN ALL SET FOR AFC ASIAN CUP QATAR



P13

AMERICAN INVESTIGATORS RETRIEVE 737 MAX JET PANEL



P18

'SUCCESSION' AND 'THE BEAR' WIN TOP TV HONORS AT GOLDEN GLOBES



MUSCAT

OHB TO FINANCE 50,000 HOMES

In line with the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to accelerate the provision of subsidised housing finance for individuals on the waiting lists for housing allocations, Oman Housing Bank (OHB) launched the 'Iskan' programme on Monday under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. The Royal directives are aimed at standardising the criteria for finance applications on the waiting lists at both the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Oman Housing Bank.

DETAILS ON P13

OMAN, BAHRAIN REVIEW BILATERAL TIES



MANAMA: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said on Monday held a meeting with Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, at Al Qudaibiya Palace. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Theyazin and Prince Salman reviewed relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as means of upgrading cooperation in various fields. They also discussed other matters of common concern. The meeting was attended by Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad al Khalifa, the King's Representative for Humanitarian Works and Youth Affairs, Shaikh Isa bin Salman al Khalifa, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Isa bin Salman Education Charitable Trust, Chairman of Bahrain Labour Fund, Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister, Shaikh Salman bin Khalifa al Khalifa, Minister of Finance and National Economy and several senior Bahraini officials. – **ONA**

GAZA

250 PALESTINIANS KILLED IN GAZA

Gaza health officials reported the highest daily death toll so far this year on Monday as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken toured Arab states before heading for Israel to try to prevent the conflict growing into a wider conflagration. Blinken held talks on Gaza in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to try to chart a way forward. He began a five-day Middle East diplomatic effort in Jordan and Qatar on Sunday, his fourth visit to the region since deadly October 7 attacks. Israeli forces bombarded the east of the southern city of Khan Younis and central Gaza Strip amid clashes in those areas, residents said. **DETAILS ON P6**

Winners of Holy Quran competition feted

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, honoured winners of the 31st version of Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition. The honouring ceremony took place at the Lecture Hall at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque on Monday. As many as 1,638 male and female contestants took part in the current version that it included 7 levels. The chief guest honoured the top three winners in each level. The competition aims to urge Omanis to memorise the Holy Quran, follow its approach and the guidance of its teachings and to raise a generation keen on reciting the Holy Quran, in addition to enhancing the presence of the Sultanate of Oman in the international Holy Quran competitions. **SEE P2**

Duqm to house space services headquarters

ONA AND HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Middle East Space Conference 2024 kicked off on Monday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

The gathering brings together 400 experts and executives in the space sector from government departments and private sector firms from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

Seventy speakers will elaborate on a wide spectrum of issues during the three-day event hosted by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with Euroconsult.

The conference, which seeks to achieve the vision, objectives of Oman's space programme, will highlight investment opportunities in Oman as a regional gateway for space

The programme envisages the launch of a satellite in 2025 and other programmes for close observation of the Earth through low-orbit satellites

ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MAAWALI
Minister of Transport, Communications and IT

services and applications.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that the conference constitutes a step forward in Oman's policy of economic diversification.

The minister told reporters

that the programme envisages the launch of a satellite in 2025 and other programmes for close observation of the Earth through low-orbit satellites. The programme includes the development of related applications via satellites, said Eng Said al Maawali, noting that incubators for startups in the space field will be launched in 2024 or 2025.

On the sidelines of the conference, an investment agreement was signed by National Satellite Services Company and Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) to inaugurate a company specialised in space services (codenamed Itlaaq) whose headquarters will be in Al Duqm.

The agreement was signed by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of the National Satellite Services Company's Board of Directors, and Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel). **SEE ALSO P13**



Oman LNG is honoured to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman on the anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne. May Allah the Almighty protect His Majesty and guide him to the renewed renaissance and bring Oman further progress and prosperity.



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Maha al Habsi, Director General of Business Development at the Challenge Oman Foundation, highlighted that the four-day programme is designed to bolster the life and professional skills of young participants.



Forum highlights parental countering of social media impact

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) is organising the 3rd edition of a forum titled “Parental Upbringing as a Measure to Counter the Impact of Social Media”. The two-day forum kicked off on Monday under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

As many as 140 researchers from inside and abroad are taking part in the forum, which

focuses on the growing negative influence of social media platforms. The forum also seeks ways to maximise benefits from the positive aspects of such sites in a manner that serves families and consolidates the concepts of national identity, citizenship and humanity.

The forum saw the launch of the Unesco Chair in Educational Psychology, a research chair supported by



The two-day forum kicked off on Monday under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information. – ONA

Sultan Qaboos University. The Chair aims to advance research and its applications in cooperation with the National Commission for Education, Culture and Sciences and the Unesco.

The forum includes more than 130 research papers and about 10 themes that evolve around parental upbringing and the role of the Islamic value system in shaping

behaviour, notably to address the challenges of social media.

The forum looks into the personal motives of social media users, electronic blackmail and safe electronic programmes and applications that can benefit people, children and youth. It also underscores the role of teachers, psychologists and social workers in developing skills for dealing with social media. — ONA

Sub-zero temperature recorded at Jabal Shams

MIDHUN RAJ
MUSCAT, JAN 8

Sultanate of Oman is in the clutches of a cold snap, with Jabal Shams setting a record for this winter by plunging below freezing point, marking the coldest temperature in Oman this Sunday at -1.1°C.

Saiq station in the elevated Al Jabal Al Akhdhar wasn't far behind at a chilly 5.4°C. The chill isn't confined to the peaks alone; governorates throughout Oman have felt the brunt of this cold wave over the past week.

The Meteorological office warns of even colder days ahead, with potential frost forecasted for the higher altitudes. In Ibri, the mercury dipped to -2°C at Jabal Al Surah on Sunday, prompting residents to document and share the rare spectacle of frost in the region.

The cold front in Oman has transformed Jabal Shams into a magnet for adventure-seekers, eager to brave the frosty climes. Camping enthusiasts are seizing this unique chance to experience the rare sub-zero temperatures firsthand.

Mubarak Moosa, a passionate adventurer from Kerala, is one of many who are drawn to the mountain's allure.

“We are planning to visit Jabal Shams this Thursday and camp there at night to witness the magical sunrise and experience the cold weather,” he shared with palpable excitement. In stark contrast, the towns of Yalooni and Salalah basked in warmer climates, with temperatures hovering around 29°C on Sunday.

Looking ahead, the Meteorological office predicts cloud formations along the coastal stretch



The Meteorological office warns of even colder days ahead, with potential frost forecasted for the higher altitudes

December temperatures were above monthly average

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Several weather monitoring stations recorded higher than the average monthly temperature for December 2023, according to Oman Meteorology.

Al Buraimi station recorded a temperature increase of +1.9 degrees Celsius, while Masirah station recorded an increase of 1. 2 degrees Celsius compared to the average temperature for December.

The highest temperatures recorded in Celsius were in Wadi Al Maawil (34.8), Barka (34), Mirbat (33.8), and Salalah (33.2) among others.

The lowest temperatures recorded in Celsius were Al Mazyouna (10), Maqshin (9.9), and Jabal Shams (-1.3).

The monitoring station on Masirah Island recorded

the lowest temperature for September in 1967 when it reached 10 degrees Celsius.

The highest recorded temperature was in December 2016, when it reached 32.5 degrees Celsius. As for December 2023, 30 degrees Celsius was recorded as the highest temperature, and the lowest recorded temperature was 20 degrees Celsius.

It may be that the year 2023 was the hottest on record, with global average temperatures at 1.46C above pre-industrial levels and 0.13C higher than the eleven-month average for 2016, currently the warmest calendar year on record.

The confirmation arrived after the European Union Climate Change Copernicus Service (CS3) announced that November 2023 was the hottest November on record globally.

the season's dynamic weather, the Meteorological office also notes an increase in plankton off the coast of the Sea of Oman, a phenomenon that's occurring in tandem with the prevailing north-easterly winds.

Oman, Qatar review cooperation in human rights

DOHA: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and its Qatari counterpart reviewed areas of joint cooperation within the framework of mutual coordination on the regional and international levels.

The two sides also exchanged expertise and best practices in matters related to human rights, among other topics.

This came during the visit of OHRC's delegation, headed by Dr Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairman of the OHRC to the State of Qatar. — ONA



The two sides also exchanged expertise and best practices in matters related to human rights. – ONA

Batinah North Governorate stands at forefront of national priorities

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JAN 8

The Al Batinah North Governorate stands at the forefront of Oman's growing national priorities, symbolising a commitment to realising the transformative vision encapsulated in Oman Vision 2040.

As the ‘Every Oman’ initiative embraces upon this governorate, it shows an essential shift in the developmental narrative, emphasising on cooperative engagement and collaborative participation in drawing the nation's future in various aspects.

In a three-day gathering, the initiative unfolds a tapestry of presentations, workshops, and strategic dialogues crafted to make the fabric of Oman 2040's objectives into the very essence of the Al Batinah North Governorate. At its core, this gathering serves as a sign for the novel national priorities visualised by the vision that achieved through community integration.

Aligned with Oman's main goal of fostering sustainable development and balanced progress across provinces, these

discussions and workshops serve as guide for enhancing local empowerment, building a culture of continuous improvement, and claiming decentralised governance.

Sayyid Dr Munthir bin Hilal bin Badr al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, said ‘Every Oman’ initiative embodies the ethos of social engagement including within the policies. He stated that this initiative seeks to not only to empower communities but also make the fabric of the provinces, fostering a symbiotic relationship between vision offices and local stakeholders, thus fostering flexibility and adaptability.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, demonstrated the governorate's approaches towards embodying Oman's developmental aspirations. He showcased a holistic approach encompassing strategic collaborations, economic buoyancy, and environmental arrangements and procedures, aligning with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's visionary directives.

The governorate's investments



The initiative unfolds a tapestry of presentations and workshops

which exceed RO 14 million over the next three years include urban revitalisation, coastal embellishments, recreational spaces, and infrastructural enhancements, presenting of a gathered effort to raise sustainability and tourism growth.

Of equal significance are the recently forged agreements, amounting to over RO 11 million, signifying a leap towards novel national priorities. These agreements include establishing an Aqua Park Resort in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq with an investment of RO 4.56 million, developing a commercial entertainment project in Sohar's Silver Jubilee Park that worth RO 3 million and initiating RO 3.5 million commercial entertainment venture in the Sohar Entertainment Centre.

Decision-makers share insights on GCC identity and tourism

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Sultanate of Oman hosted the Oasis of Dialogue Forum, centred around the theme “Identity and Tourism in the GCC,” marking a significant milestone in regional collaboration.

Under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, the Governor of Dhofar, the forum brought together 100 participants from GCC. The Qatar Debate Center, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, and the Oman Debate Centre, organised the events.

The forum's sessions encompassed workshops and dialogues on specialised topics in

tourism, entertainment, sports and culture. The first day featured discussions on national identity and institutional discourse analysis. The the second day of the forum, there was a collective session on research methodologies in the humanities presented by Dr Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, a professor of modern and contemporary history at Qatar University.

Additionally, a key session involving decision-makers addressed ‘Identity and Tourism in the GCC’, featuring insights from Sayyid Marwan al Said, Hassan al Zuwaidi, the Secretary-General of the Supreme Committee for Projects and Heritage in Qatar and Saad Al Rameehi, Chairman of the Board of the Qatar Press Center.



The forum's sessions looked at specialised topics in tourism, entertainment, sports and culture. – ONA

The session was moderated by Dr Ali bin Yusuf Al Sand, an academic and Kuwaiti media personality.

His Highness Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said, Chairman of the Board of Oman Debates Centre, affirmed that the forum represents a significant step towards

enhancing the role of debates in the Sultanate of Oman. It provides a platform for youth to express their ideas on important issues related to current transformations in the Gulf region. He emphasised the forum's importance in promoting mutual understanding and strengthening

ties among the region's youth. He explained that the choice of the theme ‘Identity and Tourism in the GCC’ reflects significant changes in the tourism sector and cultural identity in Gulf countries. He confirmed that dialogue on these issues contributes to a better understanding of cultural and economic transformations, aiming to shape a common understanding and guide youth thinking towards creative solutions that enhance communication and collaboration in the region.

Dr Haya Maaref, the Executive Director of the Qatar Debates Center, stated that the first edition of the Oasis of Dialogue Forum for the year 2024 in Muscat comes within the framework of a strategic

partnership between the Qatar Debates Center, the Oman Debates Centre, and the Omani Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. She emphasised the importance of engaging with the “Identity and Tourism” theme amid rapid changes in the tourism sector in the region.

Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director General of the General Directorate for Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, affirmed that the forum serves as a model for regional cooperation and vital interaction among various entities. He expressed their aspirations to enhance dialogue and the Omani youth's engagement with their counterparts in the Arab Gulf countries.



VIRAL FEVER OF SOCIAL MEDIA WEIGHS ON POSITIVE MEASURES



NAJAH AL RIYAMI
SUR, JAN 8

Recently, an Instagrammer posted a picture of the red lights in Ras Al Hadd, home to endangered olive ridley turtles in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The post quickly went viral and many criticised the rationale for putting red lights by sacrificing safety concerns in the popular tourist area.

But the social media did not see the big picture and missed the plight of these turtles. These lights with limited brightness were part of a programme by the Environment Authority to protect the world's few remaining turtle species. Red-light bulbs were installed due to their minimal impact on young turtles. Young turtles, upon hatching, inherently rely on the moon's natural light to guide them from their nesting sites to the ocean. This instinctual behaviour ensures their successful transition into their marine habitat. However, the intrusion of artificial lights severely disrupts this natural process.

The presence of non-natural illumination leads to the disorientation of hatchlings, causing them to veer off course and become stranded on land. This interference poses a significant threat to their survival, as the sea is their ultimate destination and source of sustenance.

Therefore, the proactive measures stand as a pivotal step in safeguarding the delicate life cycle of these sea turtle species. Through the implementation

of controlled lighting practices, these efforts aim to mitigate the adverse impacts of human activity on these remarkable creatures, thereby contributing to the long-term health and preservation of their populations.

This incident also underscores the risk of misinformed opinions especially on social media. It also calls on the need to verify information before forming judgments. Combating social media misinformation is a shared responsibility. It starts with thorough research and fact-checking. Encouraging informed opinions and critical thinking can control fake news.



THE ISSUE OF RED LIGHTS FOR TURTLES SPOTLIGHTS SOCIAL MEDIA'S TENDENCY TO IGNORE THE BIG PICTURE

Social media is a powerful tool. Broadcasting information in real time is helpful in many cases especially during natural disasters or other emergencies. But posts such as the one referred above underscores the downsides of social media, where false information can spread like wildfire and dousing it becomes difficult. One should exercise caution while forwarding, sharing, tweeting or retweeting information on social media without verifying the source and the content.

Official statistics reveal that each year, an estimated 6,000 to 13,000 turtles choose to nest within this region. These turtles undertake migrations to the Sultanate of Oman from remote areas like the Arabian Gulf, the Red Sea and the coastlines of Somalia. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the reserve serves as a habitat for a diverse array of bird and wildlife species. The primary objective behind its creation is to safeguard the natural ecosystem from human disruption.



SAF Chief of Staff receives ISSF president

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamish al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa today Luciano Rossi, President of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF).

The two sides reviewed fields of cooperation between both sides. They also exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Nasser bin Said al Saadi, Assistant Chief of Staff for Training and Joint Drills. — **ONA**



The two sides reviewed fields of cooperation and also exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest. — **ONA**

JORDANIAN MILITARY DELEGATION VISITS NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE



MUSCAT: The delegation of the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College (RJCS) led by Brigadier Sami bin Mohammed al Harbi, on Monday visited the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies in Bait Al Falaj. Upon their arrival at the college, the guests were greeted by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, NDC Commandant. During the meeting, the two sides discussed a range of topics of common interest, especially in academic and training fields. Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college's facilities. They also toured the NDC's departments. — **ONA**

YOUR RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED: CPA

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) launched the 'Your Rights Are Protected' campaign coinciding with the launch of the social protection system within the framework of multiple community initiatives adopted to serve the community.

The campaign, organised by CPA in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with the Social Protection Fund, is aimed at creating awareness to ensure the smooth flow of purchasing, avoid wrong commercial practices, combine the concept of social responsibility, and enhance the partnership between the consumer and the supplier.

Sulayem bin Ali bin Sulayem al Hakmani, Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority, said that the campaign aims to create a balanced market to achieve the common interests of the consumer and the supplier alike and that distributing the benefit to groups entitled to social protection according to the directives of His Majesty will pump more cash liquidity in all aspects of life.

Dr Khalid bin Ali al Alawi, General Director of the CPA for Al Batinah North Governorate, said: "The mechanisms for implementing this campaign are divided into two sections: supervisory and awareness."

"As for the supervisory section, it was implemented last December 2023 by monitoring and surveying the prices of goods and services, building a database, and direct meetings with suppliers and merchants. As for awareness, which began



The campaign aims to create a balanced market to achieve the common interests of the consumer and the supplier alike.

SULAYEM BIN ALI BIN SULAYEM AL HAKMANI
Chairman of the Consumer Protection Authority

immediately after the launch of the campaign that it includes many events and activities, such as lectures, awareness campaigns, exhibitions, broadcasting awareness messages through social media platforms, and other activities," he added.

In the same context, Al Alawi said that the target groups of this campaign are all suppliers, merchants and consumers, especially the groups that came under the social protection system: the elderly, children and widows, as well as people with disabilities.

In addition, to strengthening their societal responsibility to maintain a stable market, and introducing intensive awareness and oversight activities. This will be implemented during the campaign, that will

include presenting a number of programmes and activities, such as awareness lectures for consumers, in addition to various awareness and informational messages through social media networks and other means.

'Your Rights are Protected' campaign came in line with the government's approach to creating a climate of cooperation and joint integration between all sectors in accordance with Oman Vision 2040.

The social protection system is an important pillar for any society that aims to ensure the well-being and security of its citizens and includes a wide range of policies, programmes and initiatives designed to protect individuals and communities from various risks and vulnerabilities.

TENDER NOTICE

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
1011/2023/MAFWR/HQ-110-Recall-1	Maintenance contract for all types of central air conditioners in the Ministry's General Office building and its affiliated buildings for a period of 36 months	Sunday 7/1/2024	Tuesday 16/1/2024	Sunday 28/1/2024	Specialized companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board with Specialized grade	(25-/) Twenty Five Omani Riyals for local companies (10) Ten Omani Riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have head quarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender)and addressed to the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

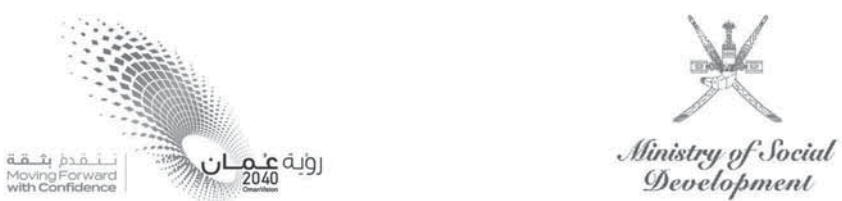
TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

MoHT to close Sohar Fort temporarily

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) announced on Monday the closure of Sohar Fort temporarily.

According to the ministry, the iconic fort will be closed from January 8 to 16.

In an online announcement, the ministry said the fort situated in the Wilayat of Sohar in Al Batinah North Governorate will undergo temporary closure, noting that the it will open its doors for visitors from January 18, 2024.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of Ministry of Social Development hereby announces the following tender:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
512/2023	Maintenance work for Al-Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Mirbat	Companies specialized in the field of Urban contracting and maintenance registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree	Friday 26-1-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 15-2-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Tuesday 09/01/2024.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Services Al Dhahirah Governorate (DGHS) - invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
4791/2023	RENT MULTI-FUNCTION DEVICES TO SCAN DOCUMENTS	Thursday 18/Jan/2024	At 9:00 am on Thursday 08/Feb/2024	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25/= Per set

Notes:-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



Protesters at the "All Denmark on the Streets for Palestine – Ceasefire Now!" demonstration organised by a broad gathering of solidarity groups and activists are seen on their way from Frederiksberg City Hall to Copenhagen City Hall, in Denmark. – AFP

ISRAEL HITS SOUTH GAZA AS TOP US DIPLOMAT SEEKS DE-ESCALATION

GAZA: Israel hit targets in south Gaza and across its border with Lebanon, the army said on Monday ahead of a visit by the top US diplomat who is seeking to avert a wider war.

Gaza's health ministry said 73 dead and 99 wounded had arrived at Al-Aqsa hospital in central Gaza's Deir al-Balah city over the previous 24 hours.

Three months into its battle in Gaza, Israel's army says its focus has moved from the northern Gaza Strip to "dismantling" Palestinian groups in the centre and south of the territory.

In the southern city of Khan Yunis, troops and warplanes overnight on Sunday-Monday struck 30 targets which a military statement described as "significant". These included underground targets and weapons storage facilities, it said.

Also overnight, the military



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken waves as he departs for Saudi Arabia, during his week-long trip aimed at calming tensions across the Middle East, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. – Reuters

said it had hit "numerous targets" in Lebanon.

Israel and Lebanon's movement groups have engaged in regular cross-border fire during the war that began an October 7.

But a strike last week in a Beirut stronghold has been a major factor contributing to rising fears of

spreading conflict. A US Defense Department official has said that Israel carried out the strike that killed Hamas's deputy leader Saleh al-Aruri.

Israel relentless bombardment and a ground invasion have resulted in killing at least 22,835 people, most of them women and

Israel relentless bombardment and a ground invasion have resulted in killing at least 22,835 people, most of them women and children

children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

On his fourth regional trip since the war began, Blinken is due in Saudi Arabia after talks earlier on Monday in UAE capital Abu Dhabi.

Blinken's visit comes alongside that of other top Western diplomats trying to stop the conflict from spreading and to boost desperately needed aid to Gazans.

In Qatar on Sunday, Blinken warned that the violence could "easily metastasize" into a regional

conflict.

Over the weekend Qatari officials also hosted relatives of captives still held in Gaza, said Ruby Chen, father of 19-year-old captive Itay Chen. The release of more captives "serves the bigger objective, as they see it, which is creating regional stability", Chen said on returning to Tel Aviv.

Qatar earlier helped mediate a one-week truce that saw dozens of captives freed in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Talks on a new truce are "ongoing", the emirate's prime minister said.

Washington, Israel's main ally that provides it with billions of dollars in military aid, has grown increasingly concerned over the war's civilian death toll.

Most of Gaza's population has been displaced, according to the United Nations, leaving them in overcrowded shelters or tents in the winter chill. — AFP

Italy: G7 working with Israel on 'rapid' end to Gaza war



Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani

ROME: G7 major powers are working with Israel to secure a "rapid" end to its devastating war in Gaza and reduce civilian casualties, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on Monday.

An Italian foreign ministry statement said Tajani had phone calls with British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and suggested "joint forms of pressure, at G7 level, on the parties involved (in the conflict) to achieve certain objectives".

"G7 countries are working with the Israeli government to find a rapid way out of the military phase," it quoted Tajani as saying as Italy begins its one-year presidency of the Group of Seven major industrialised powers.

One "absolute objective" is "to limit immediately the number of Palestinian civilian casualties", and a second is "to put pressure on the Israeli government to end military operations" in Gaza, the statement said. — Reuters

'Indiscriminately striking' civilians is war crime, pope says in major speech



Pope Francis delivers his yearly address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Vatican, sometimes called his "State of the World" address, at the Vatican. — Reuters

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis, tackling conflicts in the Middle East in his yearly address to diplomats, said on Monday that "indiscriminately striking" civilians is a war crime because it violates international humanitarian law.

Francis, 87, made his comments in a 45-minute address to Vatican-accredited envoys from 184 countries that is sometimes called his "state of the world" speech.

Expressing concern that the war between Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip could spread in the wider Middle East, he called for a "ceasefire on every front, including Lebanon".

In remarks linking the two high profile conflicts, Francis said modern warfare often does not distinguish between military and civilian objectives. There is no conflict that does not end up in some way "indiscriminately striking" the civilian population, he said. "The events in Gaza are clear proof of this. We must not forget that grave violations of international humanitarian law are war crimes, and that it is not sufficient to point them out, but also necessary to prevent them."

"There is a need for greater effort on the part of the international community to defend and implement humanitarian law, which seems to be the only way to ensure the defence of human dignity in situations of warfare," he said. — Reuters

WHO axes medical aid delivery in absence of security guarantees

GENEVA: The World Health Organization (WHO) said it had been compelled to cancel a mission to bring medical supplies to northern Gaza after failing to receive security guarantees.

It was the fourth time WHO had had to call off a planned mission to bring urgently needed medical supplies to Al-Awda Hospital and the central drug store in northern Gaza since December 26, it said.

"It has now been 12 days since we were last able to reach northern Gaza," the WHO office in the occupied Palestinian territories wrote on the X social media platform.

"Heavy bombardment, movement restrictions, and interrupted communications are making it nearly impossible to

deliver medical supplies regularly and safely across Gaza, particularly in the north."

The delivery planned on Sunday, WHO said, had been designed to sustain the operations of five hospitals in the northern part of the enclave. Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said he did not have information on WHO's assertion, referring questions to the Israel Defence Forces.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he was "shocked by the scale of health needs and devastation in northern Gaza".

"Further delays will lead to more death and suffering for far too many people," he wrote on X.

In separate comments, the



Displaced Palestinians, who fled their houses due to Israeli strikes, ride a vehicle in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – Reuters

International Rescue Committee aid group said its emergency medical team and the Medical Aid for Palestinians charity had been

forced to withdraw and cease its activities at the Al-Aqsa Hospital in Gaza's Middle Area due to increasing Israel military activity

in the area.

The Israeli offensive has displaced most of Gaza's 2.3 million population, left many homes and civilian infrastructure in ruins, and caused acute shortages of food, water and medicine.

On Monday morning, the Israeli army dropped leaflets on al Moghani in central Gaza Strip warning residents to evacuate several districts it said were "dangerous combat zones".

For Aziza Abbas, 57, one of a handful of Gazans now camped close to the southern border with Egypt, there was nowhere else to go after what she said was bombardment around a school in which she had taken shelter after leaving her home in the north. — Reuters



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TUESDAY | JANUARY 9 | 2024

7

In brief

■ SARAJEVO



RESCUE BEGINS FOR TRAPPED INSIDE FLOODED CAVE

Divers entered a flooded 8.2-km Slovenian cave on Monday to try to evacuate five people who have been trapped deep inside since Saturday as water levels begin to recede, the head of the rescue mission said on Monday.

“The first section of the cave is passable for now,” said Maks Merela, the head of Slovenia’s Cave Search and Rescue Unit. “The divers are getting inside and we hope they will come out with evacuees in the course of the day, by evening at the latest,” Merela said.

Divers managed to reach them on Saturday and Sunday and bring them food, water, medicines and a heated tent, but the high water level made their evacuation impossible.

— Reuters

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH PM HASINA SECURES 4TH STRAIGHT TERM

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina swept to a fourth straight term in power, with her party winning almost 75% of the seats in Sunday’s general election that was boycotted by the main opposition and drew a low turnout.

“Each political party has right to take decision, absence of one party in election does not mean democracy is absent,” she told reporters at her official residence in the capital Dhaka.

The daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, founding father of Bangladesh, first became prime minister in 1996.

In her past 15 years in power she has been credited with turning around the economy and the massive garments industry, winning international praise. — Reuters

■ PARIS



FRENCH PM’S JOB ON LINE IN MACRON RESHUFFLE

French ministers on Monday awaited a cabinet reshuffle expected this week by President Emmanuel Macron, with the job of the prime minister herself at risk.

Commentators see the reshuffle as essential to relaunch Macron’s centrist presidency for the final three years of his term and prevent him becoming a “lame duck” leader.

Macron has faced protests over unpopular pension reforms, the loss of his overall majority in parliamentary elections and controversy over immigration legislation. — AFP

Four dead in Ukraine as Russia evacuates hundreds from major city

KYIV: Four people were killed in a “massive” wave of Russian strikes across Ukraine on Monday, officials said, as authorities in the Russian border city of Belgorod evacuated hundreds due to Ukrainian shelling.

As the war approaches its second anniversary, both Moscow and Kyiv have accused each other of causing dozens of civilian casualties in a sharp escalation of attacks.

“Overnight on January 8, 2024, the enemy launched a massive attack on Ukraine,” Ukraine’s air force said on social media.

Russia launched 51 missiles in all, 18 of which were shot down, it added.

Russian missiles hit a shopping centre and high-rise buildings in President Volodymyr Zelensky’s hometown of Kryvyi Rih, killing one person, deputy head of the presidency Oleksiy Kuleba said.

“In Kryvyi Rih, there are many breakages in power grids, there are power outages, and electric transport does not work,” he said.

A separate missile attack in the western region of Khmelnytsky killed two people, officials said, while an elderly woman in Kharkiv region died after being pulled from the rubble of her home.

Russia said it had only struck



Rescuers and local residents clear debris following Russian strikes, in Zmiiv, Kharkiv region. — AFP

“military” targets in its latest defence ministry briefing.

The strikes came as Russia moved some 300 people from the border city of Belgorod due to Ukrainian shelling, the biggest evacuation from a major Russian city since the conflict began.

Kyiv’s forces have launched waves of deadly strikes on Belgorod, which lies less than 32 kilometres from the Ukrainian border.

Some 300 residents who decided to leave are now being housed in temporary accommodation in the

towns of Stary Oskol, Gubkin and the Korochansky district, further from the border, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

“Over the past 24 hours we received 1,300 requests to send Belgorod children to school camps away from the city in other

The strikes came as Russia moved some 300 people from the border city of Belgorod due to Ukrainian shelling, the biggest evacuation from a major Russian city

regions,” he added.

The Kremlin has tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy on the home front, but recent strikes on Belgorod have brought the Ukraine conflict closer to home for many Russians.

On December 30, Ukrainian shelling of the city killed 25 people, prompting schools to shut for an extended period.

Moscow vowed to intensify strikes on Ukraine in response to the attack, the deadliest in Russia since the start of the war in February 2022.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa paid a surprise visit to Kyiv on Sunday.

Kamikawa, the first high-level foreign official to visit Kyiv this year, announced new deliveries of defence equipment and discussed Tokyo’s plans to host a February conference to promote Ukraine’s economic reconstruction. — AFP

German farmers block roads with tractors in protest at subsidy cuts

BERLIN: German farmers blocked roads with tractors on Monday, kicking off a week of protests against plans to phase out agricultural subsidies with nationwide action that ministers have warned could be co-opted by the far-right.

Convoys of tractors and trucks, some adorned with protest banners reading “No beer without farmers” and posters from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, gathered on German roads in sub-zero pre-dawn temperatures. In Berlin, a line of dozens of tractors blocked the main avenue leading to the Brandenburg Gate.

Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck of the Greens, whose return from holiday last week was disrupted by furious farmers trying to storm the ferry he was on, warned in a video message that farmers’ right to protest could be exploited by fringe groups.

“Calls are circulating with coup fantasies, extremist groups are forming and ethnic-nationalist symbols are being openly displayed,” said Habeck.

Police said roads and highway slip roads were blocked in multiple locations nationwide, including several border crossings with France, causing traffic jams during the morning rush hour.

Farmers say that government plans to end two tax breaks — which currently save them about

900 million euros per year — will drive them out of business.

The coalition government was forced to find billions in savings in its 2024 budget after a court ruling in November tore up its previous spending plans.

But farmers argue the burden of these cuts has been unfairly placed on them, and have vowed to blockade major traffic and logistics routes for a week, saying that an end to tax breaks will drive farms out of business.

A poll conducted by public broadcaster NTV showed strong public backing for the protests, with 91% of respondents saying they were justified.

The farmers’ backlash last week prompted Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s coalition to make unexpected changes to the budget, including modifying plans to cut subsidies for agriculture.

Rather than abruptly ending the farmers’ tax break on agricultural diesel, the subsidy will be reduced by 40% this year, by 30% in 2025, and will end from 2026.

Farmers say this does not go far enough, but a government spokesperson said on Monday the government is not considering any further changes.

However the head of German farmers’ association DBV has expressed concern that far-right activists may exploit the protests for their own ends.

— Reuters



People walk near farm vehicles, as German farmers take part in a protest against the cut of vehicle tax subsidies, near the Victory Gate ‘Siegestor’, in Munich. — Reuters

First US lunar lander in five decades blasts off on private mission

CAPE CANAVERAL: The first American spacecraft to attempt to land on the Moon in more than half a century successfully launched early on Monday, with private industry leading the charge.

A brand new rocket, United Launch Alliance’s Vulcan Centaur, lifted off from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida at 2:18 am for its maiden voyage, carrying Astrobotic’s Peregrine Lunar Lander.

Mission control staff cheered and applauded as the lander separated from the rocket around 48 minutes later without problems.

ULA’s president and CEO Tony Bruno praised the launch on NASA’s livestream.

“I am so thrilled,” he said. “This has been years of hard work. So far this has been an absolutely beautiful mission back to the Moon.”

Eric Monda, ULA’s strategic planning director, described the launch as “spot on.” “It was so cool. I ran outside to watch,” he said.

If all goes to plan, Peregrine will touch down on a mid-latitude region of the Moon called Sinus Viscositatis, or Bay of Stickiness, on February 23.

Until now, a soft landing on Earth’s nearest celestial neighbour has only been accomplished by a handful of national space agencies: the Soviet Union was first, in 1966, followed by the United States, which is still the



The brand new rocket, United Launch Alliance’s (ULA) Vulcan Centaur, lifts off from Space Launch Complex 41d at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP

Peregrine will touch down on a mid-latitude region of the Moon called Sinus Viscositatis, or Bay of Stickiness, on February 23

only country to put people on the Moon.

Now, the United States is turning to the commercial sector to stimulate a broader lunar economy and ship its own hardware at a fraction of the cost, under the Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) programme.

“Leading America back to the surface of the Moon for the first time since Apollo is a momentous honour,” Astrobotic’s CEO John Thornton had said ahead of the launch.

Nasa paid Astrobotic more than \$100 million for the task, while another contracted company, Houston-based Intuitive Machines, is looking to launch in February and land near the Moon’s south pole.

“We think that it’s going to allow... more cost effective and more rapidly accomplished trips to the lunar surface to prepare for Artemis,” said Joel Kearns, the US space agency’s deputy associate administrator for exploration.

ULA’s new rocket is planned to have reusable first stage booster engines, which the company, a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Boeing, expects will help save costs.

On board Peregrine is a suite of scientific instruments that will probe radiation and surface composition, helping to pave the way for the return of astronauts.

— AFP

Why are habits so hard to change?



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

With a new year starting, let's embrace it with a sense of renewal and the opportunity for positive change. Now is the perfect occasion to gain inspiration to let go of old habits that are no longer aligned with your vision, and focus on adopting new ones that will contribute to your personal growth, health and happiness.

Why do we find it so hard to break old habits? Habits are deeply ingrained in our brains neural pathways which form a habit loop of trigger, routine then reward. This loop becomes automatic over time, making it difficult to interrupt the pattern without intentional effort and repetition. The brain naturally resists change due to the comfort and predictability of established routines, hence moving away from familiar habits can evoke a sense of discomfort and resistance. Bad habits provide immediate reward or relief and create a powerful incentive to continue despite long-term detrimental consequences.

Negative thought patterns, self-doubt or a lack of belief in one's abilities to change can create mental

barriers. Overcoming these limiting beliefs is crucial for initiating and sustaining habit change. Altering automatic responses requires conscious effort, awareness and consistent practice.

Bad habits often serve as coping mechanisms for stress, boredom or emotional discomfort. Changing old habits can be challenging yet with dedication and a strategic approach, we can definitely break the patterns. It is important to identify your habits, understand your triggers and the rewards associated with them.

Self-awareness and self-reflection lay the foundation for effective change. Understanding the reason you want to change the habit is vital — for your own personal benefit and gain, not due to societal demands nor family constricts. Self-motivation will always outlast and outplay the external drive and desire of others.

Replacing the old habits with new positive ones rather than eliminating them will help, as incorporating alternative behaviours that align with your goals will serve as substitutes. Develop a realistic plan to integrate healthier habits into your daily routine. Consider factors like time, resources

REMEMBER THAT THE KEY TO CHANGING OLD HABITS IS CONSISTENCY AND A GRADUAL APPROACH. IT IS A JOURNEY NOT A DESTINATION.

and potential obstacles. Failing to plan is planning to fail, a well thought out plan enhances the likelihood of sticking to your goals.

Introduce changes gradually. Rapid overhauls are often harder to sustain. Slow and steady adjustments give your mind and body time to adapt. Incorporate stress management techniques into your daily life such as meditation, EFT tapping, breathwork and engage in activities that bring you joy and relaxation.

Sharing your inspirations and aspirations with like-minded people can keep you accountable to stay on track. The continual encouragement and positive reinforcements are crucial elements to your on-going success. Even when setbacks occur, understand that this is a normal part of the process. Approach them with resilience, learn from them with clarity and resolve them with an even keel focus.

Remember that the key to changing old habits is consistency and a gradual approach. It is a journey not a destination. Celebrate your successes and stay committed to the positive changes you are making. Over time, these efforts will contribute to your lasting transformation. Here's to a fruitful year ahead!

Brazil marks anniversary of Jan 8 riots

RAMON SAHMKOW

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva will convene Brazil's political bigwigs on Monday to mark the first anniversary of the far-right riots that rocked the capital — but with key absences undermining his message of unity.

The veteran leftist had been back in office for just one week when tens of thousands of supporters of his defeated election rival, far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, stormed the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court on January 8, 2023, trashing the premises and calling for the military to oust Lula.

The Brasilia riots, which drew instant comparisons to the Capitol invasion in Washington two years earlier by supporters of Donald Trump, laid bare the violent divisions tearing at Brazil in the wake of Lula's narrow win over Bolsonaro the previous October.

On the surface, those divisions are less flagrant today: The far-right is still reeling from backlash to the riots, as well as electoral authorities' decision last June to bar Bolsonaro from running for office for eight years over his attacks on the credibility of the election system.

But analysts say deep-running fissures remain.

The riots "strengthened belief in democracy" in Brazil, whose young constitution only dates to the end of the 1964-1985 military dictatorship, said political scientist Geraldo Monteiro, of Rio de Janeiro State University. "But people are still polarised," he said. Of the 2,170 arrested over the riots, 30 have been convicted so far, on charges including armed criminal conspiracy, violent uprising against the rule of law and an attempted coup, with sentences of up to 17 years.

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A terrible phone call and what came next



David French

THE REASON FOR OUR REVIVAL IS ROOTED IN A PROFOUND TRUTH ELEGANTLY CAPTURED BY AN OLD SWEDISH PROVERB: "SHARED JOY IS DOUBLE JOY. SHARED SORROW IS HALF SORROW."

Early Nov. 10, my phone rang with terrible news: My wife, Nancy, has a highly aggressive form of breast cancer.

Even as I type these words, I know there are countless readers who know the exact sensation. Either they've received a similar diagnosis or they love someone who has. And each of those readers knows the surreal feeling of having your life change instantly. Nancy and I lived in one reality before the phone call and another reality afterward.

It's like the difference between peace and war. In peacetime, you can dream and plan. True joy may be elusive, but it seems like an attainable goal. In wartime, you dig deep. You fight. And the goal is not joy but survival itself. Peace has its many challenges, but war is emotionally shattering. The fight is so very hard and can feel unending.

Imagine how much harder that fight, any fight, would be if you fought it alone.

But ever since the deep darkness of that November phone call, Nancy and I have experienced countless bursts of light shining through, each one coming through the love and care from other people. My son immediately decided to give up his final quarter of in-person college and take his last classes online, so that he could move across the country back home to help his mom. Our church small group immediately started organising meals. My friends from college raked our leaves so that I could sit with Nancy in chemotherapy. My fantasy baseball league collected funds for wigs.

And with each act of kindness and expression of concern — including from colleagues here at The New York Times, who've demonstrated remarkable care and compassion — the darkness recedes further. Nothing is easy, and the fear is still real. But there is no comparison between the state of our hearts now and their state when we first received Nancy's grim news.

The reason for our revival is rooted in a profound truth elegantly captured by an old Swedish proverb: "Shared joy is double joy. Shared sorrow is half sorrow." I've heard that proverb many times. It was the refrain of a men's prayer group that I belonged to for many years. But I had never felt its



truth so powerfully until November, when our sorrow was so deep and the love of our friends so profound.

Last week, I watched my colleagues Adam Westbrook and Emily Holzknecht's incredibly moving video essay, "The Life Span of Loneliness." In it, person after person, generation after generation, describes the crushing burden of feeling utterly alone, sometimes even when they're married or have good friends. A cancer survivor describes feeling abandoned. Middle-aged voices explain they don't want to be a "burden" on others.

If you follow my writing, you know that I'm deeply concerned with the subject of friendship. As Surgeon General Vivek Murthy wrote in April, we are a "lonely nation." Men and women have fewer friendships. An alarming percentage of Americans report having no close friends at all.

There is no national five-point plan for friendship. It's not a problem susceptible to political or cultural fixes from the top down. Instead, it's a problem that demands individual action motivated by individual conviction, perhaps led by the very people who know what it means to feel the double joy and half sorrow that sharing makes possible. Those of us who have been blessed in this way must bless others in return.

The key word in the Swedish proverb is "shared." You don't just tell me the reason for your sorrow

or joy, and I don't just listen. The word "shared" implies participation. When you share a meal, you are not merely one of two people eating. You are eating together. And so it should be with sorrow and joy. In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul tells believers to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep."

At their heart, both the Swedish proverb and the verse from Romans are concretely describing what it means to be empathetic. As Brené Brown has memorably explained: "Empathy is a choice, and it's a vulnerable choice. Because in order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling." In other words, if you're really sharing sorrow, you're feeling it as well, and as you feel what your friend feels, you lighten your friend's load. Brown continues: "If I share something with you that's very difficult, I'd rather you say, 'I don't even know what to say right now. I'm just so glad you told me.' Because the truth is, rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection." Those of us who've experienced that connection and love should feel an urgent necessity to extend it to others. In our family, we have a rule: If we see someone alone and under duress, we try to help. No matter where we are. Nancy created this family rule, and no one in our family models it better than she does. — **The New York Times**

Go with the flow to evolve...

Lakshmi Kothaneth
Are you thinking of self-development?
Another group of people are thinking of space development.

It is not just us who have been looking at skies. Generations before us have been focusing on the sky for navigation to keep up with the sea routes.

But now we are thinking of space as space — the huge mysterious area not to terraform other planets, but for economic diversification as a potential for technology is tremendous.

But no matter how far we go we still need to know how we work internally.

According to experts there are three components of self-development — physical, mental and emotional.

Let us reflect on that a bit. As per the explanation physical development looks at health and energy, mental development focuses on developing intelligence, knowledge and skills and emotional development deals with managing emotional health and relationships.

We spent years on mental development with grading, assessment and evaluation but we hardly keep up with physical development unless there is a physical training class in school, and when it comes to emotional development there is hardly any effort spent on the area.

We are born with certain qualities, and then we acquire some more as we grow with life's experiences. Some of which are positive and others could be negative.

We carry these qualities and if we are not corrected or do not have an inclination to overcome these obstacles then we carry the baggage to college, to workplace and then of course to family. And probably just like magnets we would attract similar patterns. The baggage gets heavier and soon unbearable.

The question is why don't we give equal importance to physical and



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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

WE ARE BORN WITH CERTAIN QUALITIES, AND THEN WE ACQUIRE SOME MORE AS WE GROW WITH LIFE'S EXPERIENCES

emotional development as much as mental development?

Today, however, we are beginning to realise their importance in health both physical and mental. If only we could have managed to bring in physical fitness routine, we could have avoided medications. And if we only knew how damaging suppressed emotions are to the body, we would have learnt to manage emotions earlier and saved relationships.

The stigma attached to seeking help for mental health steals away many opportunities from people who need it. Modernisation made living easy but brought in physical ailments.

CONFLICTS
In Japan a 99-year-old person is successfully rescued from underneath the rubble after the earthquake, in Gaza children who have not seen real life succumb to bombardments due to the conflict.

So where do conflicts come from?

People are physically fit and mentally knowledgeable, but are not able to manage emotions, or else why would one want to inflict harm on others.

Why would one not be able to help others, to teach children from whom education has been snatched away, and to get them water to drink leave alone medicines. If one is caught up in the internal conflicts why is not one able to survive or seek help?

The self awareness is equally important and the ability to self analyse. But motivation sometimes might need lot more acceleration than we think because it is the task of moving out of a dwelling we are used to.

There are numerous ways of coming out of the sticky mud that we have created on our own with our thoughts even if it is circumstances. The most important or essential one at first would be movement. Notice how we have come back to physical development. Maybe it is time we really took charge of finding the balance by developing all three components (physical, mental and emotional) from a young age.

ANTI-KNIFE CRIME CAMPAIGN



British actor Idris Elba stands in front of a display of clothing representing individual victims as he highlights an anti-knife crime campaign, near the Houses of Parliament in London, Britain, on Monday. – Reuters

Biden brings ‘24 pitch to South Carolina as campaign scrutinised

US President Joe Biden takes his pitch for re-election to South Carolina, where Black voters helped propel him to the presidency, on Monday in a visit aimed at shoring up a critical constituency whose support has waned since he took office.

Biden's trip, to the Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, where an avowed white supremacist gunned down nine Black parishioners in 2015, comes as his campaign sharpens its attacks on Donald Trump, the former president who is the frontrunner for the Republican Party's 2024 nomination.

Last Friday, Biden portrayed Trump as a threat to democracy in a speech marking the third anniversary of the deadly attack on the US Capitol by Trump supporters hoping to overturn the Republican's 2020 election loss.

Recent polling has shown Trump beating Biden in swing states that will determine who wins the White House this year, and a Reuters/Ipsos poll in December showed a rematch would be close.

Biden's trip comes as some Democrats have raised questions about his re-election strategy in recent months. Some donors have been eager to hear Biden be more candid, or more



Jeff Mason
is a White House Correspondent for Reuters

BIDEN PORTRAYED TRUMP AS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY IN A SPEECH MARKING THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEADLY ATTACK ON THE US CAPITOL BY TRUMP SUPPORTERS

aggressively target Trump rather than focus on the economy.

Representative James Clyburn, a Democrat whose endorsement of Biden helped him win South Carolina in the 2020 primary, said on Sunday he was concerned about Biden's standing with Black voters and frustrated that Biden's record had not resonated.

"I have told him what my concerns are," Clyburn told CNN, referring to a meeting with the president. "I have no problem with the Biden administration and what it has done. My problem is that we have not been able to break through that MAGA wall in order to get to people exactly what this president has done."

MAGA refers to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. Polls show support for Biden by Black voters has softened. Former President Barack Obama, who is concerned about Trump's potential to win in 2024, discussed the campaign over lunch with Biden before the Christmas holiday, comparing his 2012 re-election apparatus with Biden's, according to a source familiar with the meeting.

Biden has kept his long-serving senior advisers at the

White House, while Obama dispatched two to his Chicago-based campaign headquarters. The Washington Post reported on Saturday that Obama has told allies that Biden's campaign needs to have the power to make decisions without White House clearance.

Obama won re-election in 2012 with 332 electoral votes compared to Republican Mitt Romney, who captured 206 electoral votes. Each state has an allotted number of electoral votes; a candidate must win 270 to prevail.

Biden's trip comes as Democrats have shifted their

primary calendar to put South Carolina first, leap-frogging Iowa's caucus and New Hampshire's traditional first-in-the-country primary vote.

South Carolina has not backed a Democrat for president since 1976, but Democrats believe the state's diverse population better reflects the party's voters.

The campaign is investing earlier than ever to reach voters of colour, rather than parachuting in closer to Election Day simply to drive turnout, one campaign adviser said.

Biden's visit to South Carolina follows a stop there on Saturday by Vice President Kamala Harris,

who urged an audience of mostly Black women church leaders, to "roll up" sleeves ahead of the election. Harris is the first Black Asian woman to serve as US vice president.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump downplayed his role in the siege of the US Capitol on the third anniversary of the attack, arguing that those prosecuted for storming the building should be freed.

Speaking at a campaign event in Clinton, Iowa with the first Republican nominating contest little more than a week away, Trump called those jailed in the wake of the January 6, 2021 attack "hostages" and said they had been mistreated by the Biden administration.

"They've suffered enough," Trump said. "I call them hostages. Some people call them prisoners."

Speaking to more than a thousand supporters in a school gymnasium, Trump repeated his unfounded claims that the 2020 election was fraudulent and cast himself as a victim of political persecution.

"I got indicted because I challenged the crooked election," Trump told the crowd.



US President Joe Biden salutes while boarding Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland, US. – Reuters

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The Oman delegation arrives at the Qatar Airport.

OMAN ALL SET FOR ASIAN CUP IN QATAR



The Oman national team in Muscat Airport



Sayyid Ammar al Busaidy receives the Oman delegation in Qatar airport.



Oman team head coach Branko Ivankovic



The Oman team arrives in Qatar.

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Oman national football team has arrived in the Qatari capital of Doha on Monday to take part in the 18th edition of the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023. The continental tournament, organised by the Asian Football Confederation, is being held every four years.

Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Qatar, received Oman delegation at the Qatar airport.

The championship was scheduled to be held in China but due to the coronavirus pandemic it was moved

to Qatar to be held from January 12 to February 10.

As many as 24 teams will participate in the Asian Cup, which were divided into 6 groups, 4 teams in each group. The topper and second-placed teams from each group will qualify directly for the Round 16, and best four third-placed teams will join them.

The draw placed Oman team in Group 6 alongside Saudi Arabia, the three-time Asian Cup champions, Thailand and Kyrgyzstan.

The Red Warriors prepare for the first appearance against Saudi Arabia team on January 16 at Khalifa International Stadium, the oldest stadium in Qatar,

opened in 1976 and can accommodate 46,000 spectators.

Oman will face a confident Southeast Asian team Thailand on January 21 at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium before concluding their group matches against Kyrgyzstan on January 25 in the same venue.

The national team's ambitions have rose after the last competition against the UAE and China at the end of the preparation camp in Abu Dhabi.

According to the Oman coach plan, the team will train in two periods, the morning session at 11 am and the evening session at 7 pm at the Qatar University Stadium.

Oman qualified for the AFC Asian Cup for the fifth time in their history, and consecutively for three editions. The most notable achievement was surpassing the group stage for the first time in the UAE edition in 2019, but they lost to Iran 2-0 in the last 16.

Fayez al Rushaidi, Oman goalkeeper is the oldest player in the team, born in 1988, followed by Harib al Saadi in 1990, and Ali al Busaidy in 1991. Meanwhile Dhofar Club striker Abdullah al Mishrafi is the youngest player, born in 2001, Arshad al Alawi in 2000 and Musab al Maamari in 2000.

The Omani players who played the most international matches are Harib

al Saadi who played 79 matches, Ali al Busaidy (77 matches) and Fayez al Rushaidi with 76 matches.

For the first time, Oman national team's roster will be devoid of the name of Ahmed Kanu, who participated in their previous editions, and played in 13 matches, scoring one goal.

Oman had won the regional tournament Gulf Cup twice in their most prominent achievement. They emerged Gulf champions in the 19th edition in Muscat (2009) after beating Saudi Arabia in the final. The Red Warriors won their second title when they edged UAE in penalties in the final of the 23rd edition in Kuwait (2017-18).

Oman national cycling championship on Jan 19, 20

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Oman Cycling Association will hold its National Cycling Championship on January 19 and 20.

The first race on January 19 will be an Individual Time Trial at Wadi Al Abyadh for 24 km while the second race on January 20 will be a road race for 116 km in Qurayat, according to the Oman Cycling Association (OCA).

The OCA's signature OCA League Championship is nearing its completion by concluding the fifth race recently. There are only two more races to go in the OCA League.

Only Omanis can compete in the National Cycling Championship that will see the bulk of local riders in action at OCA League try their luck in the two-day race.

OCA League red-jersey holder Mohammed al Wahibi of Cycle KOM, Salalah Club's Mundher al Hasani and Abdulrahman al

Yaqoobi are some Omani riders who are in hot form ahead of the national championship.

Also in the reckoning are Oman Royal Army cyclists Said al Rahbi and Husam al Rawahi along with Salalah Club's Mazin al Riyami and Bahla Club's Saud al Mandhari.

OCA Chairman Saif al Rashidi said the two-day championship would be keenly fought.

"There are a lot of young Omanis competing in the OCA League. This championship will give them a good opportunity to showcase their skills," Saif said.

"We at the Oman Cycling Association are thrilled with the massive local participation in the OCA League and expect the same in the national championship as well," the OCA chairman added.

There will be individual trophies for Individual Time Trial and road races for the top-placed cyclists while team prizes will also be given for the road race, the OCA sources said.



German football icon Beckenbauer dies at 78



BERLIN: German football icon Franz Beckenbauer, who won the World Cup as a captain and as a coach, has died at age 78, his family said on Monday.

Known as Der Kaiser (The Emperor), Beckenbauer redefined the sweeper position in the 1960s and 1970s with his elegant style and leadership.

Apart from his national team success, he earned countless honours with his long-time club Bayern Munich, including three straight European Cups and the Intercontinental Cup.

"It is with deep sadness that we inform you that my husband and our father Franz Beckenbauer passed away peacefully yesterday, Sunday, surrounded by his family," the family announced.

Beckenbauer played alongside Brazil legend Pele at New York Cosmos, spent two years back in West Germany at SV Hamburg before ending his glittering playing career after another short stint at Cosmos in 1983.

A year later he became national team coach, and, after losing the 1986 World Cup final to Diego Maradona's Argentina, lifted the World Cup in 1990 with victory against the South Americans.

Beckenbauer was Bayern coach briefly in the 1990s, club president 1994-2009, and chief organiser of the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

However, dubious payments in connection with the tournament, which have never been fully cleared up, tainted his image in his later years.

He disappeared more and more from the public eye, also due to illnesses.

A slap in the face decided his and Bayern's fate — the Munich-born Beckenbauer had initially planned to join city rivals 1860 Munich at a young age.

But after being hit by 1860 player Gerhard Konig during a match when he was 13, he joined Bayern instead in 1959 and made his first-team debut aged 18 in 1964, Bayern's final year to date in the second division.

Ten years later, in 1974, he helped Bayern win a fourth Bundesliga title with him in the team, a first European Cup title against Atletico Madrid, and captained West Germany to World Cup glory against the Netherlands in his Munich home stadium. They had also won the Euros two years earlier.

He was part of Bayern's first golden generation with striker Gerd Müller, winger Uli Hoene, defender Paul Breitner and goalkeeper Sepp Maier.

Beckenbauer won 103 caps, scoring 14 goals, between 1965 and 1977, and in the Bundesliga had 424 appearances with 44 goals.

He was as present off the pitch as on it, starring in soup commercials in the early 1970s and other ads in his later days — plus having a column in the Bild tabloid for many years.

The once passionate golfer was married three times and had five children. One of them, Stephan, was also a professional footballer who died in 2015. — **dpa**

Moraes grabs first Dakar win

AL DUWADIMI, Saudi Arabia: Lucas Moraes grabbed his first Dakar stage victory on Monday as Yazeed al Rajhi finished third to take the overall lead in the car class.

In the bikes, Kevin Benavides claimed victories as a host of his rivals were penalised for speeding and two-time winner Sam Sunderland was knocked out of the race by mechanical problem ended his interest in this year's edition, organisers said.

Moraes, a Brazilian Toyota driver won the 438km third stage by just nine seconds from Swede Mattias Ekstrom in an Audi.

Saudi Arabian Al Rajhi (Toyota) was third at 1 minute 9 seconds but even he got lost.

"Navigating was pretty hard today," he said. "We had to backtrack several times. But we made it here."

Moraes thanked his co-driver Armand Monleon for guiding him through the dunes.

"I have to give it up to Armand because the navigation was very tricky and he was on point on everything," said Moraes who had time to help Toyota team-mate Seth Quintero.

"We had a good pace and didn't have any punctures. We even stopped to help Seth - we gave our spare wheel to him so he could finish as well. It was a perfect day."

Quintero, 21, came in 17th on the day and the American now sits 11th in the provisional rankings 27min 18sec behind leader Al Rajhi who is 29 seconds ahead of Carlos Sainz (Audi).

The Spaniard finished sixth on stage 3, 3min 29sec behind Moraes.

Frenchman Sebastien Loeb (Prodrive), who started the day in third, suffered three punctures on the rocky roads from Al Duwadimi to Al Samiya.



Toyota Gazoo Racing's Brazilian driver Lucas Moraes and his Spanish co-driver Armand Monleon compete during Stage 3 of the Dakar Rally 2024, between Al Duwadimi and Al Salamiya, Saudi Arabia. — **AFP**



Red Bull KTM Factory's Kevin Benavides in action during stage 3. — **Reuters**

Loeb said he ran out of spare tyres as he lost almost 24 minutes and dropped to ninth.

"The third came with 100 kilometres to go," he said.

"After the third one we had to repair. We lost a lot of time repairing the tyre and inflating it again.

"Then we had to stop every 20 kilometres because it was losing air.

"Sometimes you have punctures driving slowly, sometimes you go fast and you have no punctures. It's difficult to understand really."

BENAVIDES PROMOTED

Argentine Benavides on a KTM was third across the finish line but was promoted to first after Chile's Pablo Quintanilla (Honda) and second-placed Spaniard Joan

Barreda (Honda) were among riders caught speeding.

Quintanilla was hit with a six-minute penalty

Botswana's Ross Branch (Hero), winner on Saturday, retained first place overall, ahead of Sunday's winner Chilean Ignacio Cornejo (Honda).

Sunderland, who won the race in 2017 and 2022, saw his dreams of a third crown go up in smoke as a mechanical problem ended his race. The 34-year-old Briton, who was riding for the Spanish team GasGas, came to a halt after just 11 kilometres.

Sixth overall after Sunday's second stage, Sunderland gave up after waiting for more than three hours hoping a vehicle would bring him oil.

On Tuesday, the terrain will be rolling for Stage 4, but navigation promises to be tricky on a long drive — 631km with 299km of special stages — between Al Salamiya and Al Hofuf. The race ends on January 19. — **AFP**

Al Bashayer dominate Ahli Sidab to enter final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

Al Bashayer clinched a 85-35 victory against Ahli Sidab in the final round match of Oman Basketball League 2023-24 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Basher on Sunday.

With this triumph, Al Bashayer advance to the decisive match against Seeb, as both teams are tied with 25 points each.

The match was a real opportunity for Al Bashayer to showcase their strength before facing Seeb. The team delivered an impressive performance in all quarters, with Beit Bakheet scoring four consecutive points. Then Ahli Sidab's Sami al Ghaillani responded with a three-pointer. The exchange of attacks continued, with Al Bashayer adding 10 points and Ahli Sidab scoring 5 points. The first quarter ended with Al Bashayer leading 14-8.

In the second quarter, Al Bashayer's Basam al Busaidi scored a three-pointer as Ahmed al Hasani replied with two points for Ahli Sidab.

Both teams continued their offensive attempts, and the first half concluded with Al Bashayer leading 41-16.

The third quarter witnessed ongoing attacks, with Al Bashayer widening the lead to 31 points at 49-18. The third quarter ended with Al Bashayer leading 63-23.

In the fourth quarter, Ahli Sidab's Amir al Hadidi scored two



An Al Bashayer player makes a basket against Ahli Sidab during the Oman Basketball League final round match.

points, but Al Bashayer responded with four points to widen the gap to 67-25. The match concluded with Al Bashayer winning by 85-35.

International referee Issam al Siyabi officiated as the first referee, Rashed al Mashifri as the second referee and Thani al Khalasi as the third referee. On the table were Mahmoud al Ajmi, Munira al Namani, Sherifa al Zadjali, and international referee Fares al Khalasi as the technical observer for the match.

FINAL TODAY

An exciting confrontation is set for the final of the Oman

Basketball League between Seeb and Al Bashayer.

At 6 pm on Tuesday, basketball enthusiasts will turn their attention to the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex as the final match of the 2023-2024 season will unveil the champion of the Oman Basketball League between Seeb and Al Bashayer.

This showdown provides an opportunity for both teams to showcase outstanding performances and compete for a new title. Seeb, seeking their sixth title, are determined after their defeat in the previous season against Al Bashayer. National coach Kazem al Balushi is working

on an effective plan to exploit the players's skills, including American professional Bryce.

On the other hand, Al Bashayer aim to maintain the title and secure the championship for the fourth time. American coach Collier Wilton acknowledges the importance of the match and relies on his team's strength in organisation and balance between national and American players.

Oman Basketball Association Chairman Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi will attend the final, under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

Bank Muscat opens green sports field for Al Shabab Sports Team



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has recently inaugurated the lighting project for Al Shabab Sports team in Al Mudhaibi, Al Sharqiyah North under its CSR programme 'Green Sports'.

The event was hosted under the auspices of Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad al Harthy, Majlis Ash'shura Member, Ibra, with the presence of Badr bin Mohammed Al Hajri, Assistant Regional Manager - Al Sharqiyah North, Khalil bin Suleim al Habsi, Head of Al Shabab Sports team, and a number of invitees and team members.

On the inauguration ceremony, Badr al Hajri expressed his happiness about the successful execution of Al Shabab Sports Team's lighting project as part of the 'Green Sports' programme.

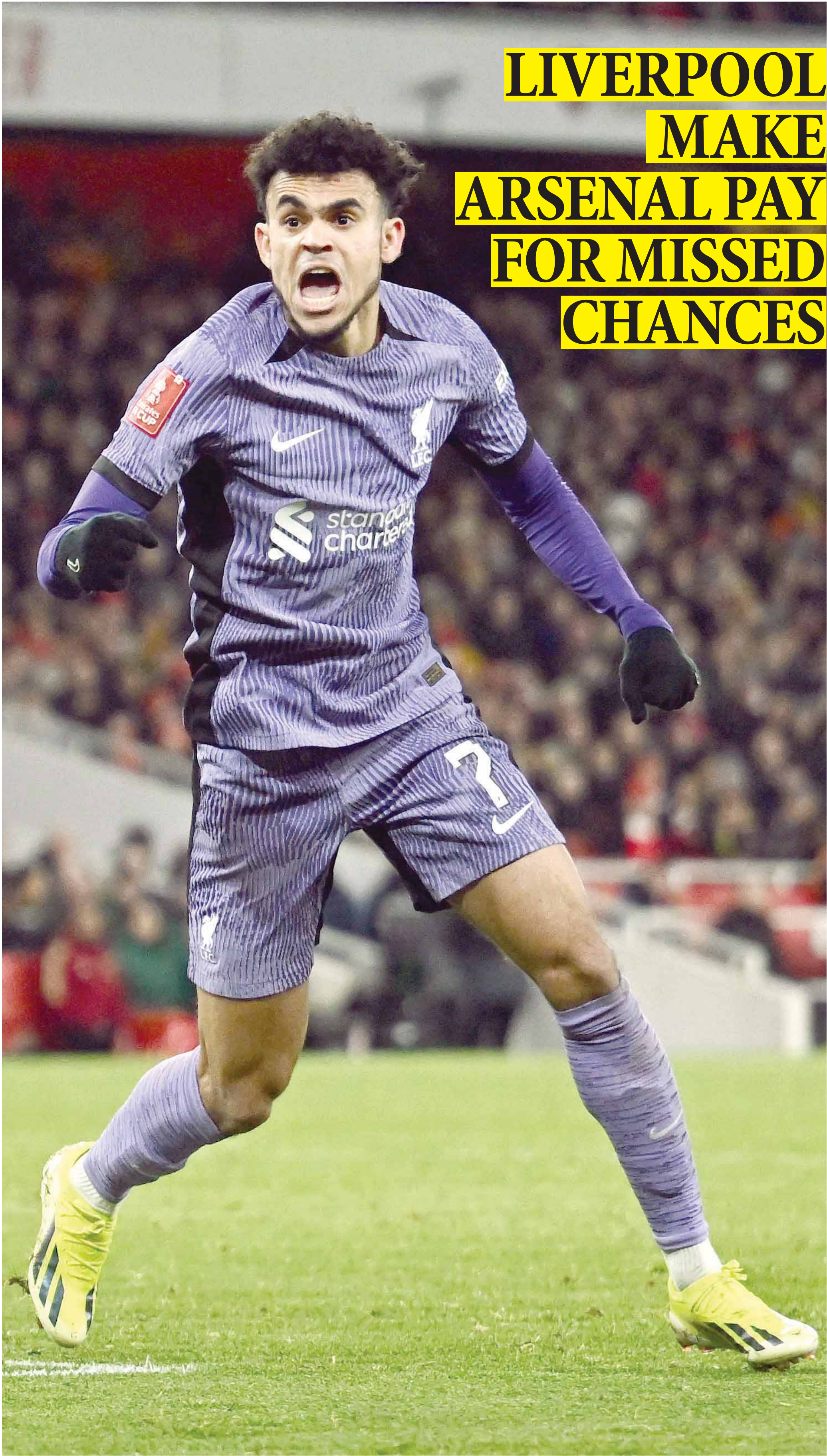
He congratulated Al Shabab team for the successful completion of the project which will contribute to the development of the main infrastructure of the team.

The field will also represent a suitable venue for the team to organise events in the evening and to organise different cultural and sports activities contributing to the enhancement of their sports

skills. Furthermore, a large segment of the Omani youth are keen to join the events related to the sports and social arenas. Bank Muscat will remain committed to serving the youth through its CSR programme 'Green Sports' to keep pace with the developments that contribute to the growth of the sports teams all over the Sultanate of Oman.

Khalil al Habsi said: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat for the continuous support to enhancing the 'Green Sports' programme. This programme represents a major social initiative for developing the youth's talents and sports teams in Oman. Therefore, the new lighting project of Al Shabab team was the dream of the Omani youth while it has now become a reality."

Bank Muscat has already announced the launch of the 13th edition of the Green Sports programme for 2024. All local sports teams interested in the programme may apply during the period spanning January 1 to 31, 2024. This year, the programme will support 20 sports teams from different governorates.



LIVERPOOL MAKE ARSENAL PAY FOR MISSED CHANCES

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 8

Having totally dominated the play, particularly in the first half, Arsenal went down by two late goals to Liverpool. It was a story of missed opportunities to score and Arsenal who have won the FA Cup on 14 occasions – more than any other team – were out of the competition as early as the third round.

Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta, who admits being short of a striker and that it's "unrealistic" to solve the problem, said: "At the moment it does not look realistic. What my job is, and what we have to do, is improve our players and try to get better results with the players we have.

"One thing is what we need and another is what we can do. What we need to do now is stick behind these players, train them and make sure they visualise something very different to what is happening now. They've done it (before). We're not going to reinvent the wheel, because they've done it."

He added: "It is very difficult, but if the team are getting hammered and not playing well and not deserving to win football matches, I'd be much more worried. I'm worried because I love winning and we have to win many more games. At the minute, that's the thing we have to change and probably what has to be reset. When my team play with courage and attitude against probably the best team in Europe right now (Liverpool) what can I do but stick by them and support them."

This was Arsenal's third successive defeat in a run of just one win in seven matches. It was a game they should have won comfortably if it wasn't for glaring missed chances. Martin Odegaard's powerful shot crashed against the bar in the 11th minute followed by his fine pass to Kai Havertz which the German mis-kicked. Then a fierce drive by Ben White was tipped over the bar.

Apart from Havertz's other missed chances, Bukayo Saka also wasted opportunities. The easiest was the shot he put over the bar from a chip by Havertz across the goal from the left.

Liverpool too were unlucky with Trent Alexander-Arnold hitting the bar and then in the second half seeing his fine pass to Darwin Nunez wasted as he shot narrowly wide. Another miss was by Diogo Jota who headed against the bar from a corner which resulted after the Arsenal goalkeeper made a brilliant save from Luis Diaz.

Liverpool had to wait till the 80th minute for the first goal and that too was an own-goal. Substitute Ryan Gravenberch was fouled by Odegaard and from the resulting free-kick Jakub Kiwior headed past his own keeper.

Arsenal launched a sustained attack for the equaliser but five minutes into added time Liverpool brought about a clinical finish for their second goal with Diaz driving high into the net from a pass by Jota.

Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp, said: "I'm super proud. It's a difficult draw (match at Arsenal). With all the things we had to consider, we scored the goals and brought the kids on (substitutes). We fought for 95 minutes."

Liverpool's Luis Diaz celebrates their first goal an own goal scored by Arsenal's Jakub Kiwior. – Reuter



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Oman Housing Bank’s Iskan programme to finance over 50,000 homes for Omanis

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 8

In line with the Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to accelerate the provision of subsidised housing finance for individuals on the waiting lists for housing allocations, Oman Housing Bank (OHB) launched the ‘Iskan’ programme on Monday, January 8, 2024, under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

The launch ceremony, held at Al Bustan Palace Hotel, was attended by numerous dignitaries, including the Chief Executive Officer, Chairman, and Members of the Board of Oman Housing Bank, as well as experts and professionals from the economic sector.

The Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik are aimed at standardising the criteria for finance applications on the waiting lists at both the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Oman Housing Bank.

They also set the fees for banking and administrative services related to financing, to facilitate the provision of funds to applicants on the waiting lists of the bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

Following the Royal Directives, OHB quickly adopted innovative digital technologies to streamline the application process and



Sultan al Habsi, Minister of Finance, with Moosa al Jadidi, CEO of OHB, and other dignitaries at the launch of the Iskan programme.

engage national talents in this initiative, which aims to serve the diverse regions of Oman.

Additionally, the bank has signed agreements with various local banks to finance housing applications, covering both conventional and Islamic banking services.

During the launch ceremony, Moosa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO of OHB, emphasised that the initiative is aimed at reducing the lengthy waiting times for eligible citizens on the waiting lists of both the bank and the Ministry of Housing & Urban Planning.

This comes particularly after the transfer of all applications from the ministry to the Oman Housing Bank for processing.

The programme will speed up the distribution of housing finance through the dedicated electronic platform ‘Iskan’. This platform allows citizens to submit their data and documents, know their turns, and choose their preferred bank for securing housing finance, in line with the criteria set by Oman Housing Bank.

Additionally, it outlines the eligibility criteria, the targeted income groups, and

the fees individuals must pay for the interest rate. OHB uploads the lists of eligible citizens to the ‘Iskan’ electronic platform according to priority.

As their turn nears, individuals receive an SMS alert with a direct link to the application process on the platform. This enables them to complete all necessary steps to obtain housing finance, including application submission, data entry, financial access, and evaluation of the whole process.

Electronic platform
The ‘Iskan’ electronic platform aims to significantly reduce

FOLLOWING THE ROYAL DIRECTIVES, OHB QUICKLY ADOPTED INNOVATIVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES TO STREAMLINE THE APPLICATION PROCESS AND ENGAGE NATIONAL TALENTS IN THIS INITIATIVE, WHICH AIMS TO SERVE THE DIVERSE REGIONS OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

waiting times from application to finance disbursement by utilising advanced digital technologies.

This enhances the platform’s ability to efficiently meet citizens’ needs. On the platform, any citizen can find comprehensive details about housing finance options.

The ‘Iskan’ programme, acting as a comprehensive umbrella, addresses the requirements of citizens eligible for housing finance through a thoughtful approach that ensures accessibility and inclusiveness.

The maximum finance amount provided by OHB is RO 60,000, which extends to RO 80,000 for citizens interested in purchasing housing units in Sultan Haitham City and the integrated city projects spearheaded by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The CEO of OHB emphasised the bank’s crucial role since its establishment and affirmed the leadership’s strong commitment to providing decent living standards for various societal segments.

TURN TO PAGE 15

US investigators retrieve 737 MAX jet panel



An investigator examines the fuselage plug area of Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 Boeing 737-9 MAX. – Reuters

WASHINGTON: US officials have recovered a panel that blew off an Alaska Airlines airliner triggering a partial grounding of Boeing’s 737 MAX 9 and sending shares in the planemaker tumbling on Monday.

A door plug tore off on Friday following takeoff from Portland, Oregon, en route to Ontario, California, depressurising the plane and forcing pilots to turn back.

The plane, with 171 passengers and six crew on board, landed safely. The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on Saturday ordered the temporary grounding of 171 Boeing MAX 9 jets installed with the same panel, which weighs about 60 pounds (27 kg) and covers an optional exit door.

It was recovered on Sunday by a Portland school teacher identified only as “Bob” in the Cedar Hills neighbourhood who found it in his backyard, US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Chair Jennifer Homendy said.

She said she was “very relieved” it had been found having called it a “key missing component” to determine why the accident occurred.

“Our structures team will want to look at everything on the door — all of the components on the door to see, to look at, witness marks, to look at any paint transfer, what shape the door was in when found. That can tell them a lot about what occurred,” she said.

The force from the loss of the panel was strong enough to blow open the cockpit door during flight, said Homendy, adding that it must have been a “terrifying event” to experience.

“They heard a bang,” Homendy said of the pilots, who were interviewed by investigators.

Homendy said the cockpit voice recorder did not capture any data because it had been overwritten.

She again called on regulators to mandate retrofitting existing planes with recorders that capture 25 hours of data, up from the two hours required in the US at present.

— Reuters

Vision to make the Sultanate of Oman a gateway for space applications: Al Maawali

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The 1st Middle East Space Conference began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre here yesterday, January 8, 2024, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

The event, which is co-organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and space sector consulting firm Euroconsult, was attended by over 400 participants from the regional and global space sector.

In his opening remarks, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, underscored the significance of the global space economy.

“Global reports indicate that



Dignitaries attending the opening of the 1st Middle East Space Conference in Muscat on Monday.

the global space sector’s economy is expected to reach around \$546 billion in 2022, with future projections of approximately \$800 billion in 2028,” he said.

The minister emphasised the role the space sector will play in expanding the country’s national

economy.

“The digital economy has been identified as a crucial component of the national economy, and this is reflected through the National Digital Economy Programme, with the space sector being one of its main pillars.”

“The idea of this conference is to translate the goals of the Omani space policy and executive programme, in line with its vision to make Oman a regional gateway for space applications that support economic diversification,” he stated.

Presenting a white paper on the Middle East space market, EuroConsult Affiliate Executive Adviser Steve Bochsinger shared that the Middle East space market is expected to accelerate over the next years as the region is becoming a global hotspot for space activities.

He noted that sector was expected to grow to \$57 billion by 2023.

The first day of the conference tackled space policy and industry in the MENA region, and discussed multiple topics including space financing, investment opportunities, and space agency models and strategies among many other topics.

The conference is also accompanied by a parallel exhibition showcasing over 25 local and global space companies.

Tethys Oil to increase operational activities on Block 56 onshore Oman

MUSCAT: Tethys Oil is increasing its operational activities on Block 56 onshore Oman. The drilling of the exploration well Menna-1 has been completed. The well logs indicate hydrocarbons in three separate zones and preparations for the testing operations are ongoing.

Testing operations will also resume on the previously drilled Sarha-3 well, on which a workover has been completed.

Both operations are an important part in the continued data compilation and preparation of a field development plan for Block 56.

The Menna-1 well was drilled vertically to a total depth of approximately 1,600 metres. The well logs indicate hydrocarbons in the Al Khldata, Karim and Birba formations. Further evaluation and testing of the well will be carried out in the coming weeks.

The Menna prospect is located some 30 kilometres south-west of the Al Jum'd discovery, with which it shares similar characteristics. The prospect is one of several identified prospects on the Eastern Flank trend, stretching alongside the border of Block 6's



The field development plan, once completed, will in turn serve as the basis for the commercialisation of the block.

productive Karim Small Fields.

In parallel to the drilling of Menna-1, Tethys Oil has completed a workover of the Sarha-3 well in preparations for the testing of the well's remaining zones, expected to be resumed in the coming weeks.

Sarha-3, drilled in 2022, is located on the Eastern Flank trend approximately seven kilometres to the north-east of Menna.

The well had a final depth of

1,200 metres and targeted the Gharif, Al Khldata and Karim formations. The well logs indicated hydrocarbons in all targets. The initial testing included the Karim formation, from which limited oil flows to surface were recorded. The resumed testing operations will focus on establishing oil flows to surface from the remaining two zones, Al Khldata and Gharif.

The aim of the current activities on Block 56 is to gain a further

understanding of the geological structures and the potential of the prospects and leads, as well as to establish the resource base of the Eastern Flank trend.

In total, the trend currently has more than a dozen prospects and leads that have not yet matured into prospects.

A full prospect and lead inventory is expected to be finalised in the first quarter of 2024.

Tethys Oil will use the collected data in the company's ongoing process to establish a field development plan for Block 56.

The field development plan, once completed, will in turn serve as the basis for the commercialisation of the block.

"We are very pleased to have safely completed the exploration drilling on the Menna prospect and that the well encountered oil in all three zones.

We are now focusing on the testing of Menna-1 and Sarha-3 and are looking forward with anticipation to share further news on the block's development in the coming months," says Magnus Nordin, Managing Director of Tethys Oil.



The opening ceremony was attended by esteemed dignitaries, officials, and members of the community and BankDhofar's executive management members.

BankDhofar inaugurates new branch at SQU

MUSCAT: Under the auspices of HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, BankDhofar proudly announced the opening of its latest branch in Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). This new branch is set to serve the financial needs of the community, offering a wide range of banking services and innovative solutions.

The opening ceremony was attended by esteemed dignitaries, officials, and members of the community and BankDhofar's executive management members.

The new branch Sultan Qaboos University aims to provide convenient, modern banking facilities with personalised services available to every customer.

With the inauguration of this branch, BankDhofar reinforces its commitment to supporting the growth and development of the local economy, while catering to the evolving needs of customers across Oman in order to activate the principle of financial inclusion, which is one of the bank's important strategies.

The design of the new branch is in line with the latest developments of the bank to achieve the highest levels of service excellence for its customers, including personal banking, corporate banking,

trade finance, investments, and more. With a team of qualified professionals, the branch will assist customers with their financial needs, offering tailored solutions to meet their requirements effectively.

BankDhofar continues to play a pivotal role in driving the economic development of Oman in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The bank's extensive network of branches, ATMs, and self-service machines is designed to provide convenience and accessibility to its customers across the country and remains committed to leveraging innovative technologies to enhance the customer experience.

Over the last 18 months, BankDhofar's branch network has expanded from 65 to more than 110 branches, ensuring that its comprehensive range of financial services is now accessible to more communities bringing banking closer to its customers across the country.

Simultaneously, the bank has invested significantly in enhancing its digital channels, providing customers with a seamless and modern banking experience with more than 310 ATMs, CDMs, FFM's and MFK's.

The increased network is located, in strategic locations across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, including major cities and towns in the capital and interior regions.

Ahli Islamic signs landmark MoU with AAOIFI

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to support the Islamic banking industry, ahli Islamic, recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI).

The primary goal is to reinforce collaboration in capacity building within ahli Islamic and foster the growth of the Islamic finance sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The signing ceremony occurred concurrently with the AAOIFI-IsDB 18th Annual Islamic Banking and Finance Conference.

The signing occurred on the second day of the conference, graced by Shaikh Ebrahim bin Khalifa al Khalifa, Chairman of AAOIFI's Board of Trustees, alongside members of ahli Islamic's Shari'ah Supervisory Board.

Yousuf al Rawahi, DGM - Head of ahli Islamic, signed the MoU, solidifying the commitment to

advancing Islamic banking in Oman. This unique MoU aims to synergise the expertise of ahli Islamic and AAOIFI, by way of collaboration that involves a series of technical and professional activities intended to fortify the development of Islamic banking and subsequently, the economy.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Dr Mohammed bin Taher al Ibrahim, Chairman of Shari'ah Supervisory Board at ahli Islamic, said, "The Islamic finance industry greatly values the role of AAOIFI in developing and progressing the standards of global Islamic finance.

It acknowledges the contributions made towards the professional development of Islamic finance.

This MoU reflects ahli Islamic's commitment to collaborate with AAOIFI within their respective domains for the mutual benefit of both institutions and their



The goal is to reinforce collaboration in capacity building within ahli Islamic and foster the growth of the Islamic finance sector in Oman.

stakeholders." Yousuf al Rawahi, AGM - Head of ahli Islamic, views the MoU signing as a significant milestone for the Bank. He said, "We are delighted to enter this noteworthy partnership

with AAOIFI. The advancement of professional capabilities and the expansion of Islamic banking in Oman are crucial in our current landscape.

NBO and PayMate partner to offer B2B payment solutions

MUSCAT: In a significant move towards modernising business-to-business (B2B) payment processes, PayMate India SPC, a leading B2B digital payments company, has signed a Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the National Bank of Oman (NBO) to digitise, automate, and streamline B2B payments using Visa Business Credit Cards.

By leveraging PayMate's advanced B2B payment automation solutions, NBO offers its corporate and SME clients the ability to utilise their Visa Business Credit Cards for making supplier payments.

This eliminates the need for suppliers to have a dedicated payment system, streamlining the process by transferring funds directly into their bank accounts through the NBO Visa Business Credit Card.

Commenting on this strategic partnership, Maha Saud al Raisi,



Assistant General Manager Retail Products at National Bank of Oman, said: "We are excited to empower local businesses with more flexibility and efficiency, making transactions smoother and easier for them.

Our partnership with PayMate ensures a safe transaction environment, providing detailed reports, and clear cash flow visibility.

With a suite of benefits such as travel insurance, exclusive discounts, and 24/7 concierge service, we aim to provide unparalleled support for both business and leisure needs.

NBO remains committed to

providing innovative solutions that drive financial efficiency and business success."

The Visa Business Signature Card empowers clients to maximise their already existing credit limits, allowing them to make supplier payouts ahead of the due date without depleting their cash reserves.

Furthermore, clients gain the flexibility to extend the time they take to settle their payables, utilising the funds for strategic business growth.

Ashwin Shenoy, Vice President & Business Head, CEMEA, at PayMate, said: "We, at PayMate, are excited to announce our partnership with the National Bank of Oman to offer B2B payment solutions to corporate and SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman.

Together, we will enable customers to use their bank-issued Visa business credit cards for B2B payables and receivables.

Ooredoo reveals first Manzili winners

MUSCAT: The first winners of Ooredoo's Mega Home Internet Prize Draw have been announced. Up for grabs were free Home Internet subscriptions for three months, six months, nine months and for life, along with Smart TVs, Mesh WiFi devices and PlayStation 5 consoles.

Congratulations to the lucky winners, but stay tuned, because the next draw will be held on 8 February, where more Home Internet subscriptions, Smart TVs, Mesh Devices and PlayStation 5 consoles will be given away.

The grand prize draw will take place on March 7, where the winner of a brand new luxury apartment will be revealed, so that's definitely one not to miss out on.

Want to be in with a chance of winning a home? Then new or existing customers can simply subscribe or upgrade to any new 5G or Fibre Home Internet connection for RO 28 per month and above, and you'll be automatically entered into the prize draw.

Upgrade your world now to Ooredoo's nationwide 5G



network and choose one of the great value 5G or Fibre Home Internet packages.

Enjoy high speed internet, uninterrupted connections, smooth streaming and reliable gameplay.

Ooredoo also offers complimentary access to OSN+ and STARZPLAY on selected plans meaning whichever Home Internet plan you choose, you

will experience fast, reliable speeds and great value for a truly exceptional experience.

Find out more at any Ooredoo store across Oman, the Ooredoo website or through the award-winning Ooredoo App.

To learn more about the Home Internet raffle draw, including prizes and terms and conditions, please visit <https://shop.ooredoo.om/home-broadband/>.



In brief

■ RIYADH



OIL SLIDES AS SAUDI PRICE CUTS COUNTER MIDDLE EAST WORRIES

Oil prices fell by more than 2% on Monday on sharp price cuts by top exporter Saudi Arabia and a rise in Opec output, offsetting supply concerns generated by escalating geopolitical tension in the Middle East.

Brent crude slid 2.2%, or \$1.74, to \$76.82 barrel by 10:24 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures shed 2.3%, or \$1.73, to \$71.83

Both contracts climbed more than 2% in the first week of 2024 on intensifying geopolitical risk in the Middle East after attacks by Yemeni militants on ships in the Red Sea. — **Reuters**

■ LONDON



UK LAGGING BEHIND G7 RIVALS IN HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS

The United Kingdom (UK) is the only one of the G7 group of countries where household budgets have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels, new research suggests.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) said its study indicated that families would be £750 (\$954) a year better off if real disposable income had grown in line with other leading economies.

Real household disposable incomes in the UK were 1.2% lower in the second quarter of 2023 than at the end of 2019, said the union organisation. Over the same period they grew by 3.5%, on average, across the G7. — **dpa**

■ NEW YORK



BOEING SHARES FALL PRE-MARKET AFTER PLANE DOOR INCIDENT

Shares in Boeing fell in pre-market trading on Monday after a door panel blew out of one of the US aircraft maker's planes mid-flight, prompting several airlines to ground similar models.

The company's stock price was down more than eight per cent at around \$228 a few hours before the New York stock Exchange was due to open. Boeing had closed on Friday up 1.66 per cent at \$249.

US authorities are investigating Friday's incident in which a door plug fell off a Boeing 737 MAX 9 aircraft operated by Alaska Airlines over the northwestern state of Oregon. — **Reuters**

Middle East space sector poised for major surge, reaching \$75 billion by 2032

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Middle East's space ecosystem is on the brink of an unprecedented transformation, with a comprehensive analysis predicting phenomenal growth and a reshaping of the global space narrative. Euroconsult's latest white paper, titled "Beyond the Stars: The Middle East's Space Ecosystem on the Move," unveils a remarkable surge in the region's space sector, projecting a staggering market value of \$75 billion by 2032.

The Middle East has embarked on a remarkable journey, driven by economic diversification, strategic vision, and technological innovation.

Speaking at the first Middle East Space Summit in Muscat, Steve Boehinger, Affiliate Executive Advisor at Euroconsult, said the region's ascent within the global space sector is unparalleled. This growth is spurred by a convergence of factors, including a dynamic market, disruptive innovations, and evolving business models.

The global space economy is experiencing profound shifts, fueled by new supply and demand drivers. The white paper reveals that the value of the global space economy soared from \$328 billion in 2017 to a projected \$509 billion in 2023. By 2032, it is estimated to reach a remarkable \$822 billion.

This exponential growth underscores the changing dynamics and increasing importance of the space industry



Steve Boehinger, Affiliate Executive Advisor at Euroconsult, speaks during the first Middle East Space Summit in Muscat.

worldwide.

In this evolving space arena, a new balance of power is emerging.

The white paper sheds light on government space expenditure in various countries. In 2023, the United States tops the list with \$73,200 million, followed by China with \$14,152 million, and Russia with \$3,408 million, among others.

In the Middle East, countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia are making significant strides, with investments in space reaching \$342 million and \$330 million, respectively, in 2023.

Middle East countries are actively redefining their approach to international space relations,

aiming to secure a certain form of non-dependence through diverse alliances. Government space expenditure in the region is anticipated to grow from \$1 billion in 2013 to \$1.4 billion in 2023 and reach \$2.7 billion by 2032, reflecting a remarkable 92 per cent growth.

The Middle East's space economy is experiencing a significant surge, as evidenced by the rapid growth it has witnessed in the past ten years.

Its value has tripled during this period, reaching an estimated worth of \$25 billion in 2023.

This upward trend is expected to persist over the next decade, with projections indicating that

it will expand further to reach a value of \$75 billion by 2032.

Driving this growth are priority domains of space investments in the Middle East. While satellite applications dominated investments in 2018, accounting for 78 per cent, science, exploration, and access to space garnered 22 per cent.

By 2032, satellite applications are projected to constitute 67 per cent of investments, with the remaining 33 per cent dedicated to science, exploration, and access to space.

The region's space market is also rapidly expanding, with tremendous potential for the coming years. Valued at \$9 billion

THE REGION'S SPACE MARKET IS ALSO RAPIDLY EXPANDING, WITH TREMENDOUS POTENTIAL FOR THE COMING YEARS. VALUED AT \$9 BILLION IN 2015, IT REACHED \$13 BILLION BY 2020, FORECASTED TO REACH \$29 BILLION BY 2025 AND AN IMPRESSIVE \$57 BILLION BY 2030, REPRESENTING A SUBSTANTIAL SHARE OF THE GLOBAL MARKET

in 2015, it reached \$13 billion by 2020, forecasted to reach \$29 billion by 2025 and an impressive \$57 billion by 2030, representing a substantial share of the global market.

By 2030, the Middle East is expected to hold 7.5 per cent of the global market share, up from 3.5 per cent in 2015.

However, the Middle East faces certain challenges on its path to becoming a space powerhouse. Stakeholders highlight issues such as the availability of skilled labour, entrepreneurship, regulation, governance, infrastructure, government commitment, regional cooperation, and private capital as key hurdles that need to be overcome.

Efforts are already underway to address these challenges. Countries in the region are focusing on attracting and retaining skilled talent, striving to comply with international standards for regulation and governance, and fostering an environment that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation.

OHB's Iskan programme to finance over 50,000 homes for Omanis

FROM PAGE 13

From its inception in 1977 until the end of 2022, OHB has extended over RO 1.5 billion in subsidised housing finance. This significant figure is supported by financial results showing a substantial increase in the housing finance portfolio.

Al Jadidi highlighted that challenges have prompted the bank to develop innovative finance solutions. The bank received a total of 61,000 applications, including over 49,000 transferred from the Ministry of Housing & Urban Planning and more than 11,000 originally on the bank's list.

Additionally, the CEO emphasised the importance of providing flexible services and reducing both the waiting lists and the time to obtain housing finance. This is particularly crucial, considering the government's commitment to ensuring a decent life for every Omani citizen.

OHB, as an extension of the government, plays a pivotal role in delivering direct services to citizens. "We must offer services and products that align with the government's support for citizens eligible for housing finances," he said.

About the strategic goals of the 'Iskan' programme, Al Jadidi outlined its primary objectives as fostering social welfare and ensuring a stable and sustainable life for all. The programme aims

to launch a comprehensive housing initiative, planning to secure finance for more than 50,000 housing units over five years.

The goal seeks to bring the urban development strategy to life, encompassing all governorates and sustainable cities. A key target is to significantly reduce waiting times from 15 years to less than six months within these five years.

The programme is also designed to contribute to economic diversification through its housing finance initiatives. During the programme's launch, more than 60,000 citizens who had applied for housing finance were sent SMS alerts.

These individuals were selected based on the priority of their application submissions.

Moreover, the plan is to process more than 900 applications each month to initiate the finance operations in a new and innovative manner. These citizens were chosen according to the date of their application submissions. Text messages will also be successively sent to other citizens, based on their application priority.

Developmental Goals

Al Jadidi affirmed that the 'Iskan' programme will significantly improve the quality of life for the Omani population. By easing access to affordable housing finance, the programme aims to improve livelihoods,

spur urban development, and stimulate the Sultanate of Oman's economic landscape.

It is designed to alleviate the financial burden on citizens, thus facilitating their pursuit of housing opportunities. The programme will also strengthen the real estate and construction sectors, along with related businesses, by providing cash flows.

This influx of funds is expected to stimulate the entire housing sector and its associated industries. In adherence to the highest standards of transparency in its financing operations, OHB has integrated a dedicated electronic platform within its website, Iskan.oh.co.om.

By accessing this platform, citizens can find comprehensive information about the programme, including details on the application process, the maximum finance limit, terms and conditions, and eligibility criteria.

This integration is designed to facilitate and simplify access to information for all users.

Before launching the 'Iskan' programme, OHB established collaborations with partner banks within the programme. In coordination with various local banks, OHB's human capital division conducted comprehensive training for staff across branches, the call centre, and customer service departments.



A man stands near a screen showing news footage of Chinese President Xi Jinping at the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) building on the Financial Street in Beijing. — **Reuters**

China regulators lift stock net-selling ban for mutual funds

SHANGHAI: China's securities regulator is allowing mutual fund managers to sell more shares than they buy each day, three sources said, removing a ban introduced late last year aimed at propping up a flagging stock market.

The China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) late last year barred major mutual fund companies from selling shares on a net basis on any day, answering top leadership calls to stabilise a market that was among the world's worst performers.

One source directly aware of the change suspected the policy shift was partly due to growing redemption pressures on funds.

"If you net sold stocks at the end of last year, you would get

calls from regulators," the source said, adding he received no such calls this year.

It's understandable, as "if you cannot net sell stocks, you don't have the money to repay redeeming investors."

Such so-called window guidance has disappeared in recent days, two sources with direct knowledge of the issue said.

"The net selling restriction here has been removed. We can now net sell stocks," said one of the people.

China's blue-chip CSI300 Index slumped 11 per cent last year amid a faltering post-Covid economic recovery, a deepening property crisis, and geopolitical tensions. — **Reuters**

Setting an effective system that makes goals actually work

Last week, my article revolved around why shouldn't one depend only on New Year's Eve for their new resolutions, and plans. This week, my article focuses on an effective system that one can follow in order to ensure their goals actually work, both at personal and professional level. Yet first, let me illustrate a typical challenge that majority of the people encounter, including myself at some point of my life, where goals remained unfulfilled.

You have lot of ideas, aspirations, goals and plans set for the year, yet you don't seem to find the time, motivation and the urge to achieve them.

Does this sound familiar, to you, a friend, co-worker or a family member? You or they are



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is an award-winning technology expert & renowned motivational speaker

CLEARLY DEFINE YOUR INTENTIONS AS A FORM OF GOALS, MAKING IT SPECIFIC, ACHIEVABLE AND MOST IMPORTANTLY TIME-BOUNDED

not alone.

Studies and surveys have shown that many people face similar challenges in realising their goals. Reasons for the same include lack of clarity in setting goals, inadequate planning, external circumstances and the likes.

Despite the apparent achievement attained over the past 35 years, I can attest that I have gone through lots of ups and down, primarily for not having an effective goal setting system in place.

Let me share with you this week a system that I personally continue to use till date, which I am confident will help you too, achieve profound results.

First, clearly define your intentions as a form of goals, making it specific, achievable and

most importantly time-bounded.

These can include but is not limited to your personal or professional development, health and fitness, side-hustles, business endeavours, relationships and the likes.

Avoid having many, and ensure they are well-defined. Prioritise quality over quantity goals. I can confidently tell you that too many goals may end you with none at the end of the term achieved.

For those who do it once, every year, and depend on New Year's Eve, can now see and understand what I mean, and attest on the success rate which is closer to nil.

Yes, I have achieved many thing in life, but have also lost and missed many opportunities too. Lesson learnt was prioritising a few over the many goals.

Secondly, be consistent and

ensure you follow-up periodically on each of the goals.

Daily (as soon as you wake up or before you go to bed), weekly (over a weekend), and monthly (for the annual goals you have set for the year(s)).

Many well-defined and time-bounded goals fall short due to not having a systematic follow-up in place.

I do them daily, as soon as I wake-up in the form of to-do-lists, and again in the evening before going to bed as a follow-up on what has been achieved, what has not, and what is it required to ensure it is progressed.

Lastly, make sure you celebrate after you achieve your goals. Believe me, the satisfaction that one receives after celebration is astounding for they act as a great source of motivation.

When you make the necessary time to celebrate your achievements, you reinforce the idea that the efforts you have done are worthwhile. Furthermore, such an act helps you to continue creating and achieving goals, knowing that there is a celebration at the end of the tunnel. I do this constantly, and have seen the effect it has on the goals I make.

To conclude this week's article, I would like to emphasise that everyone can create effective goals provided they ensure the goals are defined clearly, timed, followed-up consistently, and always celebrated in any form or another.

Try this simple yet effective system, but don't forget to invite me on your next celebration date, especially when you see the productive results you attain from the same.

Is the Chinese miracle over?

China's economic performance over the last year has been disappointing – so much so that some observers argue that growth has already peaked, and that it is all downhill from here. But it is far too soon to write off China's economic resilience.

As 2023 began, the lifting of draconian “zero-Covid” restrictions fuelled a kind of domestic euphoria, reflected in soaring consumption. But the picture soon darkened, with the second quarter bringing declining exports, stagnating retail sales, shrinking corporate profits, local-government spending cuts, and a weakening housing sector. Chinese business confidence plummeted, and foreign businesses were spooked. In November, China recorded its first-ever quarterly deficit in foreign direct investment.

Even so, China's economy will probably grow by at least 5% this year – a respectable rate, by international standards. More important, China's economy still has a lot of fuel in the tank: a record-high savings rate means that it still has plenty of cheap finance for investment and innovation.



YANG YAO

The author is a Liberal Arts Chair Professor at the China Center for Economic Research and the National School of Development at Peking University.



People wait to board trains at the Shanghai Hongqiao railway station ahead of the National Day holiday, in Shanghai, China. – Reuters

Already, China is investing heavily in the technologies – such as renewable energy, electric vehicles, and artificial intelligence – that will shape the global economy in the coming decades. China is also rapidly developing its capacity in emerging technologies like fusion nuclear, quantum computing, quantum communication, and photonic semiconductors. We know that this strategy works: other successful economies, such as Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, have proved as much.

But China does face growth headwinds. Geopolitical tensions – in particular, the United States-led effort to “decouple” from China economically – are discouraging FDI and spurring companies to diversify their production away from China.

But rather than leaving China altogether, many foreign firms are adopting a “China+1” strategy, opening new facilities in a third country, while maintaining their Chinese operations.

The reason is simple: with 30% of the world's total manufacturing

FROM US-LED 'DECOUPLING' TO UNFAVOURABLE DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS, THE IMPACT OF THE MOST-CITED FACTORS AFFECTING CHINA'S GROWTH PROSPECTS IS PROBABLY OVERSTATED. INSTEAD, THE RECENT WEAKNESS OF CHINA'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE LARGELY REFLECTS THE TEMPORARY COSTS OF NECESSARY POLICY INTERVENTIONS

value-added – about the share of Germany, Japan, and the US combined – China still offers firms a massive cost advantage. Add to that huge excess capacity, and China's manufacturing sector will continue to thrive.

In fact, the only thing America's decoupling effort will ultimately achieve is to spur China to accelerate the development of its own overseas manufacturing capabilities, much as Japan has done since the 1980s.

The likely impact of unfavourable demographic trends on long-term growth is similarly overstated. Yes, China's population is aging and shrinking rapidly. But as AI enables the automation of a growing number of tasks, productivity will increase, and demand for human labour will fall. Together with improved education, this should more than compensate for the contraction of the labour force – possibly even creating the opposite problem: too few jobs.

So, what explains China's slow recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic? The answer lies in government policy. Over the last several years, the central government has been working to tackle imbalances that threaten China's long-run growth prospects – beginning with massive debts held by state-owned enterprises, private companies (such as real-estate developers), and local governments. If China has learned anything from the US, it is that excessive financialisation can destroy a country's manufacturing sector.

That is why the Chinese authorities are committed to deleveraging.

Local governments are a top priority on this front. Since 2010, China has pursued two major rounds of fiscal and monetary expansion, each of which led to a surge in the commercial debts of local governments.

After the first round, in 2014-18, the central government allowed local governments to issue long-term bonds worth CNY8 trillion (\$1.1 trillion), so that they could repay their commercial debts – a kind of debt-swap programme. But local governments were again forced to borrow heavily during the Covid-19 pandemic, accumulating yet more debt that the authorities are still working to address.

Another priority for the central government is unwinding the excessive commercialisation of some sectors. Consider the tutoring industry: families pay private education companies for after-school classes, in the hope of giving their children an advantage over their peers. But these companies charge high prices, which parents struggle to pay, and provide little benefit to students, who are already working hard in school. So, in 2021 – with the private tutoring industry having ballooned to \$120 billion – the authorities banned for-profit after-school tutoring in core subjects.

The third key imbalance that China's government is attempting to reduce lies in the real-estate sector, which is simply too large, accounting for about a quarter of all fixed investment between 2013 and 2021. With some major property developers now struggling to service their debts, stabilising the sector has become a top priority for policymakers.

None of these imbalances poses an imminent threat to Chinese growth. But reducing them will bolster China's long-term economic health. That is why China's government is taking bold action, despite the short-term costs. For example, housing sales have plummeted by about 40% since mid-2021, owing largely to government efforts to rein in the sector.

The good news is that the government has set growth as its main goal for this year and has rolled out new expansionary monetary and fiscal policies. Notably, with the monetary authorities encouraging banks to resume lending to real-estate developers, it is hoped that the housing sector will return to normal this year.

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LIFESTYLE

A man feeds seagulls on the banks of the Yamuna River during a cold foggy morning in New Delhi . — AFP



CULTURE

Artists perform an Odissi dance presentation in Chennai . — AFP



ADVENTURE

Argentinian rider Kevin Benavides competes during Stage 2 of the Dakar Rally 2024, between Al Henakiyah and Al Duwadimi, Saudi Arabia. — AFP



FASHION

Bollywood actress Neelam Kothari poses for photo during an event in Amritsar . — AFP



BOLLYWOOD

Bollywood actors Sidharth Malhotra and Vivek Oberoi with director Rohit Shetty attend the trailer launch of 'Indian Police Force' in Mumbai . — AFP

art & life

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'Succession' and 'The Bear' win top TV honours at Golden Globes

MEDIA DYNASTY drama "Succession" and dramedies "The Bear" and "Beef" took top television honours at the Golden Globes on Sunday.

"Succession," which broke the record for most Golden Globe TV award nominations for its fourth and final season, took home the best drama award, along with three wins for cast members.

First-time Globe winners Matthew Macfadyen, who portrays Tom Wambsgans, husband of Roy media family member Shiv Roy, and Kieran Culkin, who plays the youngest Roy sibling, won for best male supporting actor and best male actor in a drama series. Sarah Snook, who plays Shiv Roy, won best female actor for a television drama.

Filled with mixed emotions by the HBO show's last awards season, "Succession" actor Jeremy Strong, who portrays the sibling Kendall Roy, called the win "bittersweet."

"Succession" depicts the struggle for power among members of the wealthy, backstabbing Roy family. The gripping drama series won five Golden Globes prior to this, including its first best drama award in 2020.

Also leading the Golden Globe television race, FX's "The Bear" won the best television comedy award, gaining three Golden Globes for its second season.

"Thank you to the entire restaurant community. You know, we play the characters for a couple of hours or a couple of months out of the year, but this is y'all reality, the highs and lows, so thank you for embracing us to tell this story," said Lionel Boyce, who plays a restaurant worker named Marcus, in his acceptance speech.

Lead actor Jeremy Allen White, who portrays head chef, Carmen "Carry" Berzatto, took home the best male actor Globe for a musical or comedy show, making it his second Golden Globe.

"I must have done something right in this life to be in your company," White said, referring to his fellow cast members in his acceptance speech.

Breakout star Ayo Edebiri, who plays chef Sydney Adamu in "The Bear," took home her first Golden Globe for best actress in a comedy show.

"I'm very lucky to be an artist," she said in her acceptance speech.

Edebiri, who was introduced in the first season of the show, had a more prominent role throughout the second season.

"The Bear" follows formally a formally trained chef, played by White, who returns to his hometown in Chicago to take over his family's sandwich shop after the death of his brother.

Other noteworthy winners include the Netflix comedy-drama "Beef," which won best television limited series, with leads Ali Wong and Steven Yeun bringing home best female and male actor. They were the first Globe wins for both actors and a nod to an Asian-led series.

Last June, Eldridge Industries purchased the Golden Globe assets with Dick Clark Productions (DCP) and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which was criticised for a lack of diversity in its stewardship of the awards. — **REUTERS**



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Unique houses survive quake in Japan village



THE NEW YEAR'S Day earthquake demolished wooden buildings all across Japan's Noto Peninsula but thanks to decades-old smart architecture, one small fishing village stood strong.

A few roof tiles came loose but not one of around 100 structures in wind-swept Akasaki, on the stick of land's western coast, collapsed in the magnitude 7.5 quake whose epicentre was just a few kilometres (miles) away.

Masaki Sato drove all night from his home 300 kilometres (190 miles) away in Tokyo after the quake to check on the 85-year-old house that he has owned since 2017 and runs as a summer B&B.

"The house stands on a very narrow lot of land, and the building has many small rooms, with many columns" that make it stronger, the 43-year-old said.

To withstand the harsh rain, snow and ocean winds buffeting off the Sea of Japan, Sato's house and most others in Akasaki have few glass windows.

Their exterior walls are made from sturdy wooden slats, layered horizontally. The structure is supported by thick beams criss-crossing the ceiling.

The earthquake and its many aftershocks killed at least 161 people, and 103 others are still missing, authorities said on Monday.

But there were no casualties in the tight-knit village.

Even tsunami waves trig-

gered by the earthquake didn't reach the houses, which are built on land slightly uphill from concrete tetrapods that protect them from the sea.

At Sato's place, ceramic dishes smashed, appliances toppled and a recently added wooden sliding door broke, leaving debris strewn across the floor.

But that was it. "I felt so encouraged, because the village was still there standing," Sato said.

"I think it's thanks to the design of the houses," he added, sitting at the dusty but still solid kitchen counter in his guest house.

WINDSHIELD

The same lucky outcome was seen around the village, where "the design of the houses is more or less the same," said resident Seiya Shinagawa, a retired fisherman.

"Traditionally there's a shed on the coast as a wind-shield, with a narrow main house behind it," the 78-year-old said.

This setup is a remnant of the days when each fisherman would launch their boats out of their shed directly to the sea, Shinagawa said.

From around the 1920s, the community's fishermen opted for more lucrative deep-sea fishing far away from home, sometimes hauling in small fortunes for their catch.

But when a fire broke out and destroyed a significant part of the village in the late 1930s, people rebuilt the houses in a unified and

stronger design.

DEMOGRAPHIC THREAT

Now despite its resilient character, the village faces a problem that is widespread in Japan: a severely ageing population.

Most people in Akasaki are over 65, with many living alone, including 74-year-old resident Akiyo Wakasa.

"My neighbour and their next-door neighbour also live alone," she said.

According to Wakasa, part of the problem is that "fixing houses costs money".

"I'm not sure how many people here actually think it would be worth fixing the house and continuing to live here when they have nobody to hand it down to," she explained.

For Sato, an IT firm employee who runs a real-estate renovation business on the side, seeing Akasaki entering a slow decline is unbearable. The area is not recognised by the government as a cultural asset, but it's a place where people lead a simple, old-fashioned lifestyle, he said.

And when there's no one to live in a house, it's torn down — eroding the village's charm, according to Sato.

"Akasaki, which has preserved a unique and uniform housing design... is losing its scenic appearance."

To save Akasaki's special look, Sato has purchased five of the houses and sheds himself, and wants eventually to open some cafes and restaurants there.

"The village is too precious to lose," he said. —AFP

FOOD



Ivory Coast chefs cook up new twist on African food

IN THE KITCHEN of his Abidjan restaurant, Ivory Coast chef Charlie Koffi prepares his country's staggering tropical bounty with the techniques of fine French cuisine. And he's far from alone.

A growing number of his fellow chefs in the West African nation are retouching local specialties with cooking skills picked up elsewhere.

One of Koffi's signature dishes is an adaptation of gouagouassou sauce, a local specialty.

In his version, a rabbit is stewed with African eggplants, spicy oil, powdered akpi seeds and local fefe pepper.

"It is one of the dishes I really loved as a child," Koffi said. "As a chef, it was almost an obligation to come back to it."

Koffi was trained in France before opening his Abidjan restaurant, Villa Alfira, in 2017 to showcase his country's cuisine.

In the well-lit main dining room overlooking a pond where fish on the menu swim, Eric Guei tucked into a gouagouassou casserole.

"I find taste and audacity in this dish," the happy customer said. "It mixes Western know-how with local flavours."

Guei enjoyed the copious but beautifully presented meal with his friend Yasmine Doumbia. "Gouagouassou is a very traditional Ivory Coast dish, and to see it in a restaurant like this is a real pleasure," she said.

Villa Alfira is a change from the "maquis", typical animated local eateries where braised chickens and fish are eaten by hand, along with traditional sauces, manioc polenta, and fried plantains.

GRILLED OKRA AND CASSAVA CHIPS

A few kilometres away, a chef at the upscale restaurant La Maison Palmier is working on her new creation: a taster dish inspired by placali, a typical Ivorian dish made with sticky gumbo sauce, bits of meat and dried fish, accompanied by fermented manioc paste.

Hermence Kadio, who trained locally, has her own much lighter take on the classic. She grilled the gumbo (okra), while the cassava is puffed up and turned into chips.

Every week the restaurant's French head chef Matthieu Gasnier offers amuse-bouche — small bite-sized appetisers — like these to "re-awaken the memories of people who grew up with these dishes".

About half his clientele is Ivorian, he said.

"Even if our restaurant's cuisine is intended to be international since we are in a five-star hotel, I think it would be wrong not to take advantage of all these beautiful products that surround us," he said.

Grains such as fonio and sorghum grow in the Ivory Coast's hot dry northern savannas, said Koffi, while the forested south produces

local varieties of spinach and typical tropical products such as bananas and yams.

HEALTHIER AND TASTIER

N'Cho Yapi, who founded the group Chefs: Creators of Emotions, said Ivorian cooks began going back to their culinary roots just after the turn of the century.

Before that, chefs at fancy restaurants "had the habit of offering Western dishes with imported products," he said. "But the cost of living kept going up," so they turned to less-expensive products "they had just under their noses".

And local specialties are appearing more and more on the menus of the luxury restaurants that have mushroomed across Abidjan in recent years, Yapi added.

Valerie Rollainth, an Ivorian chef trained in France at the famous Institut Paul Bocuse, insisted that typically hearty Ivorian cuisine is no longer suited to the capital's increasingly sedentary lifestyle.

"There are too few vegetables, a shocking quantity of oil, and the dishes are cooked too long" and lose their nutrients, she said.

At the nutritional workshops she organises she urges people to eat local products in new ways, such as raw okra, which "is very good against diabetes".

"Some diseases are linked to eating habits," she said. "In the Ivory Coast, not everyone has access to health care, but everyone has access to healthy food."

—AFP



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TRAVEL

Sa'al Steps offers winter workout and leisure trek



NAJAH AL RYAMI

The short but challenging trek of Sa'al Steps on Jabal Khoneh is a popular route for hikers in winter. Located just 35 minutes from Muscat, this hike offers a quick workout that is spectacular at sunrise or sunset, and can be done before or after work, or for a quick weekend getaway.

"Best way to do them: start climbing while it's still dark and get to the top to enjoy the sunrise", one trekker advised, while another trekker added that for them their preferred time was sunset "as you can see the colours fade away like a painting".

Your landmark will be visible from the highway: look out for the satellite

dish that sits on its peak. To reach there, a 4WD is not required. You turn into the Sa'al village and at the end you will find a gravel road and a board there. Follow the Google maps search for 'Sa'al stairs trail', as Raghu explains "the start board is there at the bottom, and you walk up the mountain."

When it comes to challenges, it seems, preparedness is required. "My legs hurt," one trekker complained. However, as with all things, repetition makes it easier. Another trekker, Vishal, observed, "I feel like it depends on how the person takes it, when I did it the first time I was exhausted and then next time onwards it was cool enough."

For those who want to take it easy, allow an hour or even two for the trek. But for those who are fit and want to test their

speed, it can even be done in 30 minutes.

Climbing up endless concrete steps allows for a good workout on your gluteal muscles, calves and hamstrings, and increases your heart health and stamina as well. Also count the mental peace that a mountain hike will bring.

"For me, if you want a challenge nearby, that's the closest one. I used to go once every week. As far as I remember there are 626 steps," Raghu, an avid trekker, reminisced. "It's been a while since I've gone there as I tore my knee ligament in June and haven't been there after," he explains, stressing the importance of not straining body and only doing these hikes only when is fit and ready for it.

More than that, the reward for the trek is the

breathtaking view from its peak. A whole package of the mist, the orange sunset or sunrise, the aerial perspective that brings you peace and clarity of mind, and a sense of achievement.

As one trekker, obviously smitten by poetry with Sa'al's breathtaking ambience, said, "Sa'al steps was a transcendental ascent through ancient limestone escarpments, revealing the stratigraphic poetry of the earth's geological narrative."

Sa'al is but one of many trails that the Sultanate of Oman has to offer. As always, when hiking, it is best to come prepared. Bring a cap, sunscreen, water and snacks, and also a torch, just in case! If possible, it is better to go with a friend, although Sa'al steps are relatively safe and easy enough for solo hiking.

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



Dr Zainab Al Ajmi

Shaping the Future of Education: Global Education

IN (2016) FORMER US President Barack Obama told the Asia Society: "In a 21st-century world where jobs can be shipped wherever there's an internet connection, where a child born in Dallas is now competing with a child in New Delhi, where your best job qualification is not what you do, but what you know – education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success, it's a prerequisite for success." Certainly, schools have undergone a remarkable transformation in the last decades. The shift from traditional chalkboards to interactive smart boards and from using notebooks to incorporating iPads into education represents a substantial change. Furthermore, the access to information and the impact of the knowledge economy on school-aged children from (2022) to (1942), it's representing evidence that the change is extraordinary (Winn, Cunningham& Bond, 1/ 2022, ECU blog, what is the Future of Education?).

The term "global education" indicates the "process of providing students with the knowledge and understanding to actively engage with people, cultures, governments, and economies on an international level. Students need to develop the ability to navigate the globalised world as citizens of the planet. Schools with a global philosophy have teachers who can engage with students and provide them with the skills necessary to work collaboratively with people from different cultures and backgrounds. A global education approach focuses on educating students to learn to work together, across cultures, to solve complex problems that may not have simple solutions. Students are required to think critically and creatively and, in the process, develop the capacity for lifelong learning" (The Committee on Global Education, Spring 2018, www.amherst.edu).

Winn, Cunningham& Bond (2022) describe the top trends in the future of education as follows: Firstly, there is a growing emphasis on Global Citizenship Education, as schools increasingly integrate it into their curriculum. This shift reflects a changing world, encouraging students to adopt a global mindset while fostering stronger connections with local communities. Moreover, flexible learning environments that extend beyond traditional classrooms and school hours are becoming more prevalent. Secondly, education is shifting towards Problem-Based Learning, recognising that lifelong learning is pivotal for career success. Teachers are leveraging students' knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges, promoting critical thinking and practical application of knowledge. Additionally, technology is a driving force in education, with concepts like the "flipped classroom" and synchronous learning gaining momentum, offering broader curriculum access and remote learning opportunities. Education systems are also becoming more flexible and adaptable to changing economic and environmental factors, strengthening ties with local economies, and emphasising real-world relevance. Furthermore, a global perspective and multilingualism are on the rise, as schools immerse students in diverse cultures and languages to meet the demands of an increasingly international job market. Finally, the integration of online platforms is facilitating global content integration, providing educators with tools for effective instruction, and fostering a community dedicated to global education (ECU blog, what is the Future of Education?).

In sum, the world is changing rapidly, and education needs to keep up. Global education is a trend about preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century and AI. This means making sure that all schools have the resources they need, and that all students are supported in their learning. In addition, students also need to learn how to learn, so that they can adapt to the changing world around them.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

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